

VILLAGE VIEW

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Oriental rugs, like other examples of fine craftsmanship, are still considered good investments by those who can afford to buy them, in spite of the prices they bring. Chances are good, some say, their value will rise along with that of other antiques, fine art, precious metals and gemstones.

For most of us, however, investing in these already-recognized hedges against inflation is beyond our pocket-books' capacity. Monthly bills, expected and unexpected, eat up most of our income, leaving little or nothing for investing. We're lucky to tuck a few dollars into a low-interest savings account now and then.

Are there still available to folks like us less costly items that may, in time, prove good investments and that will, in the interim, meet our needs for home furnishings? After all, that's how Oriental rugs are utilized. They're used daily, cared for appropriately with normal household equipment, professionally cleaned occasionally, and their value continues to rise.

Most of us put rugs on our floors, and if we're going to buy rugs anyhow, we might as well put our dollars into ones that appreciate rather than just wearing out. And, if we can't afford Orientals, it might be worth our while to look at hooked rugs.

Rug-hooking is an ancient craft; in this country rugs were first hooked by the colonists because their supplies of materials of every kind were limited and wasting anything, even if a rag, was deplored. Clothing too worn and tattered to be useful to any person, blankets too threadbare to give warmth to the smallest crib or cradle, were used for hooking rugs: rug making, like quilting, enabled early Americans to add color, comfort and warmth to their rooms at no cost but time and labor.

These, like Orientals, are now collector's pieces. Unlike Orientals, however, their prices have not yet skyrocketed, and while there's no guarantee they will, stranger things have happened.

Should a rug's value not double in ten years, you'll still have had the use of it, the pleasure of living with it, and chances are excellent, if it's lasted long enough to be an antique, or even a near-antique, given proper care it will be in as good condition a decade or two hence as it is today. Few modern rugs reward you as well.

Delving into the history of rug-hooking takes us a lot further into the past than American colonialism. The earliest ones traced were made in Egypt where the Copts, descendants of Egyptians who built the Pyramids, hooked rugs as early as the 5th century.

Perhaps seafarers and traders introduced rug-making techniques to Scandinavia; both Egyptians and Norsemen spread their influences via the oceans. Scandinavians have been hooking for thousands of years, not only floor coverings but bed coverlets, wall hangings, and even table covers. Early examples of their designs reflect the classic Egyptian and lead to the conclusion they were probably adapted from the work of the Copts.

When rug hooking began in America, housewives of the New England coast dyed their wool scraps in copper pots, obtaining dyes from herbs and other plant materials. Roots, berries and leaves, even stalks of certain plants gave color to the fabric. Wood-ashes, creme of tartar, sal amoniac or copperas, all common kitchen ingredients in those days, were also used in the dyepot.

Burlap sacks made sturdy backing and homespun linens and linsey-woolsey were also used.

American hooked rugs are classified by experts into four periods; antique ones date back from 1775 to 1830; early rugs from 1830 to 1880; late, to the turn of the century; and modern, from then to the present time.

Like other authentic antiques, hooked rugs of the earliest period are rare and comparatively expensive, but later ones may be found in unexpected places. Some turn up when attics of old houses are cleared and estates are settled. Sometimes, hooked rugs can be found at rummage or yard sales. Second-

hand and antiques shops may be a source.

The alternative to acquiring an old hooked rug is to make your own; if bitten by the hooked-rug-bug, you might find this most satisfying of all. You can create tomorrow's heirlooms, control the color scheme, and live with your own craftsmanship while the years give your rugs the dignity and beauty of age.

Patterns are available commercially, of course; the talented rugmaker may choose to design her own. The possibilities are infinite and range from the simplest "hit or miss" to intricate floral or classical patterns. Draperies, wallpapers, fine china, or primitive paintings may suggest ideas you can translate into handsome rugs.

A beginner might choose a shell pattern, drawn on a half-circle of burlap, the rug to be used at a doorway or on the hearth. The shell design is easily drawn by tracing half-way around a saucer or butter plate. The zig-zag of the chevron makes a satisfactory pattern for rectangular rugs of any size. These are good choices to start with since little mistakes are invisible; small rugs are recommended to the novice.

The more experienced rug-hooker may choose a more ambitious project: a larger rug with a more complicated pattern. In either case, hooking materials should be of good quality. Blending shades of earth-tones with bright touches of autumn foliage colors makes a warm floor treatment for a panelled den or diningroom, for instance.

Monochromatic color schemes appeal to some designers. Borders of contrasting or complimentary colors lead naturally to center medallions and geometrics. Rugs with complex patterns are more interesting to work, but choices of shades and blending of hues become important if the final effect is to enhance the room. Hooked rugs given proper care often outlast their makers and, while changes and repairs aren't difficult, once a rug is finished, few people attempt them.

A lot of thought, time and labor will go into any rug you hook so it's worthy of the finest materials. Time taken to obtain good wool, to cut it in uniform strips, to hook evenly and smoothly is well spent.

Hooking is no more complicated than pulling a loop of a narrow strip of fabric through warp and woof of a backing material, leaving a short pile. There are no knots; the strips are held firmly by the cross strands and by the closely-packed loops themselves; a loose thread should never be pulled from a hooked rug but simply snipped off, even with the pile surface.

Daily care and regular cleaning is advised as with any rug, but hooked rugs, because of their construction, should never be shaken. Gentle vacuuming is recommended; when necessary, have rugs dry cleaned. Washing hooked rugs may cause dyes to run or the backing to shrink. Hooked rugs should not be folded for moving or storage; instead, roll them.

Much of the beauty of hooked rugs lies in the subdued soft colors time and wear impart. You can expect your hand-hooked rugs to grow lovelier, year-by-year, and give pleasure to generations of admirers of fine hooked rugs.

Whether you find one in an attic or make your own, you'll have a treasured and decorative starting point around which you may choose to build your home's color scheme.

You will, that is, if the rug-bug bites you.

VILLAGE ADVERTISER June 26, 1980