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# Inside Outside

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## Vipul Patel Architects, Ahmedabad, are rooted in aesthetics and practicality

Davide Calafa

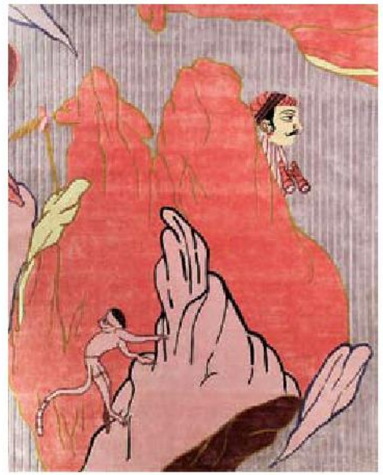
Glimpses of the Jaipur Wunderkammer Collection, a collaboration between Jaipur Rugs and designer Matteo Cibic, inspired by Cibic's visit to Jaipur

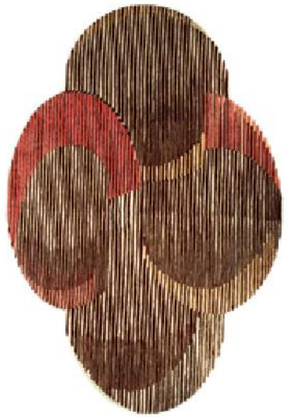
Yogesh Chaudhary

# Jaipur Rugs:
## On a growth path

**Innovative design and a unique business model have seen Jaipur Rugs carve a distinctive space for itself at the top echelons of the Indian handmade carpet sector in a relatively short span.**

TEXT: SUMAN TARAFDAR





Wunderkammer. Literally 'cabinet of curiosities' in German, it's not the sort of word you would forget. However, it's also just a word, printed and glossed over on a hectic day. What if it were to be three-dimensional, take shape and become possible to touch and hang on your wall? Well, it just has – in the shape of Jaipur Wunderkammer, an eclectic collection of handmade rugs inspired by the Pink City. Created by designer Matteo Cibic, who has taken cues from the city's architecture, colours and miniature paintings and played on the culture and beauty of the historic city to created 'pop' carpets. One look at the colours and designs, and you will get the pop culture reference.

Jaipur Rugs collaborated with Cibic to create this noteworthy collection.

### Reinventing the brand

A relatively new name in the world of Indian carpets, the company isn't new though, as Yogesh Chaudhary, Director, Jaipur Rugs, explains: 'My father, Nand Kishore Chaudhary, started his handmade carpet business with two looms and nine artisans in his family home in Churu, Rajasthan in 1978.'

Today Jaipur Rugs has become known for its distinctive business model, which involves working directly with weavers. 'My father went directly to the weavers. The industry unfortunately uses a lot of middlemen. From the weaver to the customer, there is a humongous chain of people in the middle. So, the weaver generally gets very little value out of it. My father's journey over the last few decades has been moving as far away from the middlemen as possible. That has been one of the core mantras of success for us. When we started working directly with the weavers we could service them a lot better. We could give them raw materials faster. Instead of paying them when the carpet was finished, we paid them every month depending on how much work was done. In turn, the weavers made superior quality goods for us. My father's company got branded as the one providing the best quality. Many customers say our carpets have the best "backs" – implying they are perfectly woven carpets.'

NK Chaudhary, began to export in 1986. Jaipur Rugs started in 1999. The five next generation siblings are all involved in the business. 'Two of my elder sisters and my younger brother are based in Atlanta, US,

as we distribute across North America,' explains the younger Chaudhary, in his early 30s. 'My third sister heads the design for us. We have won a number of design awards over the years.'

'Our main business remains exports, and even today we export to about 60 countries,' Chaudhary points out. Almost 40,000 artisans spread across 600 villages in six states are associated with the company. 'The model is that we take raw material, which is spun by hand mostly, and then it is tied and put in bags, which are sent to our branch offices, from where they are delivered to the weavers' homes with the design to be made. A quality check happens, they pay them there, and then we get them back. The weavers, about 85 per cent of whom are women, do not have to leave their homes.'

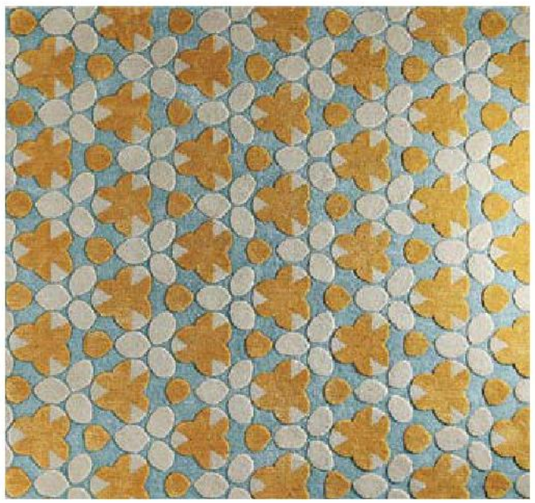
### Design evolution

While every design is sent, Chaudhary mentions a notable exception, which has garnered a lot of attention and success. 'The collection, Manchaha, is where the weavers design their own rugs. They weave anything they see around to anything they have in their mind. We had a rug with a monkey with a gun.'

Chaudhary, who got into the business about 13 years ago, says at the time designs were all traditional. 'Carpets were their own world, and had nothing to do with fashion. During the economic slowdown – 2009-10, a lot of homes decided to become more modern – globally, percolating down to India. Today, about 90 per cent of homes are modern, where everything is nice and clean versus ornamental and traditional. The industry went through a drastic shift because of this. All the weavers were only trained to make classic designs and the industry did not know how to shift. It's almost a fashion-oriented industry now.'

'Another huge impact has been from machine-made carpets. Today machines have improved to the extent that it is hard to differentiate a machine-made rug from a handwoven one. That is why we realised it is very important to tell the story of the brand so that people still buy the handmade product versus a machine-made one.'

A less pleasant change has been the customer demand of immediate delivery. 'Earlier customers would be ready to wait a few months. So we keep a lot of stock. If someone wants a custom-made carpet, they have to wait. We had to make the supply chain efficient to lessen the lead time. A carpet that earlier took six to eight months to make now has to be done in four months. We made a carpet for the Piramal family, which was 30 ft by 40 ft, which we got done in about 10 months by using people in shifts. Otherwise, it would have taken a year and a half!'



### Shifting markets

The US has for decades been India's largest carpet export market for all exporters, often taking over 90 per cent of an exporter's orders. Meanwhile, till about a decade and a half ago, Germany was the hub where everybody came to buy carpets. The models have changed now, says Chaudhary. 'Now a lot of retailers have started coming to India directly. New markets have opened up for India – from China to Africa and South America and smaller European countries. Wholesalers have disappeared, for the most part.'

Chaudhary says Jaipur Rugs has been growing in the last decade or so. 'We did about ₹153 crore in revenue last year. Earlier the main revenue for us was only the US, the last five to seven years we have been able to diversify the business across continents.'

### CURIOUS CARPETS

Matteo Cibic is a photographer's dream – willing to pose untiringly, his fluid body lending itself to myriad movements. It was perhaps this quality that attracted the 1983-born Italian designer to lose himself in the magic of Jaipur. Collaborating with Jaipur Rugs, he has a collection of handcrafted rugs that are inspired by Cibic's visit to Jaipur. The result is a wonderfully freeing collection, absolutely unique in design and concepts, imbued with bright hues reflective of the city's culture and architecture. Expect to find the sundials of Jantar Mantar, the shut shutters of the city's labyrinthine retail hubs, the majestic pachyderm, the wondrous step wells. Yes, there are the clichés – including the snake charmer and even playing cards designs reflected in the carpets.

'The collection celebrates the city's colours, music, mountains, wild animals, lakes, sundials, palaces, food,' says the expressive designer. Appreciative of India's textile heritage, he says that India has managed to retain elements from its incredible history and fantastic visual grammar, which should become more globally acceptable.

Annually the company makes five to six lakh carpets, of which about 90 per cent are exported. 'We started selling in the Indian market only three years ago,' says Chaudhary. We opened our Mumbai store earlier this year, followed by Jaipur, while the Delhi store has been open for a couple of years.' A pleasant surprise for him has been that people are also buying online.

As for growth, Chaudhary says there is a fast-growing market for handmade rugs. 'It's becoming a trend to use rugs at home. With a client list that includes celebrities such as Karan Johar and Aamir Khan, lots of new clients want to emulate their lifestyles, leading to a spurt in the sector.'

### Foundation story

The company has a foundation called the Jaipur Rugs Foundation, where it trains thousands of artisans every year in different parts of the country. 'We are currently doing training programmes in Bihar and Odisha,' says Chaudhary. 'There is still a huge gap.' Currently it employs weavers in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. 'We trained weavers a few years ago in Jharkhand for