



Press Release

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The new face of retail in oriental rugs: two young DOMOTEX visitors and their labels *On the Rugs* and *The Knots*

Preparations for DOMOTEX 2019 (11–14 January) are well in hand, and judging by the high number of exhibitor registrations received so far, it is going to be a successful show indeed. Many of the exhibitors are currently working on the finer details of their showcases, eager to put their best foot forward when they present their product innovations in January. The keynote theme for DOMOTEX 2019 is “CREATE’N’CONNECT” – a bold statement that puts the spotlight on the current connectivity megatrend. Connectedness is an important aspect of flooring in the sense that floors are unifying, connecting elements of room design. Floors and flooring provide the very foundation for the rooms in which we live and work. DOMOTEX mirrors this. It is a global platform where visitors and exhibitors can meet up and – in the words of the lead theme – CREATE’N’CONNECT and ultimately spark new cooperative ventures.

Among the visitors who regularly attend DOMOTEX to keep up with the latest trends and make new contacts are two young rug dealers, Anna Wahdat and Katrin ten Eikelder. Both are women working in a traditionally male profession and both come from families in the rug trade. With their labels, *On the Rugs* and *The Knots*, they are bringing innovation and freshness to the Oriental rug business and successfully opening up new target markets in the process. Both use the Internet and social media a lot more than most traditional sellers of carpets, and both are more intuitive in their selection of collections. Neither has a large rug showroom, preferring instead to focus on matters of quality, such as natural materials, sustainability, fair trade, and originality.

Fresh new approach from Hamburg: *On the Rugs*

For all the points they have in common, the two women have chosen very different, highly individual paths in life. Anna Wahdat grew up around carpets and rugs and developed a liking for interior design from a very young age. Her father and uncle are from Afghanistan and have had a business selling hand-knotted oriental rugs in Hamburg’s historic *Speicherstadt* warehouse district for nearly 40 years. As children, she and her sisters would often play among the stacks of rugs in the family’s showroom. Later, while on parental leave, Anna began putting together her own collection, carefully selecting individual pieces from among the same stacks. In 2015, with this collection of personal favorites in hand, she established her label, *On the Rugs*.

“Being able to draw on my uncle and father’s stock gave me courage and security and enabled me to take my time over developing and building up my label,” she says. Despite having her own label, Anna Wahdat works very closely with the more traditional family business. “I still make selections from their stock, even though I now have plenty of contacts of my own.” She also draws on her family’s contacts, such as when she works with other traders from the *Speicherstadt* district who specialize in particular styles or geographic regions. She values her father’s expertise. “His sales approach differs fundamentally from mine, but he has good instincts and a very clear understanding of what I can and want to achieve, so he’s a great support.”



A collection of carefully chosen personal favorites

One of the defining characteristics of *On the Rugs* is a strong preference for selectiveness over volume and range. Alongside this belief that less is more, Anna Wahdat attaches great importance to fair trade and transparency of working conditions in her rugs’ countries of origin. DOMOTEX has been part of the fabric of her life since childhood. “For me, visiting the show was always a chance to immerse myself in a completely different world. Now that I’m in the trade myself, I value DOMOTEX as an important annual fixture where I can meet up with industry peers and make new contacts.” She is often accompanied at the show by her father and uncle, who introduce her to rug dealers and producers. Of course, she also uses her time at DOMOTEX to scout for out-of-the-ordinary pieces with interesting histories. She follows her own individual taste and intuitions in everything she does, whether making selections for her collection, conducting sales negotiations or advertising. Regarding the latter, it bothers Wahdat that a number of more traditional rug dealers still rely on print ads in the local press – the kind that scream with big red letters and big discounts. “I market my hand-made originals principally online in the first instance. The main thing is, I



make sure I have really good photos of the rugs, which I then disseminate via channels like Instagram and Pinterest. The next step almost always involves direct contact. Customers can view the rugs and gain a tactile feel for the materials at her family's showroom, at selected interior design stores in Hamburg, Cologne and Berlin, and at pop-up sales events featuring readings, food and music. *On the Rugs* also rents out carpets and rugs for a wide range of event types, such as film shoots, weddings and conferences.

Out-of-the-ordinary one-offs with fascinating histories

Wahdat also invites prospective buyers to “try before they buy” by taking several rugs home with them, to see how fit in with their existing decor. “My clientele ranges from well-off retired couples to young families to hip young bloggers. The one thing they all have in common is a deep interest in design and quality interiors.” Wahdat's collection is not limited to any one style, and the price range is similarly broad. The *On the Rugs* website features Moroccan Berber rugs made of luxuriously soft Atlas sheep wool or recycled cotton displayed alongside classic Afghan rugs in pared-back traditional patterns, flat-weave kilims in fresh colors and designs, and exquisite silk rugs featuring intricate floral ornamentation. Wahdat: “I prefer one-off creations with stand-out features, such as an unusual use of color or an intentional knotting defect.” She also treasures the vintage aspect. “There's too much new stuff being produced in the world. That's why I like to give beautiful old things a second, or even third, lease of life.” Even so, her label also sells new rugs because they have formats and patterns that are often a better fit for European-style living rooms. Wahdat: “It's all about balance.”

***The Knots* – a hip label for young and urban customers**

Katrin ten Eikelder hit on the idea for her label while she was in New York, working as a business development manager for a German fashion company. “In New York, I saw oriental rugs in modern settings – beautiful hand-made originals of the kind that were no longer so popular in Germany.” So she put together a plan to rekindle the love of oriental carpets in Germany and headed to Berlin, where she founded *The Knots* in 2014. “My father is a registered expert in oriental rugs and continues to give me the benefit of his expertise to this very day,” ten Eikelder says, noting that he was very receptive to her project right from the outset. “But my family background played no role in developing my business idea.”



Oriental vintage rugs with a hint of New York

“My branding and communication differ from those of conventional rug dealers,” ten Eikelder explains. “My aim is to give hand-made rugs a new image – to highlight their quality and sustainability aspects while positioning them in a fresh, young context.” In Berlin’s central *Mitte* district she operates a showroom that prospective buyers can view by prior arrangement, but for the most part she sells online, in keeping with the shopping habits of her label’s young and urban target market. “I value fair trade and

working with small producers whom I know personally. I like to know where my products come from.” She also attaches great value to the long-term satisfaction of her customers, which is why *The Knots* is synonymous with long-lasting products made 100 percent from natural materials, such as cotton, alpaca wool and sheep wool. Each of her vintage rugs has a serial number and bears a name that references New York in some way. *The Knots* stands apart from conventional carpet and rug brands, as evidenced by the advertising claim, “Unique carpets picked with love”, which puts a premium on product individuality. If you go to the label’s website, the first thing you’ll see is a slideshow of vintage carpets spread out on an urban sidewalk. Katrin ten Eikelder herself actually features in some of the product photos – a reflection of her close personal association with the brand. The website also has a journal containing stories and styling tips on how to get the best out of oriental carpets.

From classic to modern with bleaching and re-dyeing

The online shop part of the website features vintage and new rugs, all beautifully hand-made. Among much else, shoppers will see 80-year-old creations from Turkey and various regions of Iran that have been specially sun-bleached to create unique design effects and then re-dyed. This process is a highly effective way of transforming traditional artisan products into modern design objects. “You can never really tell how the rug is going to look after this treatment,” ten Eikelder says. That’s because the new color is only partially taken up by the textiles, and in certain spots is



not taken up at all. When Katrin ten Eikelder first started the business, bold colors like turquoise, pink and green were the top sellers, whereas nowadays her customers tend to prefer muted tones like light-blue, beige and light-gray. Her *The Knots* label also features Berber rugs from Morocco and the Atlas Mountains, as well as Persian, Turkish and Afghan kilims. It also includes other textile products, such as blankets and cushions. Quality and color-coordinated with the rug range, these accessory products come predominantly in natural and pastel single tones. Katrin ten Eikelder visits DOMOTEX regularly in order to keep up to date with the latest trends and developments in the carpet and rug sector. “One thing I’ve noticed there is a resurgence in the market’s acceptance of artisan rugs and classic elements.”

DOMOTEX is the global meeting hub for the entire flooring industry and a major highlight in the events calendar of flooring professionals the world over. Dealers and distributors from around the globe use the show to meet up with product segment specialists and producers, make and maintain contacts, learn about new and emerging trends, and gather inspiring new ideas for their own businesses.

DOMOTEX 2019

11 to 14 January (Friday–Monday)

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Hannover, Germany

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