



# View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 26 No. 2 March 2019

[www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org)

## March 22 Meeting Preview: Experts Discuss “Whither the Market?”



**Alan Varteresian, Peter Pap, and Lawrence Kearney**

On March 22, at the Durant-Kenrick House, Newton, NERS Steering Committee member **Jean Hoffman** will moderate a panel discussing “Whither the Market?” Her three guests—NERS members **Peter Pap, Lawrence Kearney**, and **Alan Varteresian**—will pool their expertise and perspectives on the past, present, and future of the antique oriental rug market. Audience questions and input are invited!

**Peter** is the owner of Peter Pap Oriental Rugs. In 1974, at twenty, he became a stock boy and then a salesperson for Brooks Gill and Company, Boston. Soon he cast his lot with the “pickers” combing New England for antique rugs. He began exhibiting at antiques shows, and in 1981 opened his first New Hampshire shop. Ten years later he purchased the property in Dublin where his gallery still sits. Over the next twenty years he built a schedule of shows, including the prestigious Winter Antiques Show in New York. He currently lives in San Francisco, focusing on online business, special exhibitions, and in-house consultations and sales.

**Lawrence** is Director of Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets at Skinner; his bio on the Skinner website credits him with “an encyclopaedic knowledge of genres, from American hooked rugs to European tapestries to Song Dynasty textiles.” Prior to his Skinner appointment, he dealt in antique carpets and textiles for more than three decades. From 1983 to 1987, he was an editor of *Oriental Rug Review*, for which he penned features, auction reports, and an occasional column of “advice for the

### March 22 Meeting Details

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Place:** Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Ave.  
Newton Centre, MA, 02458

**Directions:** From Boston and east, take Mass Pike to exit 17 and follow signs for Boston/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre St. for 0.1 miles. Go LEFT on Franklin St. for 0.3 miles. Turn RIGHT on Waverley and go 0.2 miles. House is on LEFT.

From Rt. 128 and west, take Mass Pike to exit 17, turn RIGHT onto Centre Street and follow directions above.

**From Watertown Square:** Take Galen Street (Rt. 16) toward Newton Centre for 0.4 miles. Continue to Washington St. toward West Newton/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre Street and follow directions above.

**Parking:** On Kenrick Street. Parking places at the end of the Durant-Kenrick House driveway may be used for dropping off people or supplies, but **NOT for parking during the meeting.**

**Food:** Provided by members whose names begin with A through G. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and plan to stay afterwards to clean up.

**Show-and-tell:** Only if time allows. Members may bring rugs they judge relevant to any of the speakers or to the meeting topic.

rug-lorn.” Since 2003 he has been an adjunct instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design, teaching courses on rugs. In addition, he is an award-winning poet.

Collector **Alan** grew up with rugs (in which, he laments, he was then uninterested) and music (his father, a partner of Avedis Zildjian, made the famous cymbals). After being stationed in Germany in 1957 (“I could have bought wonderful things there for next to nothing!”), he taught junior high school in Roxbury. The rug bug finally bit him hard in 1970, when he bought a Qashqa’i bagface at an auction on Cape Cod. Over the years, his acquisitions have ranged from Turkish and Caucasian rugs and Shahsavan sumak bags to Turkmen pieces of all sorts. Nearing a half-century of market immersion, Alan has also collected countless rug tales, to which he alone can do anecdotal justice.

## April 12 Meeting Preview: Collectors' Choice, with Four Steering Committee Members



**Jim Adelson**



**Julia Bailey**



**Jim Sampson**



**Jeff Spurr**

At the annual Collector Series program, to be held on April 12 at First Parish, Lincoln, four NERS Steering Committee members (whose first names—coincidentally—begin with “J”) will show rugs or textiles from their respective collections, explain the attractions of these pieces, and tell stories about them.

As an undergraduate English major with a graduate business degree and a high-tech career, **Jim Adelson** had no formal education or professional involvement in fields related to oriental rugs, and no family exposure either. In the 1980s he and his wife needed floor covering for a new house, and when they looked, Jim fell hard for rugs. Weavings have been a passion since, joining other serious, long-time avocations like hiking and charity cycling (in 2019 he will ride in his fourteenth consecutive Pan-Mass Challenge, to benefit cancer research and treatment). He calls his presentation **“What Can a Modest-Budget Collector Do in Turkmen Shark-Infested Waters?”**

Now retired, **Julia Bailey** was an assistant curator at the MFA, Boston, and later the managing editor of *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World*, published at Harvard. Between 2010 and 2015 she was co-chair of NERS, and she currently edits and produces this newsletter. In **“Central Focus,”** she will show some Persian medallion rugs and touch on where their design scheme came from.

**Jim Sampson** retired in 2005, after thirty-seven years as a research psychologist at the U.S. Army Lab in Natick, Mass. From 1966 to 1968 he was a Peace Corps volunteer, assigned first to the remote Kurdish town of Bijar, Iran, and then to the University of Isfahan. In 2007 Jim visited Mike Tschebull in Darien, Conn., to show him a yard-sale acquisition. Mike suggested he join NERS; “There is always something to learn,” he said. Jim joined that year and is still on his quest. The title of his presentation is **“The Bijar: It Doesn’t Fly, but Who Cares?”**

Retired from the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard, where he built and managed an exceptional and very large collection of historical photographs of the Middle East (ca. 1850–1970), **Jeff Spurr** pursues scholarly research in Islamic textiles and in the history of photography of the Middle East. His avocations include the collection and study of African textiles, with an emphasis on the Kuba kingdom and its culture. About his presentation, **“Obscure and Unusual: Macramé in Important Old Ceremonial Objects from the Kuba Cultural Sphere,”** he explains that, in historical textiles and related objects, technique itself may be a signifier, particularly if it exemplifies an ancient tradition and supports elite status into the near present. His talk will address just such a tradition of technique as relic, serving the most important of social and cultural purposes.

### April 12 Meeting Details

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Place:** First Parish, 14 Bedford Road, Lincoln, MA 01773

**Directions:** From Rt. 95 (128), take exit 28B, Trapelo Road West. Proceed west about 2.5 miles to a stop sign at the five-way intersection in Lincoln (there’s a white planter in the middle of the intersection). Go right on Bedford Road for 0.1 mile to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on the right. First Parish is on your left.

**From Rt. 2,** take Bedford Road, Lincoln Center exit (eastbound, turn right at the light; westbound, go through light, turn right, and circle 270° to cross Rt. 2 at the light). Proceed 0.9 mile to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your left. First Parish is on your right.

**Parking:** Park in the lot behind the parish house, along the street, or in front of Bemis Hall if that building is dark and not in use.

**Food:** Provided by members whose names begin with **H** through **P**. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and stay afterwards to clean up.

**Note:** No general show-and-tell at this meeting.



## September Meeting: Mike Tschbull on Jajims



### 1. Mike Tschbull tells NERS members about the virtues of jajims

On September 14, at the Durant-Kenrick House, longtime NERS member and veteran speaker Mike Tschbull opened the 2018–19 season with a talk entitled “Why Warp-faced Weavings Are Collectible: Jajims from Western Iran” (1). Mike immediately gave three answers to the question posed in his title: first, jajims influenced the design of other weavings, including pile rugs; second, the color quality of jajims is superb; and third, jajims, made by nomads and villagers for their own use, are appealingly non-commercial.

“Jajim,” Mike explained, is an Indo-Persian word designating a warp-faced fabric with colored stripes. Jajims were woven in narrow strips—typically eight to twelve inches wide—that were then joined: two 1965 photos by Richard Tapper showed the simple ground loom on which these strips were woven, as well as a completed strip. (Some such strips, Mike noted, have as many as eight colors.)

To underscore the antiquity and continuity of weaving, Mike illustrated a cave in Georgia wherein were found 30,000-year-old fragments of dyed, twisted fabric. A fourth-millennium BCE Mesopotamian silver bull figurine wears a striped, patterned textile (2), as do human figures in four-thousand-year-old wall paintings from the tombs of Beni Hasan, Egypt; likewise, the biblical Joseph’s “coat of many colors” has often been interpreted as striped.

Several millennia more recently, a Persian manuscript painting of about 1370 depicts a woman in bed, awakened by two men fighting; her coverlet is vertically striped and geometrically patterned in a manner unmistakably suggesting a jajim (3). This image led Mike to an explanation of why existing jajims are not much collected: although they’re big—typically six by eight feet—they’re made not to be walked on but rather as bed and pack covers.



2. Silver bull figurine, Southwest Iran, ca. 3100–2900 BCE, Metropolitan Museum 66.173 3. Detail of “A Thief Beaten in the Bedchamber,” painting from a *Kalila wa Dimna*, Tabriz, ca. 1370–74, Istanbul University Library F. 1422, fol. 24a



After considering ancient examples, Mike showed images of more recent jajims, including some from his own collection. He started with one in a house he had visited in Qarajeh, Iran (4); it had been woven by the owner's great-grandmother. Mike judged it "a good piece, but [without the colors] I like—green and yellow." He then showed two examples from his own collection, one of them primarily green and red, and the other with alternating stripes of blue, red, green, and yellow, and attached finger-woven edging (5).

In talking about how jajims were made, Mike suggested that weavers bartered raw for dyed wool. He noted that the reds used were remarkably similar across a wide range of pieces, and speculated that there were centralized dyers from whom weavers obtained their supplies.

After illustrating jajims with plain stripes, he showed many with geometric designs within the stripes: although more challenging to weave, these are relatively common. In a rarer example, abstract motifs were supplemented by human figures and animals that Mike identified as dogs (6).

Having noted in his introduction that jajims influenced later pile rugs, Mike showed a late-nineteenth-century Caucasian prayer rug with vertical stripes in its field; he credited jajims as a likely design source. Some in the audience questioned this assertion, suggesting other possibilities, such as Kashmiri shawl cloth.

He then illustrated a silk jajim (7). Although he had seen such pieces being taken off quilts from Shekki, he acknowledged that sericulture was established and widespread throughout the Caucasus.



4. House in Qarajeh, and detail of a jajim made by the owner's great-grandmother



6. Figural jajim from Saveh, Iran (whole view and detail)



5. Transcaucasian jajim with Mike's preferred color range



7. Silk jajim (detail), probably Shekki, Azerbaijan



Mike next showed an attractive four-strip horse cover from Baku, featuring plain stripes and braided warps at one end (8). A patterned jajim had geometric motifs similar to those on pack bands. A coarser, heavier Qashqa'i jajim consisted of only two wide strips. Finally he illustrated a large example from Chahar Mahal, with vivid, plain stripes (9); it had been made to use over a charcoal brazier.

For the show-and-tell that followed his presentation, Mike brought several jajims, some of which he had shown in his talk; members provided other examples. A Caucasian jajim with three different red dyes (10) retained sewn-on finger-woven edging; Mike thought it once had been backed with felt, most likely beige. (Dealers often cut off these thick backings.) One of its designs, Mike felt, had originated in Uzbekistan.

Next was a jajim fragment, which he said might have come from southern Iran. After this was a simple red-and-blue-striped example, which he attributed to Central Asia, perhaps Uzbekistan. More Central Asian pieces followed. A silk jajim with red, yellow, blue, and white stripes originated in the lowland Caucasus. Mike attributed another example, very finely woven, to east Azerbaijan or the Caucasus. To an exceptionally large jajim, approximately ten or twelve feet in width, Mike assigned a Central Asian, perhaps Uzbek, origin (11). Last was a weaving that wasn't structurally a jajim, and may have been Baluch.

Many thanks to Mike for sharing yet another of his research and collecting interests with our members!

Jim Adelson



8. Jajim made as a horse cover, Baku



9. Detail of a Chahar Mahal jajim made as a brazier cover



10. Caucasian jajim (detail)



11. Large Central Asian—perhaps Uzbek—jajim (detail)



## October Meeting: Ali Istalifi on Suzanis of Central Asia



### 1. ACOR-sponsored visiting speaker Ali Istalifi begins his NERS presentation on suzanis of Central Asia

On October 5, at the Durant-Kenrick House, Newton, this year's ACOR-sponsored traveling speaker, Ali Istalifi, gave a presentation on Central Asian suzanis (1). Newton was Ali's second stop in his ten-venue North American tour of rug societies.

Ali, who was born in Afghanistan and now lives in London, began by noting that, of the beautiful and sophisticated textiles produced in Central Asia, suzanis are among the most coveted. The suzanis we possess were made between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Historically, the Silk Road was critically important, not only for trade but also for the exchange of artistic ideas. The pre-Soviet map of Central Asia shows a vast desert area with independent oasis kingdoms, or khanates. In the eighteenth century, an economic boom brought these khanates wealth and created a demand for luxury materials, including textiles. With the full imposition of Soviet rule in the mid-1920s, however, textile arts declined dramatically.

"Suzani," derived from the Farsi/Dari phrase for needlework, has become a term specific to the embroideries under consideration. Both Tajik and Uzbek women made them: Tajiks, descended from the Sogdians, speak an Indo-European language, while Uzbeks are Turkic-speaking.

Suzanis are silk-thread embroideries on linen, cotton, or silk grounds. The grounds were woven in strips, embroidered, and then joined. Suzanis were commonly made in three sizes: large (around 2 by 3 meters), medium (around 1.8 by 2.4

meters), and small, called *nim* (half) suzanis. Designs fell into two general categories, consisting either of an arch surrounding a plain field or of various motifs covering the entire field.

Ali's "Story of Fatima" encapsulated what he considered the "essence of suzani art." Around age eleven, a girl such as Fatima would begin learning to embroider, and by sixteen, when she was expected to marry, she would have completed several suzanis for her dowry, their quality judged by the women around her. Fatima's suzanis thus captured her "hope and aspirations" (2).



### 2. Ali's "Story of Fatima," utilizing historic photos





### 3. Ali traces the development of Bukhara suzani designs

Ali then characterized suzanis according to seven areas in which they were produced. The first was Bukhara, the richest city in central Asia in the nineteenth century, with a mix of Uzbek and Tajik populations. On linen or cotton grounds, Bukhara suzanis are embroidered using a flat (*basma*) stitch, and sometimes a chain stitch. Oldest among them are suzanis with dominant, “archaic” central medallions. Gradually the size of these medallions was reduced, providing more space for border development and the inclusion of other field motifs (3). Experimentation with other forms, such as lattice variations and tree-of-life designs, followed. Ali attributed these changes to the Bukharan economic boom and the floral taste of buyers in Persia and Mughal India.



### 4. Suzanis from Tashkent (left) and Nurata (right)



### 5. Ura Tube suzani

The second suzani-producing region was Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, with an Uzbek-majority population. Wealthy during the eighteenth century, Tashkent was annexed by Kokand in the early 1800s and by Russia later in the century. Tashkent suzanis, much less varied than those of Bukhara, have a design vocabulary of red circular forms on red or white backgrounds (4 left).

Nurata, the third region, is an ancient Zoroastrian city with a Tajik majority. Sometimes quilted, Nurata suzanis have linen or cotton grounds and main motifs rendered in flat stitch with distinctive chain-stitch outlines. Their designs often feature central stars with radiating diagonal “bouquets” or flowering plants (4 right). In addition to suzanis in the customary rectangular format, the women of Nurata embroidered small squares (*bokche*) measuring about a meter per side.

The name of the fourth region, Ura Tube or Ura Tappa, was changed to Istaravshan in 2000. The city has a Tajik majority and an oppressed Uzbek minority. Ura Tube suzanis, like those from Nurata, often have central stars (5). Two of their distinguishing qualities, according to Ali, are the prominent stems on their main floral motifs and the frequent presence of a pistachio-green color.

Ali’s fifth suzani-making area was the Tajik-populated Ferghana Valley. Its suzanis display fine, flat-stitch embroidery on cotton or silk-satin grounds, often dyed. Some are double-sided; a number include embroidered love poetry.





**6. White-ground Shahrissabz suzani of Ali's first type**



**7. Iroqi-stitch Shahrissabz suzani, perhaps commissioned as floor covering**



**8. Silk-ground Shahrissabz suzani, with motifs seen on Lakai embroideries**

Region six was Shahrissabz ("Green City" in Persian), the birthplace of Tamerlane. With its mix of Tajiks and Uzbeks, the area was known for the beauty—seen as enhanced by monobrows and gold teeth—of its women. Whatever the standards by which their looks were assessed, Shahrissabz women produced the best (and now the most sought-after) suzanis, as well as embroidered garments and animal trappings.

Shahrissabz suzanis, according to Ali's classification system, are of three types. Examples of the first type (6), dating back to the early nineteenth century, feature dense patterning in an unusual flat stitch on heavy linen or cotton grounds, typically white. Made in all sizes, they were strictly urban products.

Representatives of the second type are embroidered using a stitch called *iroqi* that completely covers their grounds, suggestive of needlepoint (7). Ali thinks these large, intricate, and rare examples, perhaps made as floor covering, must have been commissioned work. The *iroqi* stitch, he noted, was also used for embroidering robes and belts.

Suzanis belonging to the third group that he assigned to Shahrissabz are embroidered in silk on silk foundations of various colors (8).

Ali's seventh category was Lakai—not a region but rather a nomadic Uzbek tribal people, descended from Karamysh, Genghis Khan's brother. Lakai men were horsebreeders, renowned for their independence and banditry. For their embroideries, Lakai women used three different stitches—chain, cross, and blanket stitch. But lest we think of their products as representing solely nomadic traditions and

environments, Ali pointed out that many were embroidered on red woollen fabric from Manchester, clearly obtained through urban trading contacts.

Lakai embroideries were made for either talismanic or functional purposes, and their formats vary accordingly. Among talismanic items were mirror bags (*oyna khalta*) for holding mirrors used in the wedding ceremony, and square and shield-shaped hangings (*ilgitch* and *uut kap ilgitch*). Among the many functional items were bed-cover ends (*saygosha*), cradle bags (*napramach*), and horse covers (*jul asp*).

Some have argued that the silk-on-silk suzanis Ali assigns to Shahrissabz are in fact Lakai work—that the Lakai, forcibly resettled in Shahrissabz, adapted their embroidery to suzani format. An opposing view is that the Lakai migrated to Afghanistan and never made large-scale embroideries. Ali's opinion was that the Lakai did produce suzanis, but of a specific, red-ground type.

At the end of his presentation, Ali addressed a revisionist theory of suzanis in general: that their commonalities preclude their having been solely domestic products, and that many were commissioned and made professionally. Although he conceded that some designs may have been professionally drawn, and that many suzani backings were commercially block-printed, he maintained that women were the artists responsible for these embroideries.

After Ali concluded his talk, those in the audience asked several questions: How early were synthetic dyes used in suzanis? Ali said he knew of examples from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and thought there may have been





**9, 10. Ali and NERS members examine a Nurata suzani and a Bukhara *nim* suzani.**

**11. Nurata suzani (detail)**

**12. Large Bukhara suzani (detail)**

**13. Ura Tube suzani (detail)**

**14. *Bokche* with Persian poetry, probably Afghanistan (detail)**



others from the latter half of the previous quarter. Where did *boteh* designs on suzanis come from? Ali thought from Mughal India. When and how did suzanis originate? Very likely before the late-eighteenth century, Ali said; it's just that earlier ones haven't survived. How long does it take to make a suzani? "Years." By one individual or more than one? Ali felt that suzanis were family efforts. Where did the silk used in suzanis come from? It was cultivated and produced locally, although it once had come from China.

Members brought numerous items for the show-and-tell, and in their enthusiasm quickly left their seats to get closer looks. First up was a suzani that Ali attributed to Nurata, based on its floral forms, the amount of open space on its white cotton ground, and the use of chain stitch with outlining (9, 11). He felt that it probably dated to the middle or third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Next was a *nim* suzani, which Ali assigned to Bukhara (10). Chain stitch was its predominant technique. Ali thought it was mid-nineteenth century or possibly earlier. A large linen-ground suzani, clearly kin to the previous example, followed (12).

Then came an exceptionally wide suzani, on a beige linen ground, from Ura Tube. It had the prominent flower stems that Ali had noted were characteristic of the region (13).

Ali linked the subsequent piece to Nurata. It was somewhat coarser than the preceding ones, leading him

to date it to around 1900. In addition, it was quilted—another distinguishing feature of some Nurata suzanis.

Following this was a suzani that utilized both flat and chain stitch. Each design motif in its border was unique. Ali attributed it to Bukhara, noting that its coarser ground suggested a date in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The next four pieces, shown together, were more recent. The first came from the Ferghana Valley, and probably had been made in the first quarter of the twentieth century. It was followed an example from the 1960s or 1970s. Another later piece included a poem; Ali thought it had been made in northern Afghanistan (14). The last of the group was a giant embroidery probably dating to the 1990s. Ali explained that its Ottoman motifs suggested that it was created for a Turkish market. Given its large size, it was likely produced by multiple needleworkers.

The remaining show-and-tell items were utilitarian: two Lakai embroidered horse covers, another horse cover that Ali believed to be Kirghiz, and two Turkmen *bokches*, one Tekke and the other Yomud.

Our hearty thanks to Ali for adding significantly to our knowledge and appreciation of suzanis and related needlework. We hope that, on this marathon tour, he and the rest of his rug-society audiences similarly enjoy their sessions!

Jim Adelson



## November Meeting: Gerard Paquin on Textile Designs in Turkish Rugs



### 1. Gerard Paquin begins his talk, illustrated with slides and rugs from his personal collection

At our November 16 meeting, again at the Durant-Kenrick House, collector and NERS member Gerard Paquin appealed to fans of rugs and textiles alike with a talk entitled “Silk and Wool: Textile Designs in Turkish Rugs” **(1)**. At the start, he laid out the key themes of his presentation: first, that Turkish rugs borrowed designs from Ottoman textiles; second, that *yastiks* are a particularly good format in which to see these influences,

and third, that in addition to their shared design repertoire, both rugs and textiles help define Turkish architectural space.

To begin, Gerard compared the motifs of a Yuan-period Chinese silk damask **(2)** to similar ones on a Turkish “Seljuk” carpet made not much later **(3)**. That the pile version was less curvilinear reflected the differences in materials and weaving technique. Overall, he noted, the textile-weaving process favored small, repeating patterns, as seen in the Seljuk rug. In contrast, the geometric designs of Turkish “compartment and gul” carpets, such as small-pattern Holbeins, were in his opinion less likely to have been derived from textiles.



**2 Silk damask fragment, China, Yuan period, ca. 1300, Metropolitan Museum 35.56.20**



**3. Fragmentary Turkish carpet (detail), early 14th century, Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum inv. no. 688**





**4. Wool knotted-pile carpet with textile-panel format, 17th century, Vakıflar (Istanbul Carpet Museum) no. E-110**

Gerard then showed a sixteenth-century Ottoman brocaded silk textile with repeated ogival forms containing tulips, carnations, and hyacinths. A seventeenth-century pile carpet featured similar floral forms; in addition, its field was divided by vertical bands, so that it echoed textile loom widths, their selvages intact, joined together to make a panel (4).

Gerard emphasized the importance of silk textiles in the Ottoman world, both as key items of trade and as means of storing wealth. Pile carpets and kilims with textile designs were much less expensive to produce, and therefore to own.

A pile-carpet fragment from his collection (5) featured a *rumi* (stylized split-leaf) lattice, derived from Ottoman or Timurid textiles (6). In a series of images, he showed that the *rumi* elements underwent gradual evolution, with later versions likely based on other rugs rather than on the original textile models. Pile weaving, he pointed out, allows for new design ideas, including a wider range of color.

Gerard then considered other artistic media that rug designs might have come from. Although the making of architectural tiles and fine manuscripts was long established



**5. Rug fragment with *rumi* lattice, 16th century or earlier, Paquin Collection**



**6. Length of Ottoman brocaded velvet (detail), 16th century, MFA 04.1628**





7. Velvet *yastık*, 17th century, GWU Textile Museum 1.79

in the region, he felt these arts were less likely design sources, in part because textiles were so portable and prestigious. As one illustration of this mobility, Gerard picked a Turkish pile rug with a design derived from an Italian, rather than a Turkish, velvet.

As promised, Gerard spent time focusing on *yastiks* (pillow covers). He compared a seventeenth-century silk-velvet *yastık* (7) with a nineteenth-century Dazkırı pile example (8) that showed significant design carryover. The later *yastık* admittedly had acquired new elements, but in the course of two hundred years there likely would have been pile intermediaries closer to the original source. After another such textile-rug pairing, he showed a velvet *yastık* with a central medallion and corners, together with an Ottoman book cover of similar format. For the large-scale, centralized design of *yastiks* like this, he acknowledged, the arts of the book may have been the original design source.



8. Pile *yastık*, 19th century, Paquin Collection

Why do so many *yastiks* have lappets at their ends? Gerard thought that, in silk weaving, these devices may have served to interrupt a very long repeat, dividing a length of fabric into sections that would become individual objects when the fabric was cut up. He noted that the Ottomans didn't invent lappets, which perhaps derived from architectural forms and were therefore seen as appropriate for the space-defining function of rugs and textiles. To illustrate this function, he showed an Ottoman tent, its interior walls lined with decorative textiles that had literally become architecture.

Gerard concluded his talk indicating that although rugs respond to current fashion, silk textiles were a source for many of them. But he also cautioned against our getting so wound up in theory that we fail to enjoy the rugs themselves, underscoring this point with a quotation from Alexandre Dumas: "How is it that little children are so intelligent and men so stupid? It must be education that does it."





**Pile rugs at the show-and-tell: fragmentary Ersari Turkmen trapping (9), Caucasian Shirvan (10) and Gendje (11) rugs, Jozan Sarouk (12), Alban Kuba (13), and non-textile-derived old Turkish carpet (14)**

The show-and-tell following his talk began with a half-dozen of Gerard's own pieces. The first was his *rumi*-lattice carpet fragment, which had a camel-colored ground. Why that color? He conjectured that the rug weaver may have been emulating a textile with a metallic-thread ground. Next, he showed a velvet *yastık* that, despite its typical Ottoman floral repertoire, is now believed—because of its structure and fineness—to be early seventeenth-century Italian, woven for the Ottoman market. The pile *yastık* that he showed after this had an ogival central motif and prominent tulips related to those of the preceding velvet. It was followed by his Dazkırı *yastık* (8). Gerard's final *yastık* had vertical stripes deriving from an Ottoman or possibly Kashmiri textile source. Finally, departing from Turkish examples, he displayed a fragmentary Ersari Turkmen pile trapping (9) with a design based on a Central Asian velvet *ikat*.

NERS members supplemented Gerard's pieces with textile-inspired rugs from several weaving regions. First were an Ersari *chuval* patterned with the so-called Mina Khani design and a Turkish pile *yastık*. These were followed by a diagonally

striped Shirvan rug (10), shown with an assemblage of Kashmir-shawl material meant to illustrate the Shirvan's design source. In a similar Caucasian vein, a Gendje had a striped ground overlaid with leaf-and-vine elements, and border motifs also found in Shahsavan sumak weavings (11). From Persia came a Jozan Sarouk with overall floral motifs (12) inspired by eighteenth-century Persian silks. We returned to the Caucasus with an Alban Kuba (13), its design—shared by some Zeichur rugs—derived from Azerbaijani embroideries.

The show-and-tell closed with a very large old Anatolian carpet—late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, according to its owner—whose many interesting and infrequently seen motifs likely stemmed from design sources other than textiles.

Our substantial thanks to Gerard, not only for highlighting the links between textile and pile-woven designs, but also for bringing examples from his own collection for us to study and enjoy in the wool—or even “in the silk”!

Jim Adelson



## Auction Report: Ronnie Newman Collection Sold at Skinner



**Ronnie Newman, 1993**

Rugs and textiles belonging to New Jersey dealer Ronnie Newman, now in failing health, were auctioned at Skinner on October 21 and December 9, 2018. The Americana that Ronnie also collected was dispersed at Sotheby's the previous January and at Skinner in August (see below, bottom row).

Ronnie was unmissable at New England country auctions in the 1970s and '80s. His relentless bidding on the rugs he wanted was just one aspect of his uninhibited presence; at the least provocation he might burst into an operatic aria or declaim in some *very* foreign language. In 1979, I saw him onstage, in an off-Broadway play, *Strider*; for once, I remember noting, his characteristic theatricality didn't seem outsized.

In the 1990s, Ronnie became a rug-society presenter, speaking to NERS about aesthetics and, at one of the ACOR conferences of the era, talking about his beloved Chinese rugs. "How old is that?" somebody in the ACOR audience asked about one of them. "Old *enough*," Ronnie replied, fixing his signature glare on the questioner, who pursued the matter no further.

For more on this singular dealer, in his own words, see "Who's Afraid of Ronnie Newman?," a two-part interview in *Oriental Rug Review* (June–July and Aug.–Sept. 1993).

*Julia Bailey*



**Top lots: Kangxi mat, \$18,000; dragon saddle rug, \$16,000; Şarkışla (East Anatolian) fragment, \$14,000, Ningsha mat, \$10,000 (all prices excluding buyer's premium): sold December 9 at Skinner Marlborough, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets**



**Chinese silk saddle cover, \$32,000; Saryk *chuval* face, \$20,000; Konya long rug (detail), \$18,000; Khotan "RKO" rug, \$14,000: sold October 21 at Skinner Boston, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets**



**Embroidered townscape panel, \$12,000; paint-decorated box with houses, \$11,000; yellow-painted and red-stenciled lift-top box, \$9,000: sold August 12 at Skinner Marlborough, August Americana**



## Peter Willborg

News of Stockholm dealer Peter Willborg's death has reached us. The rug world has lost one of its giants, but his legacy as a scholar will remain. His 404-page magnum opus, *Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari: Village, Workshop and Nomadic Rugs of Western Persia*, which incorporates his own field research on a vanishing cultural milieu, is a resource unlikely to be replaced. Perhaps better known is his *Flatweaves from Fjord and Forest*, on the folk weavings of his native Scandinavia. He also supplied many of the pieces in Viveka Hansen's *Swedish Textile Art*. Peter had an unerring eye, and many of us have visited his online gallery to search for the best types from all over rugdom and to benefit from his freely shared wealth of knowledge. He was a gentleman and a gentle man, and will be sorely missed.

Lloyd Kannenberg



The late Peter Willborg

## Russell Cook

Former NERS member Russell A. Cook, of Hanover, N.H., and Thetford, Vt., died on January 8, at the age of 87. Russ had enjoyed a long career in asset management and was an avid outdoorsman. He and his wife, Marjorie—who also belonged to NERS—were discerning collectors of Caucasian rugs. In 2006, they graciously lent two of these—a splendid Borjalu Kazak and an exceptional Marasali prayer rug—to the exhibition *New England Collects*, at ACOR 8. We in NERS extend to Marjorie our sympathy, our hope that rugs still give her pleasure and comfort, and our invitation to rejoin us at future meetings.

Julia Bailey



The late Russ Cook

## Rug, Textile, and Related Events

### Auctions

Mar. 2, Boston, Skinner, American Furniture and Decorative Arts  
Mar. 23, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Poppmeier Collection II  
Apr. 28, Boston, Skinner, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets  
Apr. 30, London, Bonhams, Islamic and Indian Art  
May 5, Boston, Grogan & Company, Spring Auction  
(including rugs and carpets)

### Exhibitions

Until Mar. 10, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts  
Collecting Stories: Native American Art  
Until April 14, Zurich, Museum Rietberg, Shades of Elegance:  
Fashion and Fabrics in Teheran around 1900  
Until July 28, Los Angeles, LACMA  
The Power of Pattern: Central Asian Ikats from the David  
and Elizabeth Reisbord Collection

### Fairs and Conferences

Apr. 5–7, Santa Ynez Valley, Marriott Hotel, Rug Collectors'  
Meeting (by invitation)  
June 24–30, London, *HALI* London (including symposium and fair,  
in celebration of the publication of *HALI* 200)

## Future NERS Meetings

- May 3: Joel Greifinger on Kurdish weaving from three regions (Durant-Kenrick House, Newton)
- May 19: Annual picnic, moth mart, and show-and-tell (Gore Place, Waltham)

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## In Memoriam: Rosalie Rudnick



**Rosalie at sixteen or seventeen, portrayed in oil by her brother, artist Joseph Ablow**

Rosalie Rudnick, 80, cofounder in 1986 of the New Boston Rug Society (now NERS), died on November 17, 2018, eleven years after learning that she had Alzheimer's Disease. For years following her diagnosis, Rosalie continued to support NERS and attend its meetings with her husband, Mitch.

The stellar Caucasian carpets that she and Mitch had acquired since the early 1980s were sold by Michael Grogan on November 20, 2016 (see pp. 3–7 of the Feb. 2017 *View*: [www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v24n3-02-2017.pdf](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v24n3-02-2017.pdf)), following Rosalie's move into the memory-care unit of The Falls at Cordingly Dam, Newton.

Over the decades of their collecting, Rosalie and Mitch were generous lenders to museums and other carpet-friendly venues. In 1990, three of their rugs were included in *Colors of the Caucasus*, a small show in the Islamic Gallery of Harvard's Sackler Museum. Eleven were shown in the ACOR I exhibition *Through the Collector's Eye*, at the RISD Museum of Art and the Textile Museum in 1991–92.

At ACOR VIII, back in Boston in April 2006, the Rudnicks had their own show, *Gems of the Caucasus: Antique Caucasian Rugs from the Rudnick Collection* (see

<http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/rugl141a.pdf>, pp. 4–5). *Textile Gems of the Caucasus: Rugs from the Collection of Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick* followed in November 2006, at the Concord (Mass.) Art Association ([www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/rugl142a.pdf](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/rugl142a.pdf), p. 6).

Finally, the exhibition of which Rosalie and Mitch were proudest was *Caucasian Rugs from the Rudnick Collection*, hung in 2012–13 in the Upper Rotunda of the MFA, Boston ([www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v21n1-09-2013.pdf](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v21n1-09-2013.pdf), pp. 4–6).

Those of us who knew Rosalie from the early years of her rug collecting were wowed by her focus, determination, visual acuity, and enthusiasm for sharing her passion. We miss her, and we extend our sympathy to Mitch.

*Julia Bailey*

What follows is excerpted from NERS-member Carl Strock's lively 2002 interview with the Rudnicks, published in *HALI* 125 (Nov.–Dec. 2002), p. 173:

*For Mitch and Rosalie Rudnick, it began in 1983 with a broken water pipe in their home outside Boston. The spewing water ruined their wall-to-wall broadloom, and with the insurance money that followed they set out to buy an area rug. They no longer remember exactly what they found—a Persian piece of some sort—but whatever it was they fell in love not only with the rug itself but with the hunt. Even on that first occasion the trail had led beyond Boston to the greater opportunities of New York: “I didn’t want this experience to end,” Rosalie recalls now, sitting with Mitch in their spacious Boston condominium, surrounded by one of America’s premier collections.*

*And it hasn’t. Twenty years later they are still hunting for what eventually became their love—early nineteenth-century Caucasian rugs with village roots. Rugs with bold graphics, harmonious colors, and strong evidence of the human touch.*

*In the beginning it was a revelation for them. “I learned about dealers, about rug books, about auctions, about HALI, about Oriental Rug Review,” Rosalie recalls, thinking of the first picture she saw of rugs hanging on a wall. “I said to Mitch, ‘Do you know there are collectors out there? I want to be a collector.’”*

*[Mitch, despite initial reservations about financing this new enterprise, acquiesced, adding.] “I wanted to support Rosalie in something she was passionate about.”*

*Passionate Rosalie certainly was, and still is. She took up restoration, paying for private lessons with some of the East Coast’s leading practitioners, so she could work on her*



own rugs, a pursuit that she says enables her to know her pieces inside and out. "There are no secrets in my rugs," she says.

With two other enthusiasts—Kate Van Sciver and Judy Smith—she put together a little group calling themselves the New Boston Rug Society, successor to the earlier, moribund Boston Rug Society, meeting in the basement of her home.

A few years later when Ned Long called from Cleveland to ask if New Boston would be willing to host a conference of all of America's local rug societies, Rosalie and the others agreed. It was a natural progression, since Mitch was already raising money to support a rug exhibition at the Rhode Island School of Design Art Museum, which could be tied to the conference. That's how it worked out, and so was born the American Conference on Oriental Rugs (ACOR).

To this day, Rosalie says, "I get very nervous if I haven't done something ruggie, some sort of rug-related something—reading an article, looking at a picture, restoring—at least once a day."

They have come a long way from the early days when they complained to a New York dealer that the rugs he was showing them were too old to be any good. [In their condominium now] are a good Karachov, an idiosyncratic Borjalu, and rugs of sometimes no easily identifiable type. A visitor begins to notice that for a major Caucasian collection, there are serious gaps: there is no Eagle Kazak, no Pinwheel, no bird Akstafa, no black Marasali. That is because the Rudnicks do not collect "types," even though they started off doing so. If you ask about the gaps, Rosalie has unapologetic answers, based on her own taste. Pinwheel Kazak? "Too commercial." Eagle Kazak? Ditto. Black Marasali? They have a "yck yellow." Akstafa? A "yck green."

"We think of the collection as a whole," Rosalie says. "A lot of collectors just buy a bunch of rugs. We try not to. We're trying to create an overall wonderful collection that represents our growth and has real artistic merit."

As for agreeing on purchases, it was easier in the beginning. Now Rosalie is more willing [than Mitch] to tolerate rugs in poor condition if there is still beauty left in them.

They are in no hurry to exhibit their collection until conditions are just right, though they are gracious about inviting wandering ruggies in for a private tour. As for how much of their life revolves around the rug passion, they say they have "rug friends" and "normal friends," but the people they really enjoy are the rug people. "The rug world is a wonderful world to live in," Rosalie says, "and if we hadn't found it, I hate to think what our lives would be like."



**With enduring style and verve, Rosalie outshines a modern Uzbek suzani at the 2012 NERS picnic**



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**The New England Rug Society** is an informal, non-profit organization of people interested in enriching their knowledge and appreciation of antique oriental rugs and textiles. Our meetings are held seven or more times a year. Membership levels and annual dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information and renewal forms are available on our website, [www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org); by writing to the New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 6125, Holliston, MA 01746; or by contacting Jim Sampson at [jahome22@gmail.com](mailto:jahome22@gmail.com).



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