



For Manhattan Designer
Lexi Tallisman

A Handmade Rug
Makes All the Difference!

Lexi Tallisman was working at a desk job at MTV when an interior designer friend asked for immediate help installing a Paris apartment. Despite the three-week deadline, she jumped at the opportunity. This baptism-by-fire experience included a rug purchasing spree at the legendary Bon Marché department store. “It was incredible,” states the Manhattan designer about this life-changing experience. Life-changing indeed. Soon after her return to New York, she handed her notice at MTV and founded her firm Greyscale Interiors in 2010. Since then, handmade decorative rugs have played a pivotal role in her interiors featuring an artful mix of vintage and contemporary pieces.

Ms. Tallisman’s love affair with rugs predates her decorating days. “Even prior to becoming a designer, I’d shop at auctions, specifically downtown,” comments the largely self-taught designer who hails from Cleveland, OH and whose interiors are primarily located in the New York tristate area. “Living in New York City, particularly downtown, I’ve been used to being surrounded by interior design

The sumptuous indigo blues in a luxurious monochromatic wool carpet are played up in this dining room’s wallcovering. Photography by Joshua McHugh. Courtesy of Greyscale Interiors.

STORY BY ALIX G. PERRACHON

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A vintage accent piece exhibiting soft camels and blues adds a historic note to this elegant eclectic master bath. Photography by Joshua McHugh. Courtesy of Greyscale Interiors.

OPPOSITE The copper hues in a partly "erased" silk floral pattern harmonize with the leather furnishings and wood floors bestowing this country living room with casual sophistication. Photography by Joshua McHugh. Courtesy of Greyscale Interiors.

shops and rug stores and would always stop in just for eye candy and inspiration." In the last decade, she has used rugs, both vintage and modern, to define spaces and achieve her hallmark layered, collected look.

While many designers find the rug shopping process challenging, Ms. Tallisman finds it exciting, if not exhilarating. "I feel that people who work in the rug industry have a different kind of passion than many others," she remarks. "Maybe it's the fact that they, more often than not, have to travel to work so closely with the rug makers." Her affinity with the crafting aspect of handmade rugs is hardly surprising given her studies in textile technology and fashion merchandising at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT).

For Ms. Tallisman, decorative rugs are essential to creating her eclectic interiors where warmth and ambience prevail. "I look for texture first in everything I use including wallpaper," she says. Their handcrafted attribute holds a distinctive magnetic appeal, one that is lacking in machinemade rugs. "To me, it's the difference between eating pasta from a box versus handmade pasta in a family's home in an olive grove in Italy," she remarks. "The look, care, intention is palpable when it's done by hand. The little mistakes that you often see add to the character and show true craftsmanship. The labor aspect is absolutely mind blowing!" In fact, when her clients balk at a handmade rug's price tag, she shows them a video on rug production which inevitably helps them



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A cream-colored Moroccan with its charcoal lozenge repeat endows this sitting room with Lexi Tallisman's signature layered, collected look. Photography by Tawni Bannister. Courtesy of Greyscale Interiors.

appreciate the craft and inspires them to buy the rug. “It makes all the difference!” she insists.

A handmade rug's resilience and durability are critical when selecting a piece for a client. “I do find that if you select the right rug in terms of materials, construction, design, and color, you can ‘live’ all over your rug,” the designer notes while mentioning that her current 14-year-old living room rug is still beautiful despite having endured a number of accidents in four different apartments. Commenting on handmade rugs' unique esthetics, she continues, “You can see the difference just in the look of the pile and the fibers used. A handmade rug can be your piece of art in a room.” As for machinemade rugs, they too have their place. “I'm all for using a cost-effective rug, or getting a remnant piece of carpet when you have a new puppy or on top of a main rug in a kids' playroom or

nursery so that you can live in your space and not worry about ruining anything that was more expensive,” she says.

With respect to her rug choices, Ms. Tallisman comments: “I'm not interested in sticking to a particular time frame or esthetic. I always love a good vintage rug. The more wear, the better--just think of the number of steps that have walked across that rug!” Vintage Persian, Moroccans, Turkish, and Chinese Art Deco are among the pieces that have found their way in her interiors. She loves vintage pieces for the personal touch they add to a room. “A room without a vintage rug just feels too new,” she explains. “Bringing in an old rug makes it feel more personal and lived in.” Her love of rugs is such that she will “swoon” over any rug, regardless of its age, featuring a distinctive design and quality. Given her textile and



A richly saturated navy-blue Moroccan displaying a rustic tribal ivory pattern creates a warm inviting mood in this West Village living room. Courtesy of Greyscale Interiors.

fashion background, it's no wonder that she relishes the challenge of creating a custom rug. For her, the finest pieces are an expression of true art.

Starting or ending the design process with the rug depends on what the designer comes across in her sourcing. Thus, the rug can enter the picture at any point in time. "I design as I find pieces," she remarks. Sometimes, she starts with a rug that she has previously identified or with a client's pre-owned piece. "I love incorporating family heirlooms into a client's design," she comments while also highlighting the importance of being an adept editor.

True to her design esthetic based on fusing different textures, periods, colors, and patterns, Ms. Tallisman thrives on creating a balanced palette when coordinating rugs with fabrics. She searches for a more patterned and textured rug if the room's color

palette is neutral. When the room's design scheme features a wider color range, she extracts one or two hues to find a rug, generally more subtly patterned or monochromatic, that would unify the space. "I think the rug should be less busy to not make the eye wander with many colors in the space," she adds. "It's all about harmonious juxtapositions. Everything in the room doesn't necessarily have to match but must complement each other."

Harmony is also Ms. Tallisman's guiding light when connecting rugs in the same room or from one space to the other. "I always think of a project as a cohesive narrative in one collective space," she continues. "Everything has to flow." This comes into play when coordinating two rugs in the same space as she did in a Greenwich Village apartment to anchor living room and dining room areas. Both pieces are in

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the contemporary vein while their colors, albeit different, are complementary. The dining space's silver monochromatic piece featuring touches of ivory harmonizes with the living room area's Moroccan with its rich aubergine field and tribal ivory design.

Although sustainability *per se* is not the designer's conscious objective when searching for a rug, she views it as an important by-product of a handmade piece. When educating her clients on the intricacies of handcrafted production, she is also nurturing their appreciation for the sustainability of the process.

Practical considerations should also be paramount when selecting a rug for a client. Considering

the room's use in terms of foot traffic—especially from children, pets, and the outdoors—and potential sunlight fading are among the key elements to be taken into account. Ultimately, she says, “There is no substitute to being able to get a true sense of how any item feels than to see it in its final home.”

For Ms. Tallisman, handmade decorative rugs' appeal is not limited to human beings. “The attraction of dogs to rugs is one that melts my heart! I'm not sure if it's that good/bad smell that they want on them or just knowing that now they can run around without slipping, but the joy a dog, at least mine, gets when I lay down a new rug is just too cute,” she concludes.

About The Designer

Originally from Cleveland OH, Lexi Tallisman moved to New York in 2001 where she earned a Bachelor of Science in textile technology and an Associate's degree in fashion merchandising at Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in 2004. After working at MTV, she established Greyscale Interiors in Manhattan in 2010. A full-service boutique interior design firm, Greyscale Interiors aspires to express and enhance her clientele's lifestyle.

Committed to the process of collaboration, the designer balances colors, textures, and materials to create her signature collected esthetic. By layering saturated color palettes with custom upholstery, antique and vintage rugs, and furniture with modern accessories, she designs spaces that exude warmth and casual sophistication.

Her projects are mainly located in the New York tristate region. A vintage furniture enthusiast at heart, she devotes much of her time to scouring antique markets and attending design auctions. Her work has been featured in *Curbed*, *Lonny*, and *Zillow*.



Lexi Tallisman. Photography by Ben Draper.
Courtesy of Greyscale Interiors.

OPPOSITE A silver high-low wool-and-silk rug featuring a large-scale graphic circular repeat sets a luxurious tone in this eclectically furnished Park Avenue living room.
Courtesy of Greyscale Interiors.