# modern

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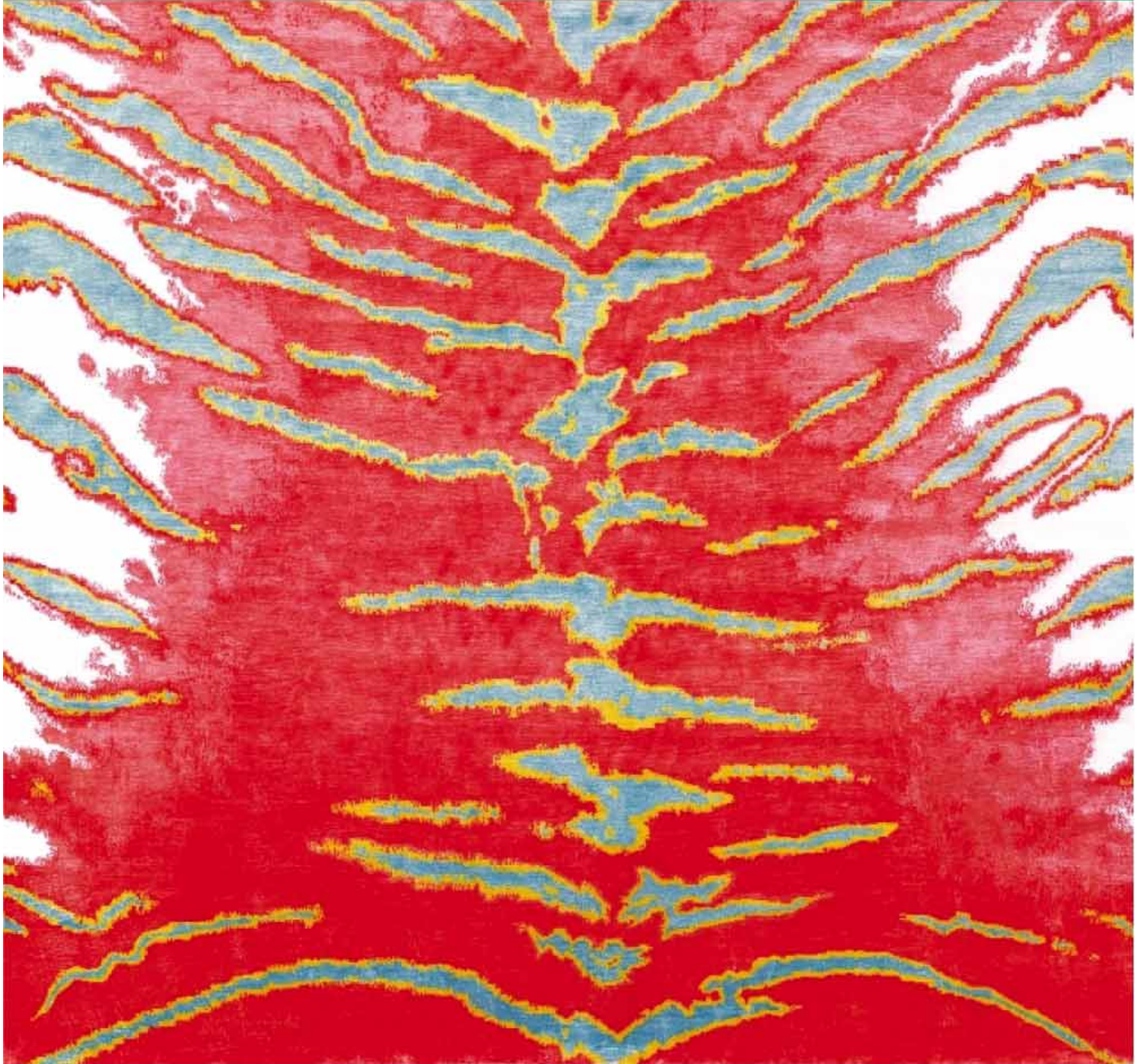
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**THE COLOUR ISSUE**

**Above:**
The virtual showroom of
www.rug-maker.com

# RUG INTERFACE

The internet has led to many traditional businesses radically rethinking their
routes to market. **Mark Sinclair** reports on how the rug industry is reacting

**N**ot so long ago – just a little over ten years in fact – the internet was in its infancy. Then by 2000 the dotcom bubble had burst and it seemed that this new digital technology, set to revolutionise communications and business, might have gone into premature meltdown. Fast-forward to 2006 and the picture is different again. Today it's hard to imagine the world without the internet. Online is well and truly here to stay.

For the rug and carpet industry, the rebirth of the web and the current buoyant growth of the online industry is particularly welcome news. The textiles industry appears to be wholly embracing the internet. Typing 'bespoke rugs' into *Google*, for example,

brings up 167,000 responses. As the technology available online improves, so do traders' applications of it. All over the world more and more rug designers and manufacturers are using and enjoying the vast resources currently offered by the web.

In its simplest incarnation, a website can act as a hub for showing off a studio's production processes and latest designs; the conventional approach being a portfolio of flat images of rugs on-screen. This is scarcely innovative, but then again the technology that makes it possible to create more dynamic online presentations is relatively new. Indeed, the first entry listed on a search for bespoke rugs (which no doubt they are very happy

about) is Area Rugs (www.arearugs.co.uk) – Andrew Warburton's hand-tufting studio based in West Yorkshire. It's a very simple website but it communicates what the company does and the level of attention that they put into their craft. The home page features a clever 360° image of its workshop which, while not necessarily cutting edge web design, certainly does the job of transporting this local operation into the international domain.

Many rug designers and manufacturers have taken the idea of bespoke to another level entirely, installing interactive features that enable consumers to choose the look of their own rugs. The website of Berlin-based company Rug Star (www.rugstar.com), for

example, allows users to scroll through the available rug designs. While quite slow and a little confusing, the Colour Mixer section of the site is a great addition, particularly on their 'Noodlesoup' range, where you can change the colours and their brightness by clicking on the colour bar running alongside the image. The Mix and Match feature allows users some interaction in the design of pre-patterned rugs – click on this range and it's possible to move sections of rug around on the screen, effectively creating a bespoke pattern.

Tamarian (www.tamarian.com), based in Baltimore, have a nice looking site and similarly provide an option to customise their range online, offering a colour breakdown of each rug in their range, while Hill & Co. (www.hillco.co.uk) have a 'Magic Box' which cleverly stores any combinations of previously chosen colours that can then be applied to a new design or pattern. A 'randomising' feature also claims to help with inspiration.

London-based design studio loophouse (www.loophouse.com) specialise in custom-made rugs. Earlier this year they launched 360° Colourbox, a fantastic online resource which allows visitors to the site to explore an impressive range of 360 colours and customise any of the rugs from the *Signature* Collection. "When reconstructing our website we considered the importance of clarity, easy navigation and speed," explains Lorraine Statham of loophouse. "The importance of accessibility to images became apparent. The 360° Colourbox is just one of the sections that allows you to develop an initial loophouse look, design, or style. It enables clients to re-colour signature designs to their preferred palette or colourway from the comfort of their





**Top left:**

A real rug simulation in wool and silk produced by the explorug.net program from www.rug-maker.com, St Albans. The program simulates different textures which along with colours can be changed instantly

**Far left:**

A screen shot from www.rug-maker.com demonstrating the way that a rug can be placed in any room-setting

**Left:**

The Colour Mixer part of the Berlin-based firm Rug Star's website, www.rugstar.com

home, studio or office."

While many of these sites require a password in order to access the various collections and interactive areas (these can be obtained by emailing the studio), one company is offering an downloadable program that customers can actually install on their own PC. "I've always looked to the future and the direction things might go, and asked myself what's worth investing in," says Richard Mathias of St Albans-based Rug-Maker.com, the company behind the www.explorug.net program. "The way the technology has grown and will continue to grow, the internet is an obvious place to look."

Mathias has just launched the explorug.net site. He hopes this "decision-making tool for the ideal rug in your room," will revolutionise the way people create and buy rugs. "I think this is a real winner as a product in terms of what it has to show, what it has to offer and the simplicity of it," he says of the software program created by his design partners, Jyoti Tandukar and Shreeniwas Sharma, who are based in their studio in Nepal. "That's the key – it has to be able to be understood within a minute or two so that a customer is able to do it themselves."

And he's right – the program is a remarkably intuitive and user-friendly system that permits customers full creative control of the shape, size and design of any rug. "It's absolutely infinite now," he says, "you can have anything – it's all in your own imagination." Mathias has a version of the software running in the main room of his shop and, attached to a big screen. It's an impressive thing to watch. As he runs through the applications, he breezily mentions that this system means that the



**Top right:**
A customised rug, *Belgium Field.* Tamarian, Baltimore

**Right:**
Hill & Co. (www.hillco.co.uk) Magic which stores customers' previous colour preferences

**Far right:**
The customising page of Tamarian's website www.tamarian.com





Design Name: Belgium Field

**Left:**
The www.jan-kath.com gallery presents the company's rugs in an art gallery setting through which the customers navigate themselves from the comfort of their computer

**Right:**
A rug from London-based firm Loophouse who specialise in bespoke rug production. The website www.loophouse.com includes a newly launched Colour Box section which allows users to customise any of the company's *Signature* Collection



days of lumbering rugs into people's houses to try out are over. To get a realistic idea of how their bespoke rug will look, all that buyers need is a copy of the software program, a box of Chromatone coloured wool tufts and a couple of actual samples showing the variations between wool and silk at different knots.

The most exciting thing about Mathias' software is what's lacking in most of the bespoke design packages currently available: the ability to have a unique design placed into an image of the room in which it will eventually sit. Simply email a range of digital pictures to the Rug-Maker.com team and they'll place the chosen rug into the environment, paying particular attention to achieving the correct perspective and even taking into account shifts in lighting and shadow.

"With an internet connection at your home or work, you're offered hundreds of rug designs, laid in your own room one after another, so that you can change their colours to suit other furnishings," Mathias continues. "The chosen rug can also be seen

in close-up, as if you are viewing the real rug, then finally you can place an online order in the desired size and quality." Future plans for www.explorug.net may see users able to have their own branded custom showcases of rug with, says Mathias, "their own designs, rooms, and colours, making it an ideal tool for distributors, designers and retailers."

In Germany, one design studio who have embraced digital applications with the same passion as Rug-Maker is Jan Kath, whose website has to be one of the most desirable looking destinations for rug design online. Created by the web studio Oktober, www.jan-kath.com is structured like a gallery with the rugs exhibited like paintings. For Kath, this isn't merely a website. "It turns out that it's now extremely important," he says of the site, "and we're actually trying to promote the website as one of our three major selling tools. It's not just a public page for consumers but it also works as a showroom in itself. As a designer you can guide your client through the gallery space, even pull out some samples. It's like having

a pocket showroom with you all the time."

The Jan Kath site is as high-end as his rugs, but its main success for Kath is that it's one of the company's most reliable marketing tools. Its look, well in tune with the overall Kath aesthetic, is also a clever play on the clichéd way of displaying rugs online as flat artwork. This time though, you can inspect the weave, the colours, the textures, as you would a picture.

Of course, the screen can take customers as near to what a rug can look like but it still lacks one vital ingredient. Touch. Will that one day come to us digitally? Stranger things have happened. Kath, for one, is getting there. "Some people who use the website project it in real size onto a wall. The next step would be to go even more virtual, just imagine that you could project the design on to a white dummy carpet? That's something to think about. People would definitely talk about that."

*Rug-Maker.com's software will be available to view at Domotex 2007, Hall 5, at stand C 50.*