

DESIGN & DECORATING

Carpet Diem

Seize on this update of an old-fashioned practice: upholstering with rugs, minus the Victorian fussiness

BY COURTNEY BARNES

UPHOLSTERED WITH overlapping Persian rugs, the reception desk that greets visitors to the Beekman, a newish Manhattan boutique hotel, exudes cozy glamour. Conceived by London's Martin Bradnicki Design Studio, the unique contemporary piece also nods to the Victorian era, when the hotel's landmark structure was built and carpets weren't used only underfoot. Back then, rugs were sometimes conscripted to clad furniture, and the monumental reception counter is a particularly ambitious example of this old technique made new. There are, however, sofas, ottomans and chests anyone can buy: simple, modern frames that wear a coat of carpet.

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The inclination of Westerners to lift rugs off the floor dates to at least the 15th century. Coveted examples imported from the Middle East were too precious for even the wealthiest Europeans to walk on, so the textiles swathed furniture or hung on the wall. The sumptuous rugs that drape tables in Vermeer's still lifes—and do the same thing amid steamy lovmaking in "Tulp Fever," a new film set in 17th-century Holland—arent merely contrived props. But it was well-heeled Victorians who began upholstering their softly rounded chairs and sofas with Oriental rugs, often skirting the seats with long fringe.

Today's versions offer a less fussy alternative. Ottomans created by Calabassas, Calif.-based Amber Lewis, for example, juxtapose old

Turkish wool rugs with contemporary brass-covered bases; when designing interiors, she can install them among mid-century-modern or traditional furniture, typically pairing the stools with plain jute floor covering. The ottomans inject color, texture and warmth into an otherwise neutral space.

Artisans in Istanbul repurpose rugs on simple steel ottoman bases for ABC Carpet & Home's collection, Sent Sofas. And London's Guinevere Antiques specializes in covering new, cube-like chests of drawers with antique cotton dhurries.

"Clients often have old rugs or other heavier textiles sitting in storage," said Frances Merrill of Los Angeles firm Beath Design, who cited cost-effectiveness and sustainability as incentives for recycling carpets on custom upholstered pieces. "I like the faded colors you can get with a vintage rug," she added.

Krista Nye Nicholas and Tami Ramsay of Cloth & Kind Interiors sought vibrancy when they recently covered an ottoman in a vintage hot-pink-and-orange frazada for a contemporary farmhouse near Athens, Ga. The thickly woven wool fibers retained their color, and the eye-popping stripes, traditional in Bolivia, read as modern. "The beauty of vintage rugs is that they've already been well worn," Ms. Nicholas noted, "which makes them ideal for spaces used by children and pets, as well as more sophisticated rooms."

London designers Penny Morrison and Carolina Irving, passionate textile collectors, offer an eponymous line of new benches, large ottomans and chairs covered with antique Turkish striped flat-weaves. They do not alter fine rugs, preferring fragments. "We use pieces that are incomplete or not rare," said Ms. Morrison. Loathe to spoil a precious textile? Emulate Ms. Morrison (and Vermeer) and save the most precious rugs for walls and tables.

BENCH WARMER
A vintage Turkish wool rug tops a contemporary base. Chautauqua Ottoman, \$3,295, Shoppe by Amber Interiors, 747-226-3998



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Kilim-Covered Mid-Century Florence Knoll Sofa from Berkshire Home & Antiques, \$9,800, hdfbs.com

Bespoke Dhurrie-Covered Bedside Tables, about \$6,500 a pair, guinevere.co.uk



Floral Silk Carpet Ottoman \$1,998, anthropologie.com