

Bottom's Up

What's
under-
foot can
matter
most



BY WENDY DONAHUE
Chicago Tribune

An interior design riddle: For every four-sided room, how many walls are there to consider? Six, asserts Dallas-based Elaine Williamson (elainewilliamsondesigns.com). And for many clients, the floor is the most important to get right.

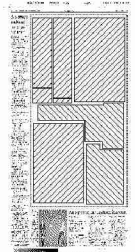
Allergies, animals and eco-consciousness continue to roll back the wall-to-wall carpet in favor of a hard surface. So the key mood-setter/personality-indicator/style dictator becomes ...

The rug.

It might be anything from an unobtrusive sisal (everywhere) to a penetrating Fornasetti gaze (roubinirugs.com). What it's less likely to be these days, in a new space anyway, is a classic Oriental.

"For the most part clients aren't even asking about them anymore," says Williamson. "There's a new breed of rugs out there, and it's very design-oriented, sophisticated and artful."

In the "Sex and the City 2" movie, the most eye-catching, enviable styles have moved from the stars to the sets. Red and pink blooms on the "Candy Flower" rug steal the spotlight in the otherwise mostly neutral living room of Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker) and John (Chris Noth).



The rug even has fashion credibility, created by designer brand Marni for the Rug Co. (therugcompany.info), one of a handful that specialize in statement-making rugs, often in collaboration with fashion designers, artists and architects.

Still, it's an overstatement to say a rug should always be the masterpiece for a room, says Margaret Russell, editor-in-chief of *Elle Decor*.

"The starting point should be something you love," she says. "If that's a rug, that's great, because it is the foundation, the base, of what everything goes on. A lot of people look at a rug as a focal point. Others look at it as the equivalent of a good paint job."

Few in either camp would argue that there now are beautiful rugs out there.

Rug layering has added another dimension. Sisal in summer can be topped with a heavier rug in winter. Or sisal can be embellished.

Still, says interior designer William Diamond, half of New York-based Baratta Design (diamondbarattadesign.com) whose interiors are often centered on bold custom rugs, "I'm not a big believer in doing sisal unless you're doing a house at the beach and are worried about sand. I think it's sort of a copout." Nor is he a fan of solid color rugs.

"We think that a rug is a great place to put your style because it sits on the floor," Diamond says. "Even if it does have a lot of style, it doesn't smack you in the face. When you bring design up higher, in sofas, chairs, walls, it's hitting you in the face more." That's why he also believes in keeping the furniture simpler, and having some coordination between it and the rug colors.

Just as at a dinner party,

he says, "you can't have everything be the center of attention."

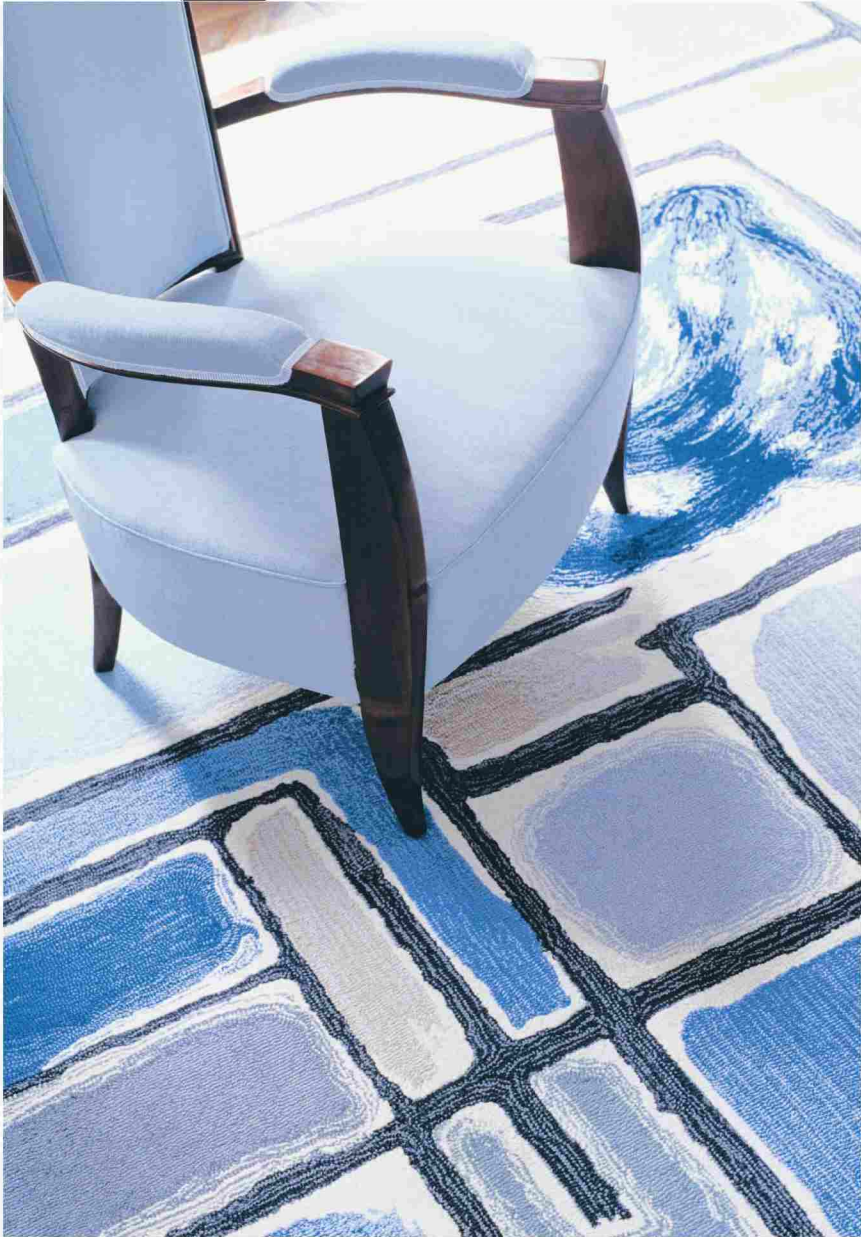


STYLE POINTERS

No-fail recipe: Pair a statement rug with quieter furniture. Or reverse the equation: Opt for a neutral base and choose bolder furnishings.

Let love lead: Despite conventional wisdom, a rug doesn't have to be the starting point for a room. A favorite object, painting or piece of furniture can offer colors and style cues.

Mix it up: Pattern on a rug is less intense than the same pattern at eye level, which is one reason a geometric or Oriental rug can coexist peacefully with prints on furniture.



Diamond Baratta's Mondrian-inspired custom rug, pictured at top of page, pairs with solid-color upholstery in the home of clients who love modern art. Above, Tony Duquette's malachite rug is on Margaret Russell's list of interesting modern rugs, as is Jonathan Adler's faux zebra rug, at right.

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