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DREAM WEAVER

BEN SOLEIMANI

SCION OF A FOURTH-GENERATION RUG DYNASTY, BEN SOLEIMANI BUILT HIS FAMILY'S BUSINESS INTO A WORLDWIDE EMPIRE. THROUGH KEEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND A GIFT FOR GENRE-DEFYING DESIGN, HE'S CHARTING A COURSE THAT'S ALL HIS OWN.



“BY THE TIME I WAS 8 YEARS OLD I KNEW EVERY KIND OF WEAVE THERE IS AND WHERE THE RUG WAS MADE JUST FROM LOOKING AT IT...”

Upper left: 6-year-old Ben Soleimani on a Persian silk carpet; Upper right: Playing polo at the 2010 Pacific Coast Tournament in Santa Barbara, CA. Photos courtesy of Ben Soleimani.



Ben Soleimani is a designer by vocation and polo player by avocation – but in Soleimani’s mind, they are inseparable. “Every time you play – going at that speed, controlling the horse, when you touch the ball – it’s with the same finesse as when you do something creative.”

Whether in the field of work or on the field of play, when you possess the creativity of an artist, the focus of a chess master and the passion of an athlete, your horizons are limitless. Soleimani draws easy parallels between the precision of rug craft and his beloved polo: “If the horse didn’t get the right feed the day before or the horse’s shoes are not done right, your mallet is not completely sound...there are so many variables that have to be just right. It’s all about the details. The people who are perfectionists will not sleep until they get all the elements right.”

In Soleimani’s world, inspiration is always at hand. “Every day I get inspired,” he says. “I see buildings, a shape of a tree, a dress with a beautiful print – I get inspired.” The world is Soleimani’s palette, as he travels from polo matches in England to the rural villages where his rugs are made and back to his home in Los Angeles. Indeed, the prodigiously energetic Soleimani conceives of new ideas 24/7, even in his dreams. On any given day he might produce up to 20 new designs.

His unique brand of alchemy involves melding disparate influences drawn from his near-photographic memory to create rugs that grace some of the grandest homes on

every continent. “By the time I was eight years old I knew every kind of weave there is and where the rug was made just from looking at it. It was something that I learned while jumping up and down on rugs as a kid,” he recalls. He’s like the proverbial kid in the candy store, only the bins overflow with mohair and cactus fibers, rich colors and countless knots and weaves.

Raised in the fourth generation of his family’s world-renowned rug business, Soleimani possesses both an encyclopedic knowledge of carpets and a craftsman’s instincts. Into that mix of tradition and innovation he brings the fresh perspective of a contemporary artist, drawing a direct line from the past to the present. “I know the motifs of the old rugs by heart, but I modify, simplify and combine them.” His rare ability to create rugs that honor two millennia of heritage, yet look entirely new, is what enables him to stay at the forefront of creativity and craftsmanship.

Many of Soleimani’s rugs are inherently green, made by hand from natural, sustainable fibers. He selects and fine-tunes each and every element to produce his desired effect. “The colors, spinning, finish have to be just right. There are so many elements and techniques that go into the carpet to create the finished piece,” he says.

For a perfectionist like Soleimani, making rugs is much more than a series of production steps; it’s a calling. “It’s so real. Everything in a rug comes from life, whether it’s the fleece of a sheep, hemp, or silk, all created by nature. And then these natural elements are transformed by wonderful people all over the world.”

As passionate as Soleimani is about creating his rugs, he is equally devoted to the artisans who make them, many of whom he’s known since he was that eight-year-old kid jumping up and down on stacks of carpets. Soleimani maintains a close kinship with the extended families of the artisans who work with him in historic rug centers such as Nepal and Turkey. Before he agrees to work with a new group of artisans, he travels



Left: Ben seated with the Tassa rug, from the Menara Collection; Bottom left: The Talaa rug, from the Menara Collection.

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to meet them and ensure that they have both masterful skills and a deep sense of stewardship, as they will pass their craft on to each new generation. “It’s in the family; skills are passed down from generation to generation. It’s work that keeps families together and sustains their way of life,” he explains.

Handcrafting just one of Soleimani’s rugs can take six to seven months – there are no automated machines, no assembly lines and no factories in his world. There are only people, making rugs the way they’ve been made for over 2,000 years – with passion, the finest materials, a respect for tradition and an eye to the future. For Ben Soleimani, it’s the only way. Because after all, a rug that bears his name is much more than a room accent. Soleimani smiles as he sums up his philosophy. “Every rug is one of a kind. It is really a beautiful work of art.”