



## Stephanie Odegard, 56 »

*President of Odegard Inc., a rug design and import company*

**How did you get into the rug business?** I'd been working with textiles all my life—when I was a child, my mother and my grandmother would teach me stitches. In 1976 I was in the Peace Corps in Fiji, and I came up with a project to develop traditional industries to produce items, including textiles, for a high-end customer. Later I did the same thing for the United Nations and then the World Bank. I advised businesspeople about how to do it.

**Why did you launch your own company?** When I started to work with the carpet industry in Nepal, I realized you need a certain kind of sensitivity. It was hard for businessmen to have the necessary patience to deal with traditional artisans. They wanted to see more money, more quickly. Finally I thought, *Not only could I do this myself, I have to do this myself, because they're just not getting it and I am.*

**What's been the hardest thing?** Putting together the financial structure. It was the part I knew and cared the least about; no bank would help me. One day I woke up and said, "I have to make this aspect a creative project, too." I developed my own alternative bank, borrowing small amounts from people who believed in me. I was able to pay them back in four years, and by that time I was bankable. *To order Odegard's rugs, call 212-545-0069 or go to odegardinc.com.*



Stephanie Odegard in her New York City showroom; Samdup Dhargyal, her rug doctor, works on some of the company's hand-knotted carpets.