

In the entry hall of Stephanie Odegard's apartment, a colorful Odegard runner in a pattern called *Hallo Metok* leads past a custom bamboo display cabinet and an antique Thonet table; a carved marble panel set into the coffered ceiling shields a light source above. Opposite: The living room features low-to-the-ground furnishings, like a 1960s Finn Juhl daybed full of pillows.



Dream Weaver

Premier carpet purveyor Stephanie Odegard's highly personal *New York City* apartment is filled with handmade delights from all over the world.

Metropolitan Home

Stephanie Odegard crisscrosses the globe for her prestige carpet and home-furnishings business. Over the past

two decades of socially conscious entrepreneurship, she's created gainful employment for more than 10,000 artisans in Nepal and India and won acclaim for both her carpet designs and her efforts to end child labor in the rug industry. But it was only recently, as she neared 60, that she finally bought herself a proper sofa.

"I'd had a beat-up Chesterfield, futons, platforms. This is my first serious sofa," she says. It's a custom seven-footer designed by Ben Baldwin for Larsen Furniture around 1970, and it anchors the living room of her serenely exotic 1,300-square-foot one-bedroom-plus-den flat in a converted SoHo office building. The classic leather sofa and other pedigreed pieces, including Hans Wegner dining chairs and Swedish Biedermeier armchairs, set off an eclectic bazaar of antique and contemporary textiles and handcrafts.

Soft-spoken and unpretentious, Odegard has done well by doing good, though that was never her plan. "Recently someone said to me, 'You're still a Peace Corps volunteer,'" says the Minnesota-bred businesswoman, who spent two years in Fiji in the 1970s helping local artists market their crafts. Similar assignments in Jamaica for the United Nations and Nepal for the World Bank followed, leading to the establishment of her own rug company in 1987. Quick to credit her success to the craftspeople who make her products, she never wanted to be center stage. "I'm a vehicle for it all," she says.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANTOINE BOOTZ
Subtle color on the walls (all from Martha Stewart's Fine Paints of Europe collection) show off Odegard's diverse furnishings, from an antique Spanish chandelier to a jet-age Saarinen table. The relief-carved marble Lotus table and latticework side table are both from the Stephanie Odegard Collection. The ceiling panel is a 17th-century Brazilian textile; the vertical drapery "falls" are unfurled saris.

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What the Pros Know

Odegard's carpets, with their rich colors and textures, are like pieces of art around which to build a room. She has likened solid-color carpets, often favored by architects and designers, to "background music," because they harmonize so easily with furnishings and art. On the other hand, says architect Stephen Alastair Wanta, who has designed all of Odegard's homes and showrooms, "the asymmetrical designs of modern rugs can help you out" by becoming "a real decorative element or point of interest" when placed strategically. Carpets are "place-making devices," as Wanta puts it, particularly in a loft space with wide-open expanses and low-slung furniture. "You can use a rug to define a special zone or oasis—an 'island' in the floor—where the furniture on it becomes a set piece within the larger environment." Furniture can be on the rug off the rug, or somewhere in between; there are no rules, Wanta says.



Hand-dyed and -knotted carpets made in the centuries-old Tibetan tradition are the backbone of Odegard's \$15-million-

a-year operation. Her genius was in introducing fresh, contemporary designs, created by simplifying busy traditional motifs found on sources as varied as antique cut velvet, Indian saris and Japanese kimonos. She has also developed a modern palette of rich, saturated vegetable dyes and increased the knots per square inch to further soften her carpets, which are made of lamolin-rich wool from long-haired Himalayan sheep. The technique also helps the rugs appeal to an affluent, Western market.

Odegard's living room is grounded by a spectacular 22-foot-long silk-and-wool *Arade* rug that evokes "saffron and rhubarb—it's gold with a lot of pink in it." With a minimalist border motif borrowed from a Byzantine-era painting, it is one of six designs from her Byzantine collection, produced in conjunction with the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"I'm very much a surface designer, not a 3-D designer," says Odegard, who has no formal design training. Several years ago, she teamed up with French design force Paul Mathieu. "I took him to India," she says, "and he really related to the craft workers and had a good feel for what they were doing." The results of their fruitful collaboration include hand-carved marble tables in cutwork filigree, a line of marble cloche pendant lights, cabriole-leg tables encased in gleaming hand-hammered brass, and carved teak cabinets covered in silver.

Above: A persimmon oval rug warms up the master bedroom, where lined Cambodian-silk drapes admit golden light that enhances the hammered-brass table. Opposite: A white marble stand used as a bedside table adds an element of neoclassical flair. The carved wood piece above the lacquered bed is architectural salvage from Brazil; the X-legged bench is a 1940's French piece.



The understated tone-on-tone designs of Odegard's carpets have been compared to Mark Rothko's color-block paintings,

with their subtle striations that create shimmer, complexity and depth. The abstract florals and geometric patterns are sometimes bold, sometimes nearly hidden, as in the deep-red carpet that covers the floor in a music room off the living room.

The walls throughout the apartment, which was designed with the help of architect Stephen Alastair Wanta, are suffused with pale color from Martha Stewart. Lavender and pink are "friendly, happy colors," Odegard believes. The music room is a more assertive periwinkle blue (Digitalis Mauve #43), and the bedroom is the faintest yellow (Salmon Favorelle #19), with a textured treatment akin to Venetian plaster. The beauty of these subtle hues, says Odegard, is that "they go with everything and change with the light."

Odegard's use of jewel-toned silks for pillows and window coverings has a human backstory: "In India, stores collect hand-woven silk from villages and sell it in what they call *bhaat* emporiums. Mahatma Gandhi believed that as long as people would hand-weave and hand-spin, they would be employed, so there would be less violence. I very much agree, and I try to support these emporiums."

For all Odegard's collecting, she shows admirable restraint. "I don't go looking for things to fit my space," she says. "I buy things whose craftsmanship and materials I'm drawn to, but only what I need. I try not to buy anything extra." ♦

See *Resources*, last page.

This page (from top): A carved teak Louise cabinet, overlaid in silver, was designed by Paul Mathieu for the Odegard Collection; his small but weighty *Jahangir* marble table recalls temple architecture (both pieces were hand-carved in Udaipur, India). Opposite: The music room holds a 19th-century Spanish desk, an *Halo Meteor* rug (in Raisin) and hand-crafted objects from around the world.

