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CHANGED ACTOR **SONALI BENDRE'S** HOME

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ARCHITECT  
ASHESH SHAH  
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RESULTS INSIDE!



(Clockwise from the left)

## VIVID EYE

'Somoroff II' and 'Somoroff III' carpets, made using 100 per cent Himalayan vegetal dyed wool, are part of a series of six created by Stephanie Odegard and inspired by acclaimed photographer Michael Somoroff. Stephanie Odegard in front of the 'Capitull II' rug, one of her creations.

## DESIGN

# DIFFERENT STROKES

*Celebrated designer Stephanie Odegard, whose inspirations lie in the tranquil Himalayan backdrop and ethnic Tibetan textiles, consolidated her deep-rooted connection to the East with the debut of her collection at the Sarita Handa showroom in New Delhi*

WRITER DORIS CHEVRON

**T**rekking enthusiasts know it well—the intense blue sky over Kathmandu, the serene towers of cloisters standing guard and colourful prayer flags dancing in the wind. It is a magical scene that leaves a lasting impression. For Stephanie Odegard a trip to Nepal turned into a vocation. “The backdrop of the Himalayas proved to be a turning point in my life.”

Dispatched by the World Bank, the former humanities student from Minneapolis had arrived in the mountain state in 1987 to improve labour conditions. During her stay, she started to

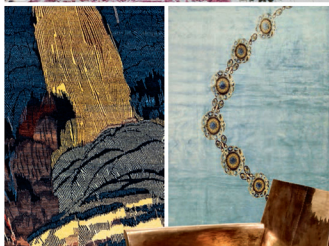
collect antique fabrics, such as the aprons of Tibetan women and traditional carpets. When she left the country a year later, Odegard was truly transformed by the impressions formed by the light and colours in the glimmering high-altitude air.

After all these years, Odegard—who now calls a 4,000-square-foot showroom in Manhattan’s Design Centre her headquarters—still raves about the intensity of the turquoise and the reddish-gold hues (which she describes as “saffron infused with a splash of rhubarb”) in the textiles she found. Soon the iconography of the patterns added to her fascination. >





PHOTOS: JOHN BIRNBY FOR PORTLAND; JOHN HALL; COURTESY STEPHANIE ODEGARD COLLECTION, NEW YORK



*(Clockwise from the top)*  
**GOLDEN AGE**

The hand-woven 'Bellegrano' rug serves as a backdrop to the Carré credenza and decorative washbasins by Viya Home for the Stephanie Odegard Collection; the ceiling fixture is 'Samarkanda' and the disk is from Venetia Studium; the 'Geometric Jali Table' and 'Jour Round Jali Table' are by Paul Mathieu for the Stephanie Odegard Collection. The 'Lobi' rug. The 'Diamond Necklace II' rug from the 'Mughal' collection. The 'Louise' chaise by Paul Mathieu for the Stephanie Odegard Collection in solid copper sheathing.

## INSTINCT DRIVEN

A few international assignments later, Odegard started to experiment with natural pigments and dyes. She devised an intricate colour chart, and without training or practical design experience, commanded her first carpet from a producer in Kathmandu. "I think that you are born with a sense for aesthetic. Nobody can attempt to learn that."

But it was not only her design instincts that prevailed. A keen sense for quality entered the game from the get-go. Odegard insisted on 100 knots per square inch instead of the then customary 50-60, a technique that rendered her carpets thinner and smoother than the other rugs exported to the United States at the time. Courageously, she reinterpreted old patterns and, contrary to other outfits, often used only two hues in her designs, one for the motif and one for the background. "I thought if I like them, it will appeal to others as well. In retrospect, I might want to call myself naive."

Finally, after mountains of textiles had started to pile up in Odegard's apartment, the owners of a few small, New York antique stores discovered analogies to the works of Eileen Gray, Sonia Delaunay and other modern designers, and by the mid 1990s, her carpets were in high demand. Today, Odegard designs are often sold before they reach the showrooms in New York, Miami, San Francisco, Zurich, or to the representatives from Brazil to Tokyo. Paul McCartney's Manhattan apartment and Robert Redford's house in Aspen displayed her creations, as did the luxurious restaurant Daniel in New York. Architect Richard Meier is a fan as are celebrity designers like Vincente Wolf and Celery Kemble. So is the Dalai Lama. Whenever His Holiness comes to the US, he kneels on an Odegard carpet.

## COURSE OF ACTION

The manually sheared and hand-combed wool originates from longhair sheep that flock the Tibetan highland at an altitude of 12,000 feet or more. Stephanie Odegard describes it as the "champagne" of the wool business. The yarn is spun, dyed and knotted by hand in the Kathmandu valley. The high lanolin content results in uneven pigmentation and creates the distressed look of subtle wear that makes her carpets livelier than most. "It is almost like a carpet has a soul and gives a room its anchor," says Odegard.

Her own apartments in Manhattan and Montauk on Long Island reflect her tastes. They are furnished with modern furniture, and textiles and furniture she has produced, often relying on traditional Indian crafts: She collaborated with French artist Paul Mathieu to work with Indian craftsmen and create furniture and lighting fixtures employing century-old techniques. (Mathieu's Udaipur home was featured in the article 'Behind Open Doors' in the March 2012 issue of *AD India*). She also partnered with Viya Home and showcases their creations made of brass, copper and stone overlaid with semi-precious materials.

Since early October this year, in the new Sarita Handa showroom on MG Road in Gurgaon, Odegard's magic has been on display—her first in India. To be closer to the country she feels deep affection for, the 65-year-old, who was instrumental in the creation of the 'Good Weave' seal to outlaw child labour in the carpet industry, is toying with the idea of a third home, in India. For her, the product is not the most important part of her legacy; it is the people that make it. ♦