

For Manhattan Designer

GLENN GISSLER

Rugs Make a Major Statement in Every Room

Manhattan-based interior designer Glenn Gissler first fell in love with a rug in high school while growing up in his native Milwaukee, WI. One day, in his neighbors' basement, the vintage hues and designs of a mildewed 1920s decorative rug caught his eye. Minutes before it was about to be taken out for trash collection, the teenage Gissler decided to bring it home and rescue it from its ignominious fate. After hours of painstakingly washing it front and back, he restored it to its former splendor and placed it in his bedroom. And *voila!* He became a life-long *aficionado* of all types of oriental and decorative rugs.

Educated in fine arts and architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design, Mr. Gissler formally established his design career working for the renowned Juan Montoya (*Oriental Rug Magazine*, Winter Issue 1995, pp. 42) and later for the acclaimed architect Rafael Viñoly before founding his firm in Manhattan in 1987. Ever since, oriental and decorative rugs have been a key component in Mr. Gissler's work. Indeed, states the designer: "The rug is one of the most important elements needed in a space to establish a 'dialogue'." Thus, he has always used at least one oriental or decorative rug in all his projects, which include the residences of notable clients fashion designers Michael Kors and Calvin Klein and comedy club star and owner Caroline Hirsch.

Right: An intricately patterned Ferreggan Sarouk creates a formal elegance which is tempered by the simple monochromatic fabrics and walls thereby highlighting the rug's beauty. Photography by John Hall. Courtesy of Glenn Gissler Design Inc.

STORY BY ALIX G. PERRACHON







What makes rugs so special for the designer? "They have mistakes which are what give them their character!" remarks Mr. Gissler with unabashed candor. "People seeking perfection should stay with machine-made rugs that are predictable unlike oriental rugs."

When selecting a rug, Mr. Gissler is more driven by its overall effect than by a specific genre. "Rugs have a feeling...a color," he comments. "I don't like rugs that are too dense or open in pattern. There needs to be a balance." Although not a particular fan of city-weave rugs, in one instance, he used a very intricately patterned garden compartment Tabriz because its washed out colors tempered the density of its pattern. The overall impact of a soft subtle rug worked perfectly in its sun-drenched airy living room.

Generally speaking, however, Mr. Gissler finds village rugs exhibiting an "organic" quality, such as Sultanabads and Serapis, with overall patterns to be most appealing. He shies away from medallion pieces, as they tend to "dictate a formal layout in the room." On occasion, he has used tribal pieces, such as Bakshaishes, and pre-WWI Chinese rugs, such as Ninxias, which he likes for their indigenous authenticity. In particular, he comments, "I love rugs that have a certain age which gives them their unique character." Most fascinating to him is how antique rugs can take on a whole new more "modern" feeling when placed in a setting where they have some "air" around them. Most interesting is how they can soften the edge of an otherwise starkly modern interior. In a more contemporary vein, Mr. Gissler loves the genuine "honesty" in the weave and subtlety of new Tibetan rugs, which work well in both traditional and contemporary settings.

For Mr. Gissler, "rugs should be the major statement in the room and there should be harmony between the room and the art." Thus, they need



Left: The designer has artfully connected a contemporary Tibetan runner with an antique Sultanabad thereby demonstrating how different genres can harmoniously coexist. Photography by Grass & Daley. Courtesy of Glenn Gissler Design Inc. Right, top: This lovely Sultanabad with its soft corals and hints of blues creates a warm and inviting ambience in this New York apartment. Photography by Grass & Daley. Courtesy of Glenn Gissler Design Inc. Right, bottom: A bold Serapi rug works beautifully in this room featuring an early 20th century Austrian table, and Filipino chairs. Photography by Fernando Bengochea. Courtesy of Glenn Gissler Design Inc.



Above: The deep earth tone accents in this overall-patterned Sultanabad are echoed in the dark wood of the mahogany bed. Photography by Andrew Bordwin. Courtesy of Glenn Gissler Design Inc.
 Right: This bold geometrically patterned Bakhaish rug ushers the visitor into the living room featuring a Sultanabad rug. Photography by Andrew Bordwin. Courtesy of Glenn Gissler Design Inc.

to come first in the decorative process—always. “I like to start with the rug because I like to use simple fabrics that make sense with it in terms of harmony,” says the designers whose stylistically diverse work has awarded him inclusion in *House Beautiful’s* Directory of Top Designers for three years in a row. When working with rugs, he likes to stay with simple wallpaper-free walls and fabrics with a plain weave, textural patterns, or subtle stripes in order to further enhance the rug’s importance in the room.

In Mr. Gissler’s work, a single room-sized rug always takes command of the space as opposed to several smaller pieces. “It makes the room feel more spacious and more unified,” he remarks. Thus, he tends to use very large rugs that are about a foot away from the wall. Moreover, he enjoys placing several rugs throughout the house except for in kitchens and bedroom suites where clients often prefer wall-to-wall carpeting. When connecting a rug from one room to the next, he freely mixes genres while using the color as the connect-

ing thread. On one occasion, he used Chinese, Tibetan, and Persian rugs all in one house thanks to his ingenious interplay of light and dark colors. “In some areas,” he comments, “colors need to be bolder whereas in others, they need to be more subdued.” As for flooring, Mr. Gissler voices a strong preference for dark wood floors whose richness enhances the rug’s beauty. In other instances, he has placed pieces over wall-to-wall and sisal carpeting. For example, he placed the soft garden compartment Tabriz over sisal which enhances its subtle richness.

For Mr. Gissler, oriental and decorative rugs will never go out of style. “How could they?” he queries. “They’re part of our global culture and our history as human beings on this planet.” They have a place in all interiors ranging from the grandest and most ornate to the smallest and most minimalist. Their production techniques, colors, designs, and overall character are just among their many compelling ingredients that guarantee their continued role in interior design.





ABOUT THE DESIGNER

A native of Milwaukee, WI, Glenn Gissler began his art studies at the age of 11. After graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design with bachelor degrees in fine arts and architecture in 1984, he formally launched his career in New York City at the offices of interior designer Juan Montoya before working for architect Rafael Viñoly. In 1987, he established Glenn Gissler Design, Inc. and has completed an impressive number of prestigious projects primarily in the tri-state area.

Stylistically diverse, his work brings a multi-dimensional outlook to interior design. Thanks to his architectural background, he has a far-reaching interest in 20th century art and culture. Through his work as an interior designer, he joins architectural concepts with thoughtful applications of lighting, fabric, and furnishings.

Mr. Gissler's work has been widely published in a variety of prestigious magazines including *Town & Country*, *New York Magazine*, *House & Garden*, and *Interior Design*. His projects have also been featured in *Bedrooms* by Chris Madden, *Homestyling* by Mike Strohl, and *The Franklin Report*. His interiors have also appeared on television on the *NBC Today Show*, CNN's *Style with Elsa Klensch*, and HGTV. In 2003, he was awarded first place in the ASID New York Metro Chapter's Interior Design Project. He has been featured in *House Beautiful's* Top Designer Directory for three consecutive years and in "The City's 100 Best Architects & Decorators" in *New York Magazine*.



Above: The deep hues in a heavily patterned Sultanabad are the major focus of this living room exhibiting an impressive array of antiques including a French Louis XIII (17th century) barley twist armchair with its original needlepoint tapestry. Photography by Andrew Baldwin. Courtesy of Glenn Gissler Design Inc.