

Ask *the* Experts



Pride of Persia Rug Co.

Persian Rugs

What materials are used in rugs?

Let's talk about hand-woven pile rugs. The vast majority of these have a cotton foundation and wool pile. Other rugs may be wool-on-wool or silk-on-silk or even cotton-on-cotton. Beware of the all-cotton rugs, which may be shiny like silk; these are really mercerized cotton or "art" (artificial) silk. Some pile rugs feature a combination of wool with silk highlights, metallic threads, or synthetic materials. On occasion, we will see rugs with goat hair foundation.

How can I tell the difference between a kilim and a soumak?

Both of these are flat-woven rugs, meaning they have no pile. The easiest way to distinguish between them is to turn them over. A kilim is a reversible flatweave; it looks the same on both sides. A soumak has a definite front and back. It is not reversible because the ends of wool strands are left exposed on the back. This can give the rug a slightly padded effect. On the face of the rug, a soumak may have a raised stitching resembling needlepoint, while a kilim has a much simpler and flatter look.

For more than a decade, Mehdi Abedi and Lisa Slappey have taught "The World of Persian Rugs" through Rice University's Glasscock School of Continuing Studies. They are the owners of Pride of Persia Rug Co., which specializes in older Persian rugs along with high-quality newer rugs from around the world.

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