

cover

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SAN FRANCISCO DECORATOR SHOWCASE



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THE HANDMADE TALE

NOW EXPANDING ITS ARTISANAL FOOTPRINT WITH A THIRD COLLECTION OF RUGS, ZAK+FOX REMAINS TRUE TO THE CRAFT AESTHETIC THAT FIRST INSPIRED ITS FOUNDER. KEITH FLANAGAN FINDS OUT MORE ABOUT THE BRAND'S LATEST CREATIONS AND ITS DESIGN PRINCIPLES

For Zak Profera, founder of Manhattan's Zak+Fox, entering the rug industry wasn't a huge leap. 'It's a little full circle,' says Profera. Known for artisan fabrics and wallpapers that are rich with references and storytelling, the textile studio has been writing a new chapter with its rugs—but they are also part of Profera's own origin story.

Before Profera left a corporate music career fifteen years ago, a friend who owned a rug company asked him to design a few pieces for fun. The process sparked a love affair with the handmade, encouraging Profera to open a textile studio in 2012. After his friend suggested rugs would be too expensive for a beginner, Zak leaned into fabrics and wallpapers as a sensible (and more economical) place to start.

It wasn't until last year that Zak+Fox launched its first rugs, but they were always an inevitable extension of the portfolio. 'We're really known for our textures and patterns and interesting constructions and fabric, and so this is a new medium to explore,' says Profera, who has just

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launched his third rug collection. 'But I think everything is intertwined.'

The connection is hard to miss in constructions like *Hjalmar* (named after Thor's hammer), a New Zealand wool flatweave that draws on Profera's fascination with Swedish rugs. Blocky motifs (like an abstract hammer that reads botanical, almost like a tree) achieve the clarity you might see on wallpaper. 'The quality is exceptional,' says Profera of the craftsmanship, noting how the wool remains impossibly soft with precise shapes. 'I mean, this is one of the greatest examples of weaving I've seen.'

Heritage quality works with Profera's story-driven approach, bringing life to far-reaching references. In the past, anything from Nordic folklore to Japanese stencils for antique kimonos have inspired his textiles. And, for his rugs, Profera credits much of the product's expressive quality to a lengthy research phase.

'When you're in this industry, you're kind of dating these mills and these makers,' says Profera, who worried whether he'd be 'ghosted' by the many mills and makers he courted over three years. Now, with about a dozen partners in India and Nepal who deliver the high level of craftsmanship he craved, his growing series—which currently stands at sixty-eight rugs—delves deep into subtleties. They're just as much about pattern as colour, texture and expression.

Take *Juego*, a lively blend of mohair, Merino and Tibetan wool, which reimagines the chequerboard. The normally structured pattern is rendered in shaggy square sections that shift with natural colours,

bringing movement to the grid. 'The beauty of what we do is that everything's custom and made to order,' adds Zak, noting how the templates themselves aren't fixed. 'So we can alter colour, shapes, sizing.'

It's a welcome option for room-defining rugs like *Mitad*, a striped design blending Merino wool and linen, split down the middle with two different colours to create a dynamic feel that extends beyond

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01 The Zak+Fox showroom

02 *Kadam* rug, Zak+Fox

03 *Hjalmar* rug, Zak+Fox

04 The Zak+Fox showroom

HERITAGE QUALITY WORKS WITH PROFERA'S STORY-DRIVEN APPROACH

the rug itself. 'This becomes part of the architecture,' says Profera, noting how the design influences how you decorate a space. 'If you're splitting the room down the middle with one colour, what does that mean for how you exist in the room, how you lay everything else out?'

The same goes for designs like *Kadam*, another take on chequerboard but with raised geometric shapes worked into the pattern. The Tibetan wool rug merges flatwoven pieces with plush piles, and the result is evocative and eye-catching. 'If you look into a room, it draws you down in a way,' says Profera.

Adding dimension to his work, rugs will play a larger role in Zak+Fox's portfolio at its new trade-only, 6,000-square-foot showroom. It opened last year with oak displays and velvet-lined drawers that recall Paris's Deyrolle (a true cabinet of curiosities), and there are already plans to extend a south-facing wallpaper gallery into another room to accommodate upcoming collections.

'We've got so much of a pipeline—it's now like an editing puzzle for the next two collections,' says Profera. And after launching his third rug collection in just over a year, Zak+Fox is just getting started. www.zakandfox.com