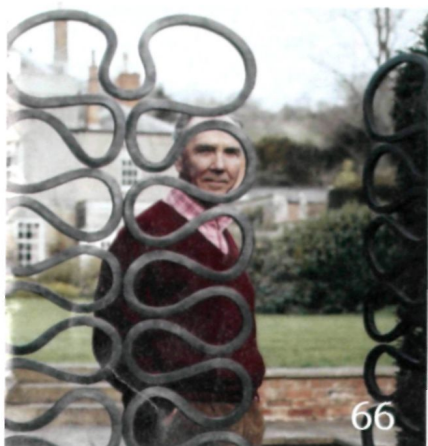


FINANCIAL TIMES

superior interiors

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Cover photograph of Studio Job's porcelain Biscuit plates for Royal Tichelaar Makkum, from about 142; for stockists see page 12.



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Below: 1940s Ghanaian strip-woven Ewe cloth. Similar pieces £200-£5,000 at Esther Fitzgerald. **Near right:** an Indonesian lawon displayed at New York International Tribal & Textile Arts Show, about £6,300.

Below: late-19th century Azerbaijani Mughan Jajim, £1,250, at Christopher Legge. **Bottom:** mid-20th century Baminiki resist-dyed cloth, £5,000, at Esther Fitzgerald.

A revival of interest in tribal textiles – from antique woven rugs and Andean ponchos to has highlighted how hard it is to find authentic pieces. Katrina Burroughs tracks down those in the know.

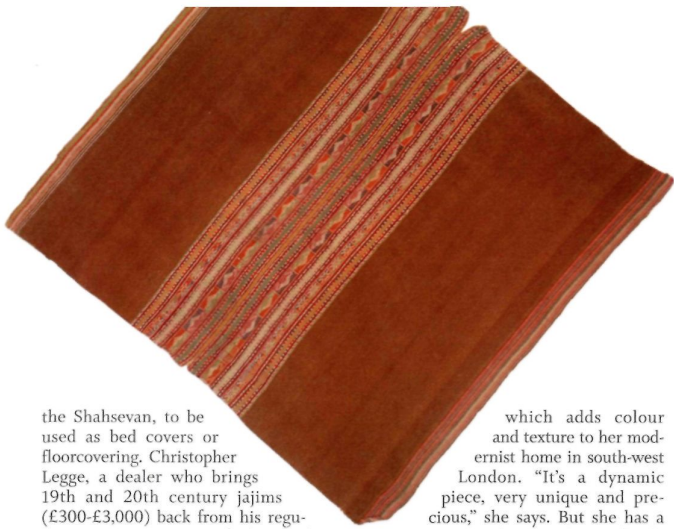
WEAVE GOT THE LOVE

Above: early-1920s Pelo Cortado made by the Santiagueño community in Argentina, £1,800, from Otumpa.

In times gone by, buyers of non-European decorative textiles might have been diverted to learn that their hand-knotted wall-filler was Moroccan, or that a woven bedcover was made in South America, but very few inquired further into provenance or technique. Nowadays, say a rug revolution, with collectors and decorators demanding treasures with pinpoint precision, focusing on the wares of tribes in the mountains and plains of Morocco. In the mountains and plains of Morocco, the tribal art of weaving began with the country's early Berber settlers. Designs vary from region to region, from simple brown patterned, vividly coloured pieces. Most in demand are the fresh-looking graphics of the Beni Ouarain, a confederation of tribes living in the north-east Middle Atlas region, whose undyed woollen rugs are made using traditional hand-knotting and flatweave techniques. The textiles are soft and flexible, loosely constructed so that their nomadic owners could easily roll them up for travel. The interior designer Douglas Mackie has been buying 20th century Beni Ouarain textiles for the past four years, for clients and his own homes in London and Nimes. He says that part of the attraction for him is that this type of tribal rug inspired pioneering modern

architects and designers: "Le Corbusier used them in France and Frank Lloyd Wright used them in his interiors; they were very popular with the great American decorators in the 1930s and 1940s." Now Mackie has seen a revival in interest among his highly influential London clients, who include a hedge fund manager, a couple of MDs at Goldman Sachs and a partner at 3i. So what does Mackie think is tempting the extraordinary modernity to them, he says.

Near left: late-1900s Bateon-style cloth by Santiagueño community, Argentina, £800, from Otumpa. **Above right:** this Indonesian Pelangi fetched £12,000 at Sotheby's in May.



the Shahsevan, to be used as bed covers or floorcovering. Christopher Legge, a dealer who brings 19th and 20th century jajims (£300-£3,000) back from his regular trips to Iran, says: "I find examples with the most extraordinarily fine weave. Apparently, in some areas, the ladies who spun the wool would burn a hole in their thumbnail with a needle. The wool had to be fine enough to pass through the hole or it wasn't good enough."

If your passion is gutsy, earthy colour – a palette of browns, ochres and turbo-charged shades of red – then the textiles of the Andes will be to your taste. These are the preferred decoration of designers whose clients prefer "white box" living with a few statement ornaments: the jeans-plus-jewels school of design. They especially suit the austere lines of original Modernist architecture. Nicole Szabason, a food stylist, owns an early-20th century rug made by the Quichua Santagueno

which adds colour and texture to her modernist home in south-west London. "It's a dynamic piece, very unique and precious," she says. But she has a warning: "These textiles are fragile and you've got to be really careful with them. My house is a Span house by Eric Lyons, and it's largely open-plan. I've got two glass walls downstairs, so I've hung the rug in the stairwell, where there is less natural light [in order to protect it]."

Antique Andean bedspreads, blankets, ponchos, wraps and rugs are all increasingly difficult to come by. The only UK specialist dealer, Otumpa, based in London, offers fewer than 50 original 19th and early-20th century pieces once or twice a year. (As part of its ethical business model Otumpa supports a foundation devoted to reviving the skills of Andean weavers and craftspeople, and also to creating a market

Above: antique handwoven alpaca wool Aguayo from Bolivia, £330, from Otumpa.

Early-20th century Aguayos, made from alpaca wool by the Aymara community in western Bolivia, cost from £300.

for their products.) Despite their scarcity, textiles can be remarkably inexpensive – early-20th century Aguayos, made from alpaca wool by the Aymara community in the Altiplano area of western Bolivia, cost from £300. Aguayos are all-purpose woven wraps, made to hold anything from a baby to a shaman's paraphernalia, often adorned with motifs that tell the story of their original owners. If made to mark a marriage, they can be divided into two decorative fields, narrating the bride and groom's attributes.

More spectacular are the sheep's wool rugs woven on traditional narrow wooden looms by the Quichua Santiagueno people of the province of Santiago del Estero in Argentina. These are more vividly coloured and heavier than the aguayos, originally doubling as draft-excluding for doors as well as carpets or bed covers. A mid-20th century example, two panels sewn together with stylised floral motifs in the area's characteristic *pelo cortado* (cut pile) technique, might be had for £1,000 to £2,000 and upwards.

There is a presence, a sense of ceremony, to all these simple pieces. Many may be pretty but they are not frivolous; they have substance. Clive Loveless, a specialist dealer of several decades' experience, buys early tribal artefacts and textiles, which he calls "primal art",

for serious collectors and international museums. He explains the power of his favourite pieces thus: "The works are both very refreshing and very pure. They mark periods in a life: birth, initiation ceremonies and death. They have a strong cultural meaning for the people who made them, and that commands respect." ♦

GO WIFT, YOUNG MAN

Christopher & Angela Legge, 25 Oakethorpe Road, Summertown, Oxford OX2 7BD (01865-557 572; www.leggeorientalcarpets.com); Turkoman, Kurdish and South Persian weavings. **Clive Loveless**, by appointment only (020-8969 5831); primal art and textiles. **Esther Fitzgerald Rare Textiles**, 28 Church Row, London NW3 (020-7431 3076; www.estherfitzgerald.co.uk); textiles of merit from the past two centuries. **Maroc Tribal** (01223-364 045; www.maroctribal.com); Moroccan tribal textiles. **Otumpa**, 97 Old Brompton Road, London SW7 (020-7581 4321; www.otumpa.com); textiles from the Andes. **Decorative Antiques and Textiles Fair**, from January 22 to 27 2008, The Marquee, Battersea Park, London SW11 (www.decorativefair.com). **The London Antique Textiles, Vintage Costumes & Tribal Art Fair**, November 4, Olympia Hilton Hotel, 380 Kensington High Street, London W14 (020-8543 5075; www.pa-antiques.co.uk). **New York International Tribal and Textile Arts Show**, from March 15 to 18 2008, The Gramercy Armory, 68 Lexington Avenue at 26th Street, New York City (www.caskeylees.com).