



**S.A. "Sam" Jernigan
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S.A. "Sam" Jernigan: Area rugs 101



This 15th century rug from Spain is fabricated of wool and linen. Natural fibers will always outperform synthetics in terms of longevity and can be considered investment quality purchases for your home, typically lasting a lifetime -- and beyond.

With the growing prevalence of wood and other solid surface floors, area rugs are the solution for defining key areas in a room and adding softness underfoot — as well as injecting a sizable dose of color and pattern.

Rugs also provide a bit of sound absorption.

That's a key element people typically don't think about when making their flooring selection — only discovering after installation that their home may have suddenly become "echo-y" (especially if there are no fabric window treatments either).

With the myriad of choices available, here are some purchasing do's and don'ts:

— Pricing will be governed by the material used, first and foremost. Synthetics are the bargain selection, while wool and silk are the premium choices.

Machine-loomed nylon rugs will be a fraction of the cost of their pricier cousins that are fabricated of luxurious natural fibers — especially if hand-woven or knotted.

In addition to their high-end appearance, these rugs typically last well beyond a lifetime and wool's natural lanolin coating also causes it to magically "shed" an astonishing array of stains.

So, investing in a higher quality area rug rewards its owner significantly over time.

— **Size.** Yes, indeed, size matters here, too. Our eye is always searching for color contrast, so the visual demarcation of an area rug will impact our perception of the scale of a seating arrangement or key piece of furniture accordingly.

A 4' x 6' rug placed under, say, just the coffee table in front of a sofa/chair grouping will visually shrink that area's perceived spatial weight. On the other hand, a more generously sized 9' x 12' rug will fully anchor that same space.

Minimally, think of having at least the rug's edges tucked under the legs of major furnishings. This not only improves the visual, but leads us to this next key consideration.

— **Traffic.** Before purchasing, do consider traffic patterns and ensure that an awkward, unsecured corner of your rug doesn't become a hazard to people and playful dogs. Also do plan on purchasing a non-slip pad for all area rugs. A non-slip pad has the dual benefit of helping your rugs last longer, as use of a pad diminishes stress on the rugs's backing. Pads are especially critical for runners.

— **Color.** You can throw virtually any amount of color/pattern onto an area rug. Not only is this an ideal jumping off point for establishing a room's style direction, but even a dramatic rug quiets down considerably by virtue of it being placed underfoot versus an element viewed at eye level.

So often we find this in design: e.g. it's not only the item or architectural element itself, but where it's situated in a room that causes it to have either a starring or supporting role.

There's a fascinating reverse optical illusion in that a light color used underfoot actually takes up more visual space than a mid-tone or darker hue. Therefore, you will not make a space look larger by using a light colored area rug (and ditto the use of light color in any flooring material). Also do keep in mind the practicality of camouflage provided by darker colors/patterned rugs.

— **Create Your Own.** Another option is to create your own area rug. Off-cuts of broadloom carpet can be cut precisely to your desired size. These should be bound for a finished look and can also be further customized by the addition of a border from a companion selection of carpet (plus inset designs are another possibility). One terrific option is a richly patterned commercial grade carpet.

— **Online.** Trust me on this one, our digital devices do not tend to be reliable when it comes to color accuracy. Returning a large area rug purchased online because the colors were altogether different than expected can be costly, potentially running you over \$50 in freight cost (each direction, depending on the retailer's policies).

It's truly better to eyeball area rugs in person.

And, it's fairly common for stores to permit exchanges, so you can take it home and ensure it's the right

color, size and fit for your space.

Overall, an area rug can add warmth and distinctive style to nearly any room in your home.

Some of my favorites are today's fashionable indoor/outdoor rugs and runners, which are created from synthetic fibers that mimic raffia, jute, or wool and which are rugged indeed.

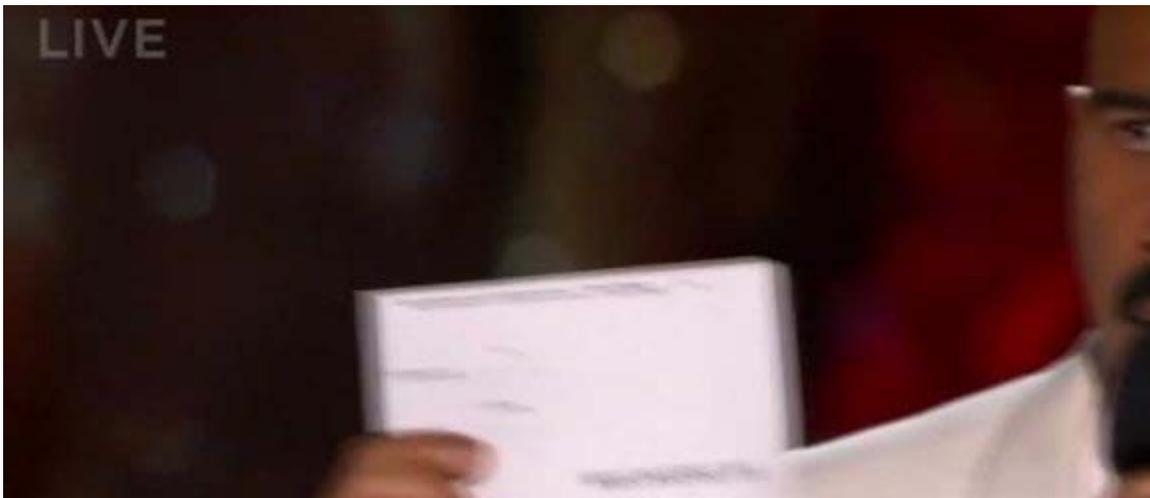
Adorned with an array of imaginative patterns, how about a French poem underfoot?

These are especially ideal for high-traffic areas: After all, who says functionality has to be boring?

(Ms.) S.A. "Sam" Jernigan, Interior Designer, IFDA, of Renaissance Design Consultations in Grass Valley (www.RdesignConsultations.com) has over 20 years experience providing design consultation/space planning on an hourly basis. She has also been quoted as a design expert in articles for AOL, FoxNews.com, BobVila.com, the National Home Furnishings Assoc., et al. Visit her website to learn more or phone 530.362.1339.

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