

cleaning & maintenance

More fibers, more imports equal greater challenges

By Christine Kiernan

When it comes to cleaning area rugs, the challenges are wide and varied — becoming especially tough in the last 20 years with the advent of new synthetic and natural fibers, differing constructions and ever-changing dyeing processes. With the shifting face of rug construction it has become more difficult to become a true expert in rug cleaning, experts say. “The challenges in the cleaning business are far greater than the challenges our fathers faced 30 years ago,” said Sy Mahfuz, owner of Persian Rug Galleries and co-principal, Mera Consulting Group. “Then, we had blue, ivory and red rugs. Now we worry about different fibers, textures and washes.”

In addition to rug composition, area of origin has become another hurdle in the maintenance end of the business. “Rugs were coming mainly from Iran — areas that we were familiar with for hundreds of years,” continued Mahfuz. “So we knew how to clean the rugs from this area. We knew what had to be hand washed, what could be more aggressively cleaned, what could be put in the tub and completely soaked. You learn this from generations in this business.”

The following are some tips on the dos and don'ts of area rug cleaning:

Do follow the five basic steps to clean a rug: (Beat the rug to remove loose dirt; spot clean by treating all stains with the proper solvents; wash



Sy Mahfuz

with water and low-residue detergents; rinse; and dry properly.)

Don't clean rugs in customers' homes. “Unlike wall-to-wall carpeting, which cannot be removed from the home, it's much more effective to clean the rug at a store or shop,” Mahfuz said. “You cannot thoroughly rinse a rug when it's in someone's home.”

Do be sure to get all dust and dirt out of a rug before putting it through the cleaning process. “If you have a heavy pile carpet, you should turn it face down on top of grating and vacuum or beat it from the back,” said Steve Boodakian, president, Koko Boodakian and Sons and co-principal, Mera Consulting Group. “Getting the dirt out of it is so important because if it stays in the rug it will wear faster and if there is dirt and grit in the carpet when it goes through the washing process, it will turn to mud.”

Do a proper inspection of the rug before accepting it from a customer. Retailers should be cautious enough to mark down any issues or problems with the rug prior to the



Steve Boodakian

customer leaving the store.

Do test a rug if there is any question as to its colorfastness. “Take a white towel or cloth, wet it and rub the rug from the back if you think it may have a dye that will run,” Boodakian said.

Don't be afraid to tell the customer that there are problems with her rug and that it must be released at her own risk. It's not worth the financial risk to assume that you can clean everything.

Do take advantage of an opportunity to perform restoration and repair. “If you see a problem with the rug, you can offer to fix it for the customer and increase your bottom line,” Boodakian said. “For example, if some fringe is torn, let your customer know that you can provide the services to repair it.”

Don't rely on insurance to pay for your mistakes. “There is no insurance in the world that will cover you if you destroy a rug while cleaning it,” Mahfuz said. “You are the expert, you know what you are doing and if you make a mistake, the insurance com-

pany will tell you that you shouldn't have done it in the first place.”

Do contract out cleaning to an expert if you are not one. “A retailer can either take in cleaning and sub it out to someone else [if he wants to make money on the process] or simply have someone on hand to refer customers to,” Boodakian said. “Whether you have [cleaning services] in-house, sub it out or refer it is a decision you need to make depending on the amount of exposure you want.”

Do be aware of what Boodakian calls “booby traps.” That is, rugs that mix different types of fibers that cannot necessarily be cleaned in the same way. “You never know that these rugs will be a problem — until you are in the middle of cleaning them,” he said.

Don't clean area rugs if you are not an expert of the trade. “You can't afford to make a mistake on every new rug, pay the customer for the rug and continue to stay in business,” Mahfuz said.

Do research with the Better Business Bureau and the Oriental Rug Retailers of America to find rug cleaners for your customers. People who have been wronged by area rug cleaners are likely to report to the BBB and the ORRA will know which of its members live up to the high standards of the association. **FCW**