



Culture Club Italian firm Nodus are pushing the boundaries of rug design through commissioning work from the world's leading designers. **Ros Weaver** reports

There's a new name in the rug world, and it's one to watch. Nodus is the arm of Il Piccolo, Italian master interior furnishers and fitters who acquired a reputation for sleek design and exquisite detailing through their commissions to furnishing Gianni Versace's private residences and shops. Since Versace's death in 1997 Il Piccolo have carried on creating bespoke furniture and fabrics for the fashion elite but there was one thing missing to complete the look.

This venture launched last year with a much lauded collection of sixty rugs by Italian designers. The success of these brave designs gave director Andrea Galimberti the confidence to go international, with a collection that aims to show a positive side of globalisation, mixing and matching textile techniques from Nepal, Pakistan, India, Turkmenistan, China and Turkey in the same way that musicians mix the sounds of different cultures.

"We've approached the creation of rugs in the same way as we produce furniture," says Galimberti, "it's not commercial. A rug that takes five people six months to knot is not commercial. The key is experimentation." He is obviously enthusiastic about venturing beyond the skills of his homeland. His sourcing is eclectic, using artisans from all over the world and he sees himself as a facilitator, helping to bring the dreams of the designers he commissions to fruition.

1 *Campari Soda*, designed by Matteo Ragni for Nodus. Silk and wool, 2m diameter but available in custom sizes



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2 *Perished Persian* (detail), designed by Studio Job for Nodus. Silk and wool. 3.50 x 2.5m but available in custom sizes

3 *Sao Paulo*, designed by Estudio Campana for Nodus. Wool. 2.89 x 3 m but available in custom sizes

“I’m not a rug dealer, so possibilities that might not occur to someone in the rug trade,” he says. “We take an idea, and then find how, and where, it can be realised.” The designers Nodus has commissioned for its second collection are certainly of a kind accustomed to thinking outside the box.

Fernando and Humberto Campana have come up with a rug concept which must have been the most innovative at this year’s Salone del Mobile. A three-centimetre-high green hemp pile forms a lawn in which rag-dolls are lying, gazing upward, like tired workers having a lunch-time rest in a park. The brother’s original aim was to collect rag dolls from all over the world, but ended by overseeing the making of the (multi-racial, male) dolls in a Brazilian village they support. The highly collectable *Circus* comes in a limited edition of ten. *Sao Paulo*, their other Nodus carpet, is more of a sculpture. Galimberti claims this is the first ever rug to be woven with a dense four-centimetre pile that has been sculpted to four different heights, symbolising the layers of society in Sao Paolo. The end result is an irregular and complex shape that looks like a group of buildings seen from above, but the shape was taken from an industrial mould used in the making of irons.

The young Dutch design partnership Studio Job’s contribution is two rugs that explore key themes from rug-producing countries. *Perished Persian* uses the forms of extinct animal skeletons to make up a reinvented traditional Persian design, woven at 256 knots per inch, drawing attention to a dying way of life. The other is a wool rug bearing a twisted ring of barbed wire in contrasting silk, representing the contradictions of luxury produced in areas of conflict and oppression.

In contrast Sofie Lachaert and Luc D’ Hanis have taken a more sensual approach. On close inspection the pretty oriental-style pattern of *Eros*, a rug woven in alternating wool and silk, is formed of kaleidoscopic erotic images. Their other rug, *Almost Red*, is in blood red banana silk, with three tiny white inserts.

With *Campari Soda*, the multi-disciplinary designer Matteo Ragni, who designs for the characteristic Italian *aperitivo* producers Campari, pays homage to Italian futurist Fortunato Depero who designed the distinctive conical bottle for the drink in 1932 as well as iconic advertisements of the era. It’s a futurist rug in garish colours reminiscent of the drink. Ragni’s other contribution to the Nodus collection is contrastingly serious. A poem by Pablo Neruda is woven into the rug like typed script on a huge sheet of aged paper. The poem is an ode to the beauty that can be found in simple everyday objects.

But Galimberti’s enthusiasm bubbles over when he shows me a corner piled with cushions that make one suddenly aware of one’s aching feet. It is Paolo Cappello’s project that, although less eye-catching, exemplifies Nodus’s ethos. Cappello has taken a simple nomadic Persian design and had it reproduced in techniques from around the world, to form a carpet with a set of cushions. The rug itself, a simple square, has the design carved into hand-knotted linen. The cushions bear the same motif, but interpreted in a variety of styles: sumak from Tehran, Pakistani single knot, crewel-work and Indian chain-stitch in wool and silk, Turkish kilim. The covers have been widely sourced, but the cushions have been finished in Italy – filled with segmented goose down around a semi-rigid ‘soul’ to stop the cushions from flopping. “It’s a marriage of old and new techniques,” says Galimberti. He likes to quote Francois-Henri Pinault: “Luxury is the meeting between a vision of the future which surprises, and a comprehension of the past which reassures.”

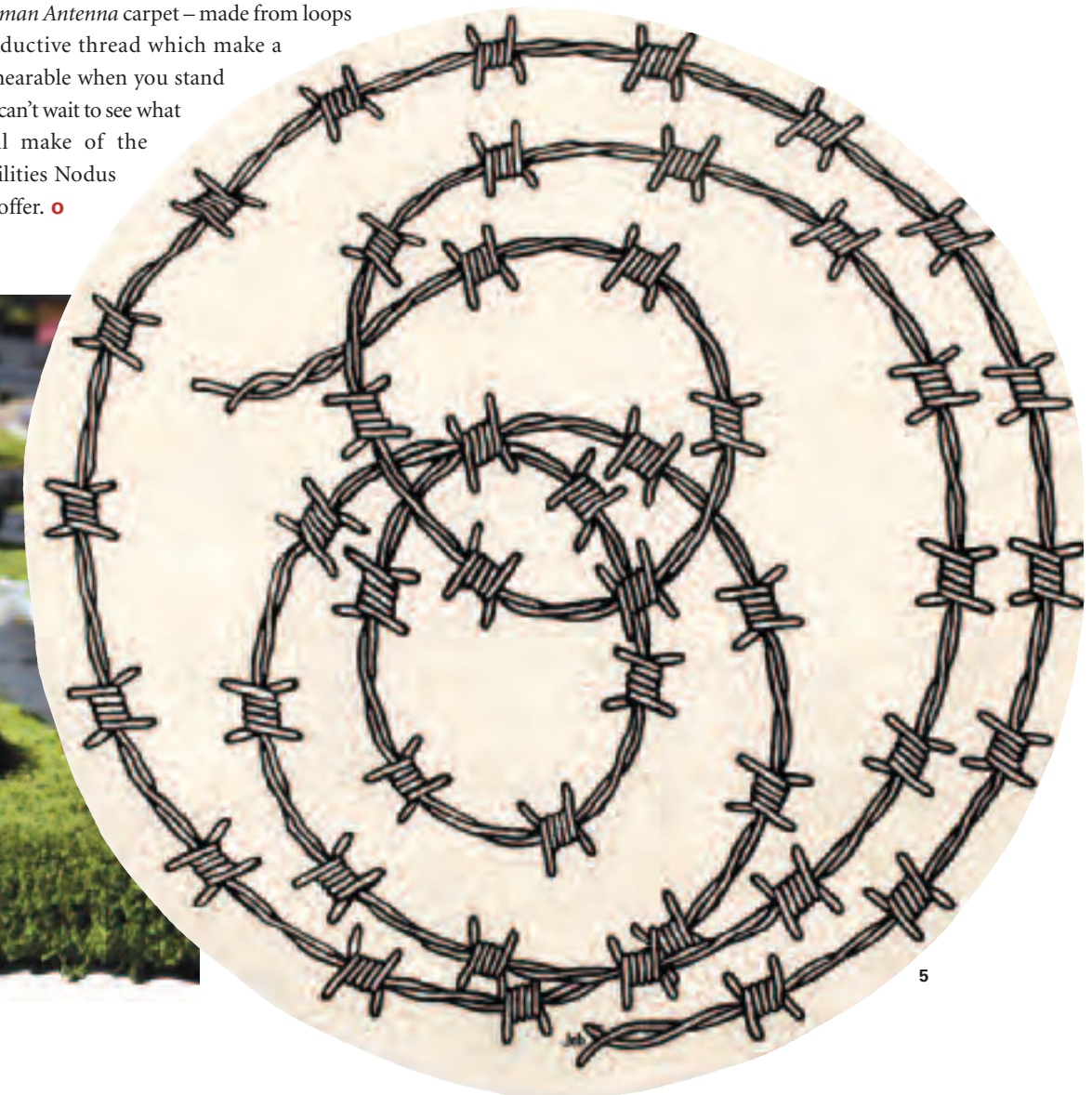
Perhaps next year Nodus will come up with a luxurious yurt in which to keep this assemblage. But all he’ll say about future collaborations is that they will be working on a collection that’s “completely natural”. When I arrived at the showroom the young Swiss designer Florian Kräutli has just finished talking to Galimberti. He’s one of the designers in line to have his dreams made reality. His last adventure with rugs produced the *Human Antenna* carpet – made from loops of conductive thread which make a radio hearable when you stand on it. I can’t wait to see what he will make of the possibilities Nodus has to offer. ◦

4 *Circus* (detail), designed by Estudio Campana for Nodus. Hemp and rag dolls, 2m diametre but available in custom sizes

5 *Barbed Wire*, designed by Studio Job for Nodus. Silk and wool, 2.2m diametre but available in custom sizes



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