

Local Oriental Rug Store Hosts Course

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Carnig Minasian, co-owner of
Minasian Rug Company, 1244
Chicago Ave., displays an
Oriental rug.



With their noses up against 200-year-old Oriental rugs, students in Carnig Minasian's Oriental rug class are on their hands and knees trying to get a grasp on the rugs' defining characteristics.

The course, part of Northwestern's School of Continuing Studies, is held at Minasian Rug Company, 1244 Chicago Ave., a family-owned store run by brothers Carnig and Armen Minasian.

As an adviser on the board of The Textile Museum in Washington and a consultant for Arzu, an Afghani weaving program, Carnig Minasian is an influential figure in the textile industry. The store houses 4,000 to 6,000 ancient rugs, making it home to one of the largest ancient rug collections in the country, Minasian said. Some of the rugs are used as examples for the class.

Offered as part of a certificate in connoisseurship of fine and decorative art, the five-week course is meant to teach the students to analyze the differences among rugs. The technique is useful for antique dealers and people in similar professions, Minasian said.

The six students this term come from various backgrounds, including social work and law. Some students said they were former customers while others said they simply are interested in the subject.

Steve Sanders, a retired Northbrook resident, said his wife wanted to purchase an Oriental rug so he decided to enroll in the class.

Students in Minasian's class are taught how to check the tightness of the weave by looking at the individual fibers. The students are encouraged to get as close to the rugs as possible to see the intricate patterns.

Differentiating the mass-manufactured rugs from the natural, hand-dyed wool rugs is a major part of the class. Color variation is one way for students to distinguish between the two. During his Thursday class, Minasian showed students an ancient, fruit-dyed rug to point out the unique color created by pomegranates.

Minasian uses maps to show the geographical origins of the rugs and to give the students a better sense of the pieces' history. He noted the intricate patterns, which reflect ancient tribal rituals, the importance of nature in some cultures and the emphasis on power through images of kings.

In the class, Minasian also highlighted the current cultural evolution in Afghanistan. During the first class, students were introduced to Arzu, a program supporting female Afghani weavers by encouraging them to earn a wage independent from their husbands while becoming better educated through mandatory literacy classes.

Through videos and discussions, students have come to appreciate the higher quality of Arzu rugs, which have more knots per square inch.

"The project is not only great, but the (weavers) make a wonderful thing," said Michael Pannos, one of the students and an Arzu customer. "(The rugs) are a really good product too."

Pannos drives in from northwest Indiana for the weekly three-hour class. Minasian takes a complicated subject and breaks down the components to make learning about Oriental rugs easy to understand for his students, Pannos said.

"He makes things very approachable," he said.

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