

# Breakfast at Minasian's

While in Chicago to lecture to the local rug society, **Raoul Tschbull** took time out to spend an absorbing morning in the suburb of Evanston, visiting the Minasian Rug Company's long running loan exhibition of southern Persian rugs.



Left: Luri (Boyer Ahmad) gabbeh, southwest Persia, late 19th century. 1.42 x 2.03m (4'8" x 6'8")

Right: Afshar mafrash side panels, south Persia, mid-19th century. 1.09 x 1.22m (3'7" x 4'0")

Below: Khamseh boteh rug (detail), southwest Persia, 19th century. 1.65 x 2.36m (5'5" x 7'9")



made by the nomads and semi-nomads from southern Iran. There were no warp-faced weavings, and few with weft substitution or weft wrapping. However, one of the stars was a sumakh horse cover belonging to Chicago collector Tom Cook. The ground is aubergine plainweave and the rows of animals and birds are very much like those on Azarbayjani and Caucasian horsecovers. Because these motifs come

In addition to being its curator, Joe Fell was a major lender. His beautiful and sophisticated Afshar pile rug was on the back wall next to another very good Afshar of similar size. He also lent a charming pile bagface with a repeat design of forms that look like outward facing animal heads, all rendered in offset knotting. It was attributed to Khamseh weavers, not necessarily in accord with my view of it.

A very nice and quite unusual red and ivory Qashqa'i packband, fifteen foot long, was lent by Sharon and Jack Fenlon, while Mike Isberian lent a stunning large pile rug with a Shekarlu border, one of four with this Turkmen-like design. Another Isberian loan was one of my favourites, a red field Luri pile khorjin face with six round medallions that look as if they were copied right off the shields used by Mongol horsemen. Otherwise, the lack of Luri pile weaving from the Khorramabad area was notable.

The Minasians are generous hosts and the rug community is lucky to have them as a resource. This exhibition was their seventh. Future shows may include Kazak rugs.

**Tribal Weavings of Southern Persia: Artifacts of a Vanishing Lifestyle**  
 Minasian Rug Co., 1244 Chicago Avenue,  
 Evanston, Illinois, USA  
 4 October 2002 – 31 March 2003



New York City is cold in February, with the west wind blasting up crosstown streets from the ice-choked Hudson, but it is nothing like Chicago, where 'The Hawk', as the hip monologist Lou Rawls once called the bitter zephyr from Lake Michigan, follows you round all four sides of a building and snow goes straight up.

Minasian's outstanding and fairly comprehensive exhibition of more than a hundred weavings from southern Iran, all from private collections and mostly from the Chicago area (HALI 125, pp.112-3), was better than anything most museums would put on. The main display area in the Evanston gallery, half an hour's cab ride east from O'Hare International Airport, is a well-lit, high-ceilinged room with yellow painted walls. Larger pieces were hung all around the perimeter, while small rugs, bags and bag-faces were displayed on a staggered row of display boards in the centre. Other pieces were hung in Minasian's main sales space. Simple labels listed size, tribal group and ownership.

If the show had a fault, it was the predominance of pile rugs which, in my opinion, take a back seat to myriad types of antique flatweaves

widely separated areas, one may surmise that they have a history that predates the 19th century tribal order in Iran. Other pieces in private collections with the same palette and structure are attributed to Qashqa'i weavers, showing just how difficult it can be to assign south Persian weavings. A pile analogue, with botehs as well as animals in horizontal rows, and atypically pale colouration, is almost impossible to attribute. Tom Cook also had several slit-tapestry Fars kilims in the show; the most flashy of them was a two-medallion piece in the main space at Minasians, while another good one has wide diagonal stripes in a broad variety of colours.

Cook was giving a gallery talk the day I was there, and he brought out an outstanding Qashqa'i flatwoven cradle, as well as a very good large red field kilim (having seen many good south Persian flatweaves here, I now think it is wrong to assume that the best of these are all in Europe). He also showed a yellow ground gabbeh with large male figures on it which was included in the south Persian exhibition at the Washington ICOC (HALI 126, p.37), as were several other pieces from this show.