

# divine design an oasis in manhattan

In 1994, the renowned Central Asian textile collector Dr Guido Goldman commissioned New York based architect and interior designer Michael Davis to create a loft gallery with a difference.

Above the mad glory of lower Fifth Avenue, there is a modern-day oasis – a place of refuge from the long and dusty trail. Cool refreshing pools of colour greet your eyes as you enter this 4,000 square foot residence/museum. The clamour of the surrounding city disappears at the flick of a switch as unseen shades silently unfurl, eclipsing the Manhattan skyline and enshrouding the visitor in the serenity and sensory pleasures of an enchanted place.

Architect Michael Davis had already designed a string of lofts in downtown Manhattan as well as a number of museum and gallery exhibitions when he first met Guido Goldman. His stylish and varied work includes such projects as a period stone house in upstate New York (*Architectural Digest*, October 2000: 'English Dreams in Westchester'), the Sony Wonder Museum of Technology on Madison Avenue, and the Oscar Blandi Salon in the Plaza Hotel. Coincidentally, he had also begun building what has grown into a formidable collection of Central Asian and Turkmen textiles and carpets. Client and architect took an instant liking to one another and soon built a working relationship and friendship. The fruits of this collaboration have included the design of several acclaimed installations of Dr Goldman's travelling exhibition, 'Ikat: Splendid Silks of Central Asia' (which among other US venues has visited the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Jewish Museum, New York; and the Denver Art Museum).

The silks in the Guido Goldman Collection have lived a long and varied life. One can imagine their long odyssey from the workshops and looms of 19th century Bukhara and Samarkand to the shoulders, walls, and dowry chests of sultans and wealthy merchants, from thence into the hands of countless traders across many borders and oceans, to the galleries of Istanbul, London, Paris and New York...now, finally, to reside, splendidly displayed and conserved on lower Fifth Avenue. Like most great collections (see HALI 27, pp.40-47; HALI 93, pp.90-94), this one grew over many years, lovingly stored yet largely unseen, before this unique environment was crafted. Responding both to Dr Goldman's sensibilities and the unique qualities of the collected material, Davis began the task of creating what he calls a "residential gallery", combining the comforts of a well-appointed city home with museum-quality



*Above:* Central Asian ikat hangings on display in the main 'gallery' space of Dr Guido Goldman's lower 5th Avenue loft; *Right:* View from the kitchen of the Goldman loft



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*Above: Architect/designer Michael Davis with ikat collector Dr Guido Goldman  
Left: The entrance hall  
Below: The hanging system*

facilities for the display and conservation of the collection.

To enter the Goldman loft is to access another world. The long, narrow entrance passage (right) features a single magnificent hanging which appears to hover unsupported before a warm, cream-coloured wall. This room leads to the main gallery (left) where exquisite ikats adorn the walls, each meticulously mounted, their jewel-coloured surfaces illuminated by crisp, clear light. The effect is made possible by a textile hanging system invented by the designer for this project (and since adopted for each of the museums in which 'Splendid Silks' has appeared). The system was developed to satisfy the collector's specific challenge to avoid both harming the pieces with pins or other fasteners and scarring the walls with each new show (typically, sixteen pieces changed twice a year). The solution was to establish fixed hanging positions, each outfitted with an aluminum hanging plate providing up to 24" of vertical adjustment. Each plate accepts an aluminum slat equal to the length of each textile. This is attached by Velcro stitched to the back lining of the piece and slides freely in its plate to allow horizontal adjustment.

The lighting system is equally versatile. Theatrical framing projectors are the primary light source, controlled by an electronic dimming system capable of a hundred individual settings. Here, the architect has captured the most elemental challenge in the display of woven art – that of illumination. With precise focusing capabilities, these fixtures can frame a piece with a tight, even field of light sculpted to the exact dimensions of each hanging. The intention, as Davis describes it, was "to use the ikats themselves as the light source in the room, in that the only ambient light is that reflected by the textiles, suffused with the glow of those lovely, natural colours".

At the collector's strict instructions, a host of other conservation measures were taken to safeguard the weavings. Double-glazed, UV-filtering mahogany windows were installed throughout, while concealed, remote-controlled blackout shades prevent daylight infiltration. Air quality is regulated through a self-correcting multiple-zone HVAC which maintains air temperature, humidity, and cleanliness within narrow curatorial standards. Even the kitchen was outfitted with sliding panels which allow the room to be sealed off from the remainder of the apartment during food preparation. A highly sophisticated security system was implemented as well, activated by magnetic contacts at all points of entry and concealed throughout the loft. In every instance such technical measures have been artfully disguised to prevent even the slightest visual impediment to the appreciation of the textiles.

To enter Guido Goldman's home is to enter a world of ikat; a world in which the collector's hospitality is perfectly interwoven with the warm and vivid colours of his collection. A long caravan has travelled the silk road across time and space to rest in other-worldly splendour above the streets of downtown Manhattan.

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