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Memories of another day

A glorious '50s revival

Fashion Sizzling summer styles **Flashback** Dreaming of the '50s **Design** Focus on Milan and Helsinki **Hotels** From Beirut to Shanghai
Celebrities Tory Burch, Raf Simons, Kristin Baker and Jürgen Dahmanns **Travel** The spectacular islands of Hawaii

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Rug rebel

By Natasha Diney



Jürgen Dahlmann's Rugstar carpets have arrived in Beirut

"I'm a maniac!" says Jürgen Dahlmann, when asked about his approach to design. You get the feeling it's an adjective he's used to describe himself before. This year he celebrates the 20th anniversary of Rugstar, a company that's turned the carpet world on its head. Bye bye beige, hello daredevil designs, quirky ad campaigns and fair-trade ethics.

Wearing a tartan tie, clashing shirt and sharply tailored suit at the opening of Samovar Gallery in Downtown Beirut last April (Samovar stocks Rugstar's collections), Dahlmann looked every inch the Berliner. Initially committed to a career in architecture, Dahlmann began collecting antique Persian rugs after a trip to Nepal.

"I was 23, and I made one of the most amazing trips. I came down from a holy site - the Muktinath Temple - to a small village where I bought a small carpet from a farmer. That was my first Tibetan carpet! Then I became a collector and a real fanatic," he says, in an excited German accent. "I had 23 in my room - I felt like a collector of butterflies. But I wanted one big carpet, and when I looked for modern carpets, they were all wrong."

Since that fateful moment, Rugstar has become part of a new generation of producers, who not only sought to make carpets "sexy" again, but to pursue social



responsibility in their production. Bagutar's designs are made in Nepal, a labor-intensive process where each carpet takes 2,000 working hours to complete, with five to five weavers working at the same time.

"During the civil war - between the Maoists and the King - the workshops were empty, so I had the chance to rent for really cheap. And opening a workshop in a dangerous area gave the young men who didn't want to fight the freedom to work."

As well as the workshop, Dalimanns opened a daycare, a school and a hospital for the 1,200 workers now employed by Bagutar. "It's like tomato soup. Great tomato soup can only exist if you buy the best tomatoes, and you have a cook who cooks carefully. And a carpet reflects the harmony in the production process. The energy of the people flows into the product - these people have to be harmonized so the product is harmonized."

Dalimanns has carried his architect mindset into Bagutar's philosophy, and his conversation is filled with talk about the constant pursuit of beauty, the emotional value of design and how to capture life's fleeting moments. Weighty words for a carpet designer, perhaps, but it's this sensitivity and balance of being "rootly now" and also "timeless"

that Dalimanns aims for - harking back to the idea of a carpet as a family heirloom. "I only want to be involved in something if something makes sense. I don't want to create things to seduce people just to spend money," he says, explaining how in today's open plan architecture, a carpet is the first way to define a living space. "Some people buy a carpet when they have a baby girl. I like this idea. When this girl isn't a baby anymore, if she moves to another city or country, she will have something that connects her to her past."

Poking fun at Persian patterns and using wild colors inspired by the "lime green and eye-popping pinks" worn by Nepali women, as well as distressed techniques and eco-friendly materials, Dalimanns has become known for the humor and energy that fill his collections. But he is not satisfied with being a transducer, and after 20 years in the business, he's still searching for the perfect melody and harmony that will make a carpet a constant source of pleasure.

"In life there are two screenings - the nomads and the city people. Cain and Abel. In carpets you can see that. Nomad carpets have a move of colors that you'll be explained. City carpets have a mastery of details and elegance in the exercise of materials," he explains. "Now my big aim is to bring these two different parts together."