As special section editor, Elise Demboski brings with her 15 years of experience in high fashion flooring with a distinctive expertise in wool.

Quick-change artistry to suit your style and your home. Create custom-colored, custom-designed wool carpets or rugs. Nothing's more fabulous than if it's "yours alone!"

By ELISE DEMBOSKI

Have you ever entered a room and immediately gravitated toward the carpet or area rug? If so, then you understand by experience how the right floor covering can transform a living space.

Today's floor is much more than a neutral backdrop for other furnishings; it is a design element that reflects one's personal taste. Our choice of flooring colors, textures, styles and patterns communicate who we are, where we're going and what values are important to our lives.

In a marketplace full of options, there are plenty of beautiful carpets and rugs from which to choose. You are certain to find a floor covering you'll love just by paging through your FABULOUS FLOORS magazine. Most of the carpets and rugs featured in the magazine are readily available through your local flooring retailer. But, what if you need a special color, size or you want a rug patterned after your favorite wallpaper?

The mere mention of the word "custom" can make one cringe. It sounds so complicated, time-consuming and expensive. Years ago, those descriptions were true, and consumers placing custom orders often experienced lengthy waits and high surcharges.

Lucky for us, times have changed! Manufacturers, especially those specializing in wool, have embraced the idea of custom ordering, making color, pattern and sizing options as limitless as one's imagination. The advance of technology has also eased the wait time and lowered the cost of creating a custom floor covering.

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Animal print rugs from Woolshire, opposite page, are available in made-to-order textures and colors. Above, customers can create a fully customized pattern, or custom color and size in established patterns like this from the Davis and Davis Classics Collection.

So, if you decide you want to color your carpet to match your bedroom walls or bind a rug in your favorite fabric, it isn't as difficult as it sounds or once was, especially when it comes to natural fiber wool.

Wool carpets and rugs lend themselves quite readily to custom processing because they are typically manufactured in smaller batches, making it easier for manufacturers to accommodate special orders.

If you're simply looking to change a color or size, all it takes is a visit to a high-end specialty retailer. Retailers who sell a lot of wool usually are well-versed in the various custom options available. Some even offer in-house binding

and can transform any carpet into a custom rug by bordering it in your choice of fabric or even leather. Just call ahead to see what services are available.

If your custom needs are more advanced, you may want to consult a designer (such as a member of the American Society of Interior Designers of which FABULOUS FLOORS magazine is an industry partner.) Designers have access to trade-only showrooms for professionals where specialty products are the norm. Once custom options are selected, the designer acts as the go-between working on your behalf to ensure the rug or carpet is manufactured according to your exact specifications.

Top, Giotto Check from Glen Eden's Michael Graves collection is one of many patterns customizable from a full palette of options. Far right, Biaggio, a Wools of New Zealand carpet by Helios brings the outdoors in with a textured vine pattern. Below, from Axminster Carpets Ltd. Cornfield Collection comes this sophisticated vine relief pattern offered in six rich broadloom colorways shown here in Rye and made with British wool yarn.

Honey from Capel's Panama Orchids Collection

To ensure a custom color is correct, a sample called a yarn palm is produced for approval. If the custom order is large or detailed, or if the pattern is completely custom, a manufacturer will make a sample piece, called a strike-off, for your approval, before producing the entire piece.

As you delve into the world of custom flooring, you'll be amazed at all the options available. Many wool manufacturers can frame your wall-to-wall broadloom in a coordinating border or mix-and-match your favorite carpet styles to create a custom rug. Some mills, such as Rodeo, Carter Carpets, Glen Eden, and Davis and Davis, specialize in custom floor coverings, making it incredibly easy to create a one-of-a-kind work of art for your floor. These manufacturers often supply showrooms with drawings, also referred to as renderings, of the many patterns available along with a comprehensive color palette. You can apply the colors to the rug or carpet as you would a paint-by-number to create a masterpiece all your own. You can also do the same with texture, choosing from cut-pile, loop-pile, tip-shear, shag or a combination of constructions.

In order to maintain the look of your custom floor covering, it is important to choose the right fiber. Wool, nylon and polypropylene are the most common fiber types.

The extra price you pay for custom features is dependent, of course, on the extent of work done and type of construction. Altering the width, length and/or color of a machine-made rug is relatively simple and inexpensive. More complex changes, for example involving the shape and pattern of a hand-tufted or hand-hooked piece, are pricier because they require a higher level of craftsmanship. Either way, manufacturers these days are ready to meet your needs quickly and efficiently. What used to take months to complete can be done in just three to eight weeks depending on the type of custom order placed.

When it comes to creating a custom rug or carpet, the options are limitless. Pretty much any pattern, color, texture, shape or size can be made to fit your home and your lifestyle. Don't be afraid to give it a try the next time you're in the market for floor covering. And discover the ease of transforming your living space with flooring that is truly unique. >>

The heritage of 828 International's latest rug collection can be found in its name: Varashawar. The word is a marriage of two worlds—Varansi, the sacred city of India and Peshawar, a trade city at the foot of the Khyber Pass in Pakistan. The fiber used is a blended handspun Gazni wool that is twisted to give the rugs a thicker hand and heavier texture.

FROM DRAB TO FAB

Stairs can pack a powerful decorating punch and add warmth and color to a home.

When you think about it, stairs typically center the house, and they are usually within visual distance of the front door. What's more, they are well traveled by every member of the house, making them an important, active structural feature deserving of attention.

Yet, when it comes to decorating, the stairs are rarely used to their full potential and so often are overlooked completely.

Adorning your stairs in a wool carpet or patterned wool runner is an easy and affordable way to take your home from drab to fab.

Carpet can be installed on your stairs with the edges turned under, or you can request the edges to be serged for a cleaner look, custom look. Remember design, especially custom, is in the details.

If your tastes run to patterned runners, the options are wonderfully numerous. Styles range from contemporary to traditional, in various widths and unending lengths to accommodate any size stair. However, when selecting one for your home, always make sure the carpet or rug is approved for use on stairs; if not, it may wear prematurely. Simply check the label for a Location Guidance Rating or consult your retailer for assurance.

If your stairs curve or turn, it is advisable to have a qualified installer visit your home before making a purchase. Extra square footage may be required, especially if you are interested in a patterned product. The staircase (featured right) is a prime example. The pattern matched effortlessly when mitered on the 90-degree turn; but the 45-degree turn required custom work. Installers had to create a special piece by seaming the border of a runner onto a broadloom field. This proved to be an important consideration when choosing a style, as it needed to be offered as both broadloom and runner.

Marie from Stanton's Royal Sovereign Collection of Wools of New Zealand Brand broadloom, rugs, and runners proved to be the perfect choice for this challenging staircase. Fortunately, in cases like this, Stanton Carpet offers many of its designs in multiple constructions, making it easy to remedy this installation challenge.