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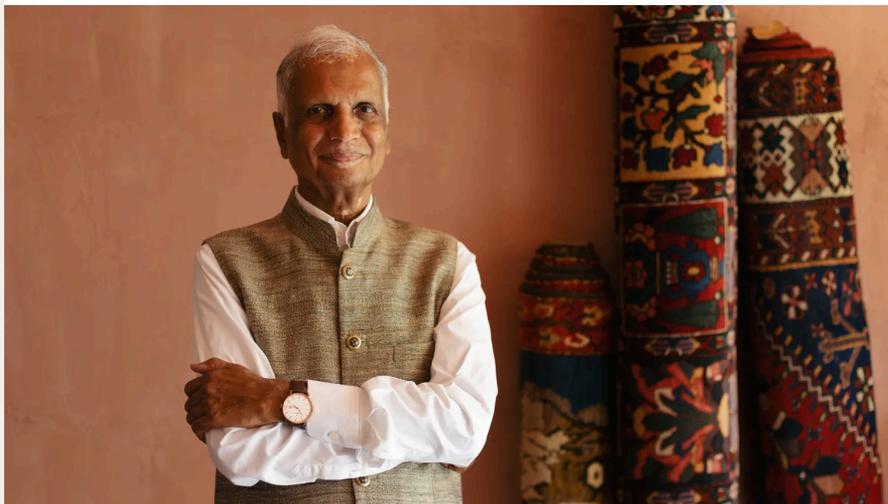
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## Meet the king of rug-making

Nand Chaudhary started with two looms — and now oversees a £90 million-a-year business that has employed over 50,000 people. He tells Lisa Grainger about his love affair with weaving



Nand Kishore Chaudhary, the founder of Jaipur Rugs

[Lisa Grainger](#), Deputy and Travel Editor, Times Luxx  
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**T**hat Jaipur Rugs is India's most successful design company is fairly surprising given the cornerstones on which it was founded. The company was never created, insists the 71-year-old weaver Nand Kishore Chaudhary, with the aim of making a fortune (which it does

today, turning over about £90 million a year). Neither did the founder dream of dominating the world of handmade rugs — which the company now does, selling its hand-knotted creations in more than 60 countries.

His vision has always been based, Chaudhary tells me over Zoom from his Jaipur office, “on love”. He loves making rugs, whether they are precious hand-knotted silk creations or hardy floor coverings — and owns an extraordinary collection of them. He loves offering his customers beautiful pieces that transform their houses into a home. He loves empowering his employees through his benevolent foundation. And, thankfully, he loves his family: his wife (nicknamed by the family the “Chief Happiness Officer” because of her ability to sort out HR problems) and his five children, all of whom work in the business.



Chaudhary with his son Yogesh



One of the firm's designs

He was very lucky, he says, that in 1978, having given up a job in banking, he discovered what he loved to do: weaving. With a 5,000-rupee loan from his father, he bought two looms and a bicycle and started to learn the trade for himself — every part of it, from spinning the wool to selling the final product. “The purpose of my life has been self-discovery and self-exploration,” the man often called “the Gandhi of India’s business world” says simply. “Life is a continuous search for a purpose that’s bigger than one’s own self. When you weave, you can let go of all of the anxieties, fears and ego that stop you from growing and experiencing what is pure.”

While making rugs he discovered not only the essence of who he was, but two things vital to making his business a success —

on which he has lectured at universities such as MIT, Wharton and Harvard. The first is: if you cut the middleman out, your customer has a direct line to you and develops a relationship with you. And the second: if you treat your workers well, you create a workforce that blossoms and in turn produces better work. The combination of both, he adds, creates a virtuous circle of happiness in which happy customers and happy workers are joined.

Employing women — who make up four fifths of the workforce — has also been key to Jaipur Rugs' success, he says. "Women are far more disciplined and produce good quality. They have learnt to be the best managers. They manage their food, their house, the education, the children — and still weave." Because he insists on running Jaipur Rugs as a social enterprise, with fair wages, healthcare and education so workers and families can improve their lives, he has a hugely dedicated workforce "which is like family", he says.

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The figures on the foundation's website are certainly impressive. It says it has thus far helped 270,000 artisans and their families in 669 villages over five states, employed over 50,000, and given healthcare to more than 67,000 and education to over 5,000 in matters from finance to sanitation. And that, the founder says, is the point of what they do. "We are driven by our belief in the potential and dignity of every artisan. By addressing multiple dimensions of development, we strive to

build a better future where artisans can lead fulfilling lives and contribute to the growth of their villages.”



The company now ships its rugs around the world



Jaipur Rugs claims to have some of the best artists in India working on its designs

NEVILLE SUKHIA

Equally important, though, it's a business, insists his son Yogesh, who is the company's director. And that means it continuously has to be best in class. As well as employing, Yogesh says, "some of the most talented artisans in India, and training hundreds to come up after them", from spinners and weavers to dyers and designers, using silk from China and India, wool from Saudi to New Zealand, it regularly collaborates with leading designers from around the world.

Since its first co-design in 1990s — a simple fruit pattern with a US graphic designer — it has collaborated with jewellers, artists and fashion houses, ranging from star students at St Martins in London to the late British jeweller Jocelyn Burton. At this summer's Milan Design Week it showed collaborations by Richard Hutten and this October at the Decorex show in London it will exhibit another with Vimar 1991, the Italian thread-maker owned by Chanel, of rugs in classic monochrome tones that mimic the house's famous tweeds.

Of all of its collaborations, the new Chanel designs have been “super successful,” Yogesh says, “with people reaching out from all over the world to ask for it.” Although fulfilling sales will possibly be more difficult, he adds. “We didn't anticipate it would sell out so quickly. And getting the yarn is difficult. So we need to develop the process to meet demand.”

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In the meanwhile its 40,000 artisans across India — but primarily Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand — will keep making rugs, from little mats for children's rooms to a giant silk-knotted carpet for a Middle Eastern royal family that took 19 people three years to weave. When, a decade or so ago, it produced that, it cost about £100,000, Yogesh says. “Now it would cost double that.”



The dyeing process



The materials for Jaipur Rugs being dried in the sun

In the past decade the business has transformed significantly, Yogesh says, as the five siblings have come into the business (three in the US, two in India, working across departments from design to technology). Whereas in 2016 nearly all of its rugs were sold locally, and proudly displayed in public spaces in the region, from the Taj Hotel and Soho House in Mumbai to islands in the Maldives, today about 60 per cent of all the carpets are exported and sold in six branded American stores, under their US label Jaipur Living, and by retailers in 60 countries, from Milan and Paris to Beijing and Moscow.

No other Indian company, the father and son admit slightly bashfully, have won more awards for design than they have. No other company in India employs more artisans. And no other rug-weaver has worked with so many great international designers and fashion houses. Today, Yogesh says, the company sometimes produces ten different designs a week. “The homeware world is increasingly emulating fashion,” he says. “We are very happy to work with fashion companies — whether that’s transforming the fibres Chanel produce for their jackets or making rugs for high street brands.”



The rugs are woven with intricate details

What makes his father happy, though, is the same thing that's always made him happy: hanging out with weavers and their looms. "When I started, no one in the villages wanted to weave," he tells me. "Now you see women who are so well trained and have their own carpet-weaving businesses. We have dignified them and empowered them and allowed them to save money for their marriages or doing further studies." And because increasing numbers of customers want to buy only products made ethically, that benefit others, the virtuous circle keeps growing. What that means is "everyone is happy, everyone does well," Chaudhary grins. "That is all I have ever

wanted.”  
[jaipur rugs.com](http://jaipur rugs.com)

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