

BERBER RUGS GUIDE

ALL ABOUT BERBER CARPETS

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STYLES AND TRIBES

The three most famous categories of Berber rugs are the Boucherouite in recycled fabrics, the Azilal in wool and cotton and the Beni ourain of high wool.

Then some tribes of the Middle Atlas have their specificity, we can quote the Boujaad rugs, the Marmoucha rugs, the Talsint rugs, the Beni M Guild, the Beni Mrirt, the Ait Ighezzrane, the Ait Seghrouchène, the Ait Yaacoub...rugs

We are going to describe in detail the 3 categories that are mainly found on the international market

The boucherouite rugs are specific to Morocco's rural tribes

In these often very modest domestic homes, Berber women weave carpets from torn fabrics from recycled textiles. A thousand rags or pieces of cotton, nylon or synthetic threads, or more rarely wool, are used to make fabulous decorations.

The contrast between the poverty of the material and the richness of the composition adds to the astonishment and wonder of this popular art. One can really speak of art brut.

While until recently, these rugs did not interest anyone and the rugs merchants in the souks did not even offer them, a movement of interest was born that went from Europe to the USA and Japan and Australia

The sincerity of these works of folk art, their joy of colours, their lyrical abstractions, the low prices of their prices interest the young generation in search of aesthetic and authentic values like sustainable development and eco-design creations

The small formats, which are often saddle pads, are now framed by gallery owners and thus take on their status as "picture carpets". These works of great artistic richness then paintings by artists to be installed on the wall. These carpets are an invitation to visual reverie, where nothing is definitively delimited in advance, where the suspended forms seem to suggest a continuity towards the infinite beyond the frame of the painting-carpet.

The cultural influence of these Berber women goes back to the dawn of time. The lozenge pattern very present in Berber carpets is a decoration that has existed since the neolithic period. These woven works reveal the traces of a thousand-year-old civilization by revealing reminiscences of signs and symbols of a distant prehistory. We also find in these carpets the result of the blending of Berber and African cultures through the ancestral circulation of the caravans of the Sahara and Sudan.

As Frédéric DAMGAARD does in his excellent book "Carpets and weavings, the art of Berber women in Morocco", it is wise to compare the weaving loom of a Berber woman to that of a musical instrument. "It is easy to imagine a Berber woman in front of her loom like a pianist in front of her piano, both compose a beautiful music with rhythms and harmonies, in terms of colours and notes. Their scores are never completely rigid and leave room for personal interpretations or improvisational initiatives. Both of them also have a very wide repertoire at their disposal, which they can interpret as they wish and according to their sensibility.

The polychromy that is born from these strips of fabric can be overwhelming in its poetry, in its fluidity, in its imagination, in its fantasy, in its joy.... The spontaneity of abstract forms and colours creates works that are not only decorative but truly artistic. We touch the heart of tribal art, folk art, art brut.

Art is not reserved for painters or sculptors. Many tribal objects speak to our senses and therefore can be considered as works of art. The Musée des Arts Premiers in Paris has opened up new perspectives for lovers of these tribal arts whose symbolism, graphics and colour palettes bring us back to universal aesthetic values.

It is fascinating to see how the strong and sublime graphics of these Berber rugs have inspired many modern artists. And for amateurs and collectors, it will always be fascinating to discover in a berber rug emotions that lead back to paintings by KANDINSKY, KLEE, MONDRIAN or POLLOCK or many other abstract painters.

It is for all these reasons that we fell in love with these boucherouite rugs and that we want to contribute to their discovery by many amateurs.

We thus make our modest contribution while knowing that these weaved hand knotted works of Berber women are now recognized as collectors' items and works of art by specialists, gallery owners and museum curators.

the Azilal rugs....absolutely unique, the genuine tribal rug!

Azilal rugs or Azilals, as their name suggests, come from the steep region of Azilal, located in the remote and very difficult to access mountains of the High Atlas, south of the city of Beni Mellal and about 180 km northeast of Marrakech.

Reserved exclusively for the women of this region, Azilal rugs are made by alternating patterns composed of a knotted line and one or two lines woven from raw virgin wool, following a cultural ritual passed down from mother to daughter for generations.

Are often associated with Azilal rugs, rugs called Ourika which are in fact all the rugs produced a little further south by the tribes of the High Atlas mountains from Denmate in the north to Ilmil in the south covering the mountainous region of Ait Ourir, the Ourika valley and the Oukaimeden park.

The Azilal rugs show great creativity in terms of designs, they combine irregular and abstract patterns, many Berber symbols and graphics often based on diamonds.

Often appear colour additions based on wool dyed with vegetable dyes or based on coloured cotton threads or even recycled fabrics. The background of carpets made of natural virgin wool is ivory/cream.

Azilal carpets are works where every rural woman in the Azilal region tells her story, the themes of the patterns being rural life, motherhood, birth. The weavers thus appropriate the tribal signs of their ancestors to express their marriage, their pregnancy, their daily life.

The Beni Ouarain rugs...Each rug is one of a kind !

The Beni Ouarain rugs are considered to be "the king carpets", the most prestigious from Morocco, hand woven from high quality silky wool, each piece is unique. These lush carpets find their place in all interior decorations.

Beni Ouarain rugs are authentic tribal rugs entirely weaved and handknotten by the women of the tribes of Beni Ouarain and nearby villages, living in the northeast of the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco, more precisely in the current national park of Tazekka, a province located between the towns of Guercif, Taza and Sefrou.

Traditional use of Beni Ouarain carpets:

The winter is icy in the Moroccan Atlas Mountains where the the lowest temperatures in Africa. To protect oneself in this environment families of the Beni Ouarain tribes, living in traditional tents, had no alternative but to produce thick carpets of high quality wool quality. Originally, Beni Ouarain rugs are not intended to have a vocation decorative but are rather a necessity dictated by the circumstances: they were traditionally used as mattresses and blankets;

That's why the classic size is about 400X200 cm, which allows to sleep on the rug and fold it over.

A few decades ago, the use of Beni Ouarain rugs was limited to tents and berber homes in the Middle Atlas Mountains . this was definitively broken at the beginning of the 20th century under the French protectorate.

Today, Beni Ouarain rugs have become an essential part of the interior home decoration and can be found in all the interior magazines of Western countries and in all the magazines of decoration since the 1970s

The wool of the Beni Ouarain:

The Beni Ouarain rugs are made of virgin wool from the sheep of the Beni Ouarain herds of the tribes, it is of high quality characterized by a slight shine and golden and ivory reflections.

This bio-natural wool is among others produced thanks to a rustic Berber sheep breed considered unique in the Middle East Atlas named: "Marmoucha".

The Beni Ouarain tribes excel in the choice of a soft and silky wool, whose harvesting can take several years before gathering enough to weave some rugs which clearly explains the rarity and value of Beni Ouarain rugs

Beni Ouarain rugs patterns and colors:

Due to the landlocked and mountainous relief of the north-eastern Middle Atlas and contrary to the other Berber tribes, the art of weaving of the Berber tribes of Beni Ouarain has never been influenced by the decorative patterns of oriental carpets or Arabs. The Berber rugs of the Beni Ouarain have kept their tribal originality.

Their design is composed of minimalist asymmetrical patterns in black or black and white.

brown, and geometric shapes: rhombuses, lines, triangles. These drawings are woven on the background of natural virgin wool of ivory color.

Dark brown wool sheep disappeared from Morocco in the 1980s.

the old rugs beni ouarain were woven with this very brown natural wool very dark; for about forty years now, rugs have been woven with black dyed wool

Dimensions of Beni Ouarain rugs :

Since the tents of the tribes of Beni Ouarain had a rectangular shape, as well as the present berber houses, whose rooms are long and narrow, the rugs that were to cover the whole of the interior space of the rooms; it is why the Beni ourain rugs, for example, tend to be much longer than they are wide.

A rug more than 2.20 meters wide, can't be a real antique carpet.

Beni Ouarain rugs s are often 4 meters long by 2 meters width.

In order for their new dimensions to adapt perfectly to those of the contemporary Western spaces, it is possible now to find some of all the sizes..The weight can vary between 20 to 35 kgs and the height of the pile is between 25mm and 50mm.

Beni Ouarain rugs, a source of inspiration...

The rugs of the Beni Ouarain tribes are characterized by their abstract artistic style which makes their purity and their ability to adapt to any place. Many European artists were inspired by these motifs in their works such as Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier (who combined Berber carpets with design furniture) without forgetting Paul Klee or Mondrian as well as most modernist architects of the 1920s and 30s. Beni Ouarain rugs were introduced in particular in the field of interior decoration by Henri Matisse, who renamed them :

"The white giants".

Here is what Timothy Whealon of Timothy WhealonInteriors in New York writes about Beni Ouarain rugs :

"I don't see them as a passing trend, but rather a decorative element that will always be present in interior design "

"This originality is exactly what explains the intense enthusiasm of decorators to stage them in their creations. They give to the rooms of cold atmosphere, an incomparable warmth and a touch of life, an ethnicity".

Beni Ouarain in interior decoration :

Charm, luxury and simplicity are harmoniously combined in Beni Ouarain carpets, making them the most famous and prized carpets in Morocco and around the world, thus becoming a true reference in design and interior decoration.

These carpets combine a modernist taste with a minimalist tendency, with a wealth of symbols of tribal art and a deeply present contemporary touch.

Being little overloaded with colors and patterns, Beni Ouarain carpets carefully integrate tribal graphic art in the contemporary space of many styles of decoration. They enhance wooden furniture, leather living rooms or any design furniture; they have often been associated with Scandinavian furniture.

Beni Ouarain carpets create an incredible atmosphere around a fireplace or a living room. The off-white colour and texture give your room a unique look that is second to none... they combine paradoxically with neutral ambiances, as well as traditional or contemporary ones, and often soothe the overcrowded atmosphere of living rooms, thanks to their floor covering which gives a very chic, extremely decorative accent.

The love for BeniOuarain carpets continues...

For the love of art, the women weavers of Beni Ouarain are always at work and are proud to make custom rugs to be exported and participate in the development of their beautiful country that is Morocco.

History and way of life of the Beni Ouarain tribes:

The semi-nomadic Beni Ouarain tribes are now known all over the world for the quality of their white carpets decorated with geometric shapes such as diamonds, lines, triangles etc...

Beni Ouarain is the name of a Berber confederation comprising 17 Berber tribes:

(AhlTaida, Beni Abd el Hamid, Beni Jelidassen, Ait Ighezrane, Beni Zeggoute, Tahala, Beni Bou Zart, Zerarda andAhlTelt..etc.). They are living in the Northeast mountains of the Middle Atlas, located south of the Moroccan Rif.

Their origin in Morocco dates back to the 9th century with the arrival of Berber tribes, certainly from southern Tunisia or northern Mauritania.

The Beni Ouarain tribes spend the summer with their herds of goats and sheep, on the heights of the mountains, at an altitude of more than 2000 meters, and descend into the grassy plains with the first snowfalls. Thus, the herds benefit from rich and abundant feed throughout the year offering high quality wool to produce the most attractive carpets in the world.

AT WHAT PRICE

You will find Berber rugs at all prices depending on where and how you buy them.

We give you a price range that excludes of course the copies . The new wool rugs Azilal and Beni Ourain are sold on the basis of a price per m2 except for the antique rugs or collector's rugs.

Boucherouite :

Public retail price : 150 to 500 euros / 170 to 580 USD

for info our promotional sales prices 60 to 250 euros/ 65 to 280 USD

Azilal rug

for a dimension of about 250X150 cm / 8 X 5 feet

Public retail price : 700 to 800 euros / 800/950 USD

for information our promotional prices of sale 380 to 450 USD

Beni Ouarain rug

for a dimension of about 250X150 cm 8 X 5 feet

Public retail price : 1000 euros / 1150 USD

for info our promotional sales price 550 USD

for a dimension of about 300X200 cm / 10 X 6,5 feet

Public retail price : 1600 euros / 1800 USD

for info our promotional sales prices 780 euros / 880 USD

for a dimension of about 400X300 cm / 13 X 10 feet

Public retail price : 3500 euros / 4000 USD

for info our promotional sales prices 1750 euros / 1950 USD

New beni ourain rugs as high wool carpets are generally available at reasonable prices but it still represents a certain budget.

For antique or vintage carpets, prices can soar because they are becoming increasingly rare and above all they are jealously guarded by the great bazaarists of Marrakech or Fes as their treasure. They are not sold at negotiated prices because they know that their rarity makes their price rise year after year.

Their price varies according to several criteria such as: size, quality and softness of the wool, quality and density of the weave, the number and importance of the restorations and the importance of the traces of wear and tear.

Old Beni Ouarain rugs can be very expensive and difficult to find without the expertise of an expert. Jean-Yves SEVESTRE who is based in Marrakech is one of them. He is also a great collector and a trusted exporter all over the world. This is very time-consuming but he prefers to buy antique rugs directly from berber families in their own villages in the spirit of fair trade. In this way, he avoids the «middlemen and merchants of rugs" that enhance the value of rugs according to fashions and trends.

WHERE TO BUY THEM

* if you want to see and touch your rug, you can buy it directly in Morocco and especially in the souk of Marrakech **but read the page PITTFALLS TO AVOID**

*you can buy it from a traditional carpet merchant, there are still a few in the town centres, they are often oriental carpet shops run from generation to generation by families often of Iranian origin but in general they do not like Berber carpets which is for them a carpet with a low level of weaving quality, which they are not wrong if we only consider the purely technical aspect of the weaving and in particular the number of knots per square decimeter.

*you can buy it in big carpet shops in the commercial areas but they sell mostly Indian copies and do not stock unique pieces, **see the page THE COPIES**

*you can buy it in many decoration shops oriented towards vintage and bohemian chic

*you will also find them in some concept stores

*Berber carpets also often give rise to pop-ups (temporary exhibition lasting a few days) and sometimes itinerant (several cities one after the other).

FINALLY you can buy them online:

*you will find some on sites such as EBAY, AMAZON, ETSY; be careful there are some serious sellers and others including many young Moroccans who try to sell piece by piece without having a real stock and without being able to provide a real service as when there is a problem at customs. A carpet is a lot of money for a young unemployed person, there are a lot of unemployed young graduates, some of whom have studied business and who are doing well with the net and online sales.

Online sites have exploded in the last three years created either by Moroccans living abroad (in France, the Netherlands, England) who have found the opportunity to create a business activity

or by visitors who have visited Marrakech and who have fallen in love with the berber rugs; they are often young decorators or stylists or young web hipsters who also see an opportunity to create an online activity to sell what they love

PRECAUTIONS TO BE TAKEN

Precautions to take so that you make a purchase you won't regret at the best price

Buy from a "seller" who you are convinced has the passion and expertise for Berber rugs

Do not buy from a seller that you feel is only there to make sales and money and who essentially acts as an intermediary

Buy from someone who has a large volume of sales and stock and therefore has a large available catalogue, and who renews itself significantly every month, it is the guarantee that you will be able to make your best choice

Buy from someone who will be transparent about the terms of sale.

Many people talk about free delivery but do not give any details when it is applicable on customs duties and especially VAT ([see PIITBALLS TO AVOID](#)).

Buy from someone who has a written and detailed RETURN POLICY
(read all lines carefully).

THE COPIES

About fifteen years ago the Turks started to make copies of Moroccan rugs and then some Egyptian copies were found. There are still a few production sites for these rugs in Turkey but today the market is flooded with copies made in India.

Their quality is sometimes quite good, especially for factories that use New Zealand wool; but even for knotted carpets they are industrial carpets made in factories where hundreds of women are lined up behind steel looms.

Many of these copies are not made of wool but of synthetic materials such as acrylic, polyester, polypropylene, etc.

We are far from the Berber rug weaved at home by a Berber woman who each time makes a unique rug by using her creativity according to the season and her mood of the moment.

If you really want a rug weaved in a sustainable development and ecodesign perspective, make sure that the rug was woven in Morocco.

there are some rugs in Tunisia and Algeria in Kabylia, but there is nothing comparable with Moroccan Berber rugs.

Luckily there are almost no Chinese copies, they would not be competitive with Indian copies.

Precautions to be taken for the copies

Beware of the expressions " MOROCCO STYLE " "STYLE BERBERE", " DESIGN BERBERE", you are almost certain to be dealing with a copy.

VERIFY the carpet material described on the ad, legally it must be there but for many websites they are difficult to display, If you are thinking of buying an Azilal or a Beni Ouarain and you find acrylic or polyester or polypropylene, you are of course dealing with a cheap copy.

You will find the same type of sellers in your country , by instance the biggest sellers of copies present on the net in France are :

LA REDOUTE which write» Berber-style» in the titles, in detail you will read Indian polypropylene; they are copies" woolly look"

Polypropylene is a plastic refined from petroleum products, has advantages and in particular the cost, but it is far from natural wool !!!! it is the mostly used material for the copies of berber rugs

LEROY MERLIN which write in the title «Berber Wool «to fool you in the description difficult to access the word wool disappears because the weft is made of cotton and you can read that it is the pattern which is Berber. They are wool industrial Indian copies

IKEA copies "inspired by Berber carpet"
They are synthetic fiber copies

CONFORAMA Berber polypropylene Indian copies in the title !

CASTORAMA Berber carpet as title and then Composition Polypropylene and Synthetic Pile

SAINT MACLOU Indian polypropylene copies and Indian industrial wool copies

PITFALLS TO AVOID

WARNING ON PURCHASING DIRECTLY IN MOROCCO or FROM MOROCCO

Whether you buy a carpet directly in the souk or online from an online site managed by moroccans with a shipping from Morocco with the argument FREE SHIPPING, read below

In spite of the promises of the Moroccan online sites which announce prices including shipping costs and taxes by using the AMANA services of the Moroccan Post Office or even CHRONOPOST, many customers are surprised that the Post Office in their country at the time of the delivery claims important expenses to be paid to them

It is true that some postal parcels go through customs, but this is less and less the case; by instance the free taxes amount value in France for a parcel received from abroad is only 45 euros of declared value! For any parcel with a higher declared value, the French customer must pay 20% VAT and 8% customs duty. That is a total of 28% of the declared value! It is about the same in any country; if you are in a specific country, we can give the details for your country

Many merchants will offer you to prepare a falsified reduced invoice but customs are not stupid, a rug is a bulky and heavy package and attracts attention! False declared values can create disputes with the customs with blocking of the parcel.

Warning on informal transport by vans or buses

Other merchants (especially those in the souk) will offer you "informal" transportation by van with home delivery at the price of 30 or 35 dhs the kilo; that was easy till 18 months ago but today the Moroccan customs control more and more and hundreds of rugs are today blocked in customs at the entry of the ferries ; customers have paid and have practically no means to recover their rug because the souk merchant will not intervene to help because he would take too many risks to be identified by customs, which would trigger a tax control, because all these goods travel anonymously and without invoices. Few serious merchants are reimbursing the customer but not all !!!!

Remains a safe way to import from Morocco is to be shipped by DHL or equivalent; but the shipping price is very high and you will have to pay your customs taxes in your country (In France the 20% VAT and most often the 8% customs duty because the merchant will not make a declaration EUR1 for exemption from customs duties, as it costs him 500 dirhams (50 euros) in addition to the shipping cost.

All these reasons justify that TRIBAL ART MOROCCO ships its carpets by full container every 6 weeks to its warehouses in France, paying VAT to the customs and then reshipping at low cost all its resellers and European private customers who are then subject to the applicable VAT rules, but the prices communicated by TRIBAL ART always include VAT if it is applicable CUSTOMERS CANNOT HAVE ANY SURPRISE.

CARE AND WASHING

the boucherouite rugs are washable

the boucherouite which are made of recycled fabrics have the big advantage of being washable.

this is particularly appreciated by customers who have dogs or young children or who have experienced the anxiety or the fact to have a large wine or coffee stain on a woollen rug they can be washed by hand or with a carpet brush

we advise you to watch the video at the following link which shows the washing of all the carpets at our place before they are shipped.

<https://www.boucharouette.com/restauration-tapis.php>

otherwise machine wash at low temperature and spin at low speed if it's a large boucherouite too heavy for your machine, there are large capacity machines in laundries

in all cases, drying in the sun for 48 hours

maintenance of rugs in wool

regular maintenance is done with a vacuum cleaner with suction accessory, avoid rotating brushes, To vacuum deeply a good suction is necessary.

Don't worry for the first few weeks, a new carpet will bleed wool and fill your vacuum bags with wool fibres; this is a normal phenomenon that stabilizes.

For wet stains, put a little baking soda on the stain to absorb the moisture on the carpet. Wait about 30 seconds and then vacuum. Repeat the process until the baking soda no longer absorbs the liquid.

What to do if you have a stain on your rug because you were unable to clean it

For small stains, you can wash by dabbing with soap and water or with water and vinegar; Rinse by dabbing.

For a complete cleaning, it is advised, as for any wool carpet, to contact a professional