

Shiraz, the rich City, not the Wine ☺

To me, carpets started as a question mark that needed answers and explanations. That soon, developed to be a subject of research leading to a career and my passion. As a tradition in my family, I followed the footsteps of my late father Mohamed and his love to carpets. Living in London, I took the many opportunities that the British capital offered and attended courses at the Sotheby's Institute in the history and origin of carpets. I extended my knowledge in the field by later on attending several auctions, reading and mainly travelling.

Recently, I have visited **Shiraz, South Part of Iran; capital of the Fars province**. In short, Shiraz is known as the city of poets, wine and flowers. It is also considered by many Iranians to be the city of gardens, due to the many gardens and fruit trees that can be seen in the city.

I went from Beirut to Bahrain to catch my connecting flight. As a hobby, I had my knitting tools with me while waiting at the gate, and yes I enjoy knitting and especially when it's a blanket or hat for my 3 years old nephew.

To my surprise, once settles in my seat with my seatbelt on, I see and smell burgers and huge take away bags from the Mc Donald's right outside our gate, circulating between the female passengers. As informed by my neighbor, the kids in Iran love Mc Donald's and hence bringing some is a must as Mc Do does not exist there.

I was looking forward to visiting the **nomads land, Persepolis, Hafez Tomb** and simply discover the city.

At 10pm, upon my arrival, my friends insisted I visited "**Shah Cheragh**" Mosque, the King of Light. It is the tomb of brothers Amir Ahmad and Mir Muhammad, both of whom were brothers of Imam Reza (8th saint in Shiite Islam). It became a place of pilgrimage since the 14th century. The multicolored reflections from the countless minute mirror tiles inside the shrine are quite dazzling and the golden topped minarets above it are superb. Hence, it is a must see place to visit and highly recommended. Making a wish is always in my agenda when visiting a holy place.

After checking in my room @ **Homa Hotel**, a 5 star government hotel, I had few hours to sleep for my next day of full discovery. My morning visit was to **Wakil Bazaar**, the old souk pronounced as Vakil (since the W in Farsi is pronounced V) before it shuts at noon for prayers & lunch. The souk reopens at around 5pm after lunch and siesta!

Vakil Bazaar is highly recommended: hundreds of vendors housed in an ancient bazaar.

Carpets, carpets and more carpets were everywhere in Shiraz. The Rug is the floor covering, the bed mat, the table they eat on; it's also the protection against wind and sand in the desert.

Carpet is predominant in every house, in every tent and in every shop in the bazaar.

Weaving carpet is an art in itself, it's an endless procedure that a lot of people do not recognize or tend to ignore.

Being passionate myself about carpets in general, I fell in love even more with this 100% handmade art ... starting with cutting the wool from the sheep, lambs, goats, and even camels,

which gives more than 4 and 5 shades of natural colored wool. Then comes the washing, the dyeing technique, the design, the weaving, & again the final trimming and cutting...

A lot of vegetables are used to make organic colours like aubergine, onion, sunflower, henna, pomegranate, saffron... However today the main color ingredients that big carpet manufacturers use are: The **madder roots** for red, the **pomegranate skin** for yellow, the **indigo** for blue (usually imported from India), **walnut** for brown and green herbs called «**Jachir**» in Farsi for a dark yellow or mustard colour which comes out after boiling it with the wool..

With only these 5 ingredients, the ISO award winning company I visited, managed to create 160 shades of colours. I learnt that if you want a dark purple which is my favorite colour on carpets you use the dark wool as a base and boil it with the combination of red and blue...

Today, we also have designers who are university graduates in carpet design, they draw the new designs on the computer and print large graph papers for the weavers to follow. It was very interesting to meet these designers (usually women) and it was more interesting to actually give them my own designs for 3 different carpets that I drew for them while choosing the colour combination myself from a huge chart of colours. The designs I am choosing are very contemporary with trendy colours to match the spirit of my concept store “Oumnia” in Saifi Village. Once executed, my customer can also order the same in the size and colours he/she wishes to have. Hence a tailor made couture rug, a statement I always use «Fashion for Floors». The exciting part is the final outcome in few months, as it takes at least 4 months to weave a small rug of an approximate size 1.5 x 1 meters, sometime more depending on the knot density. In general, tribal carpets have a low knot density compare to city carpets where the knots are tightly knotted and silk is used more often. Again women usually are the weavers. The bigger the carpet the more women sit on the horizontal loom (typical for tribal carpets) to complete the rug. A carpet sized 3 x 2 meters would take 10 months to 1 year to complete. Another fact I learnt is that the older the female weaver is the better it is to weave a carpet. That’s because elderly women usually have the expertise and are mainly patient for this kind of timeless work.

Visiting the Gashgai/Qashgai nomads was amazing, just seeing how simple and primitive their live is while my mobile rings in the middle of the desert, their home.

Their only worry is the wellbeing of their sheep and goats.

Another interesting spot I visited is the tomb of the famous romantic **poet Hafez**, whom prose, “ghazal” are weaved on the famous 16th century carpets, ie: the Ardabil, showcased at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, UK and its mate in the Los Angeles LACMA Museum. **Hafez Tomb: Hafez is the greatest master of Persian lyric poetry and the literary giant of the 14th century.** The extraordinary popularity and the wide appeal of this great poet among all Persian-speaking people make his tomb a cherished placed, visited by all.

Saadi Tomb: is also recommended. Mausoleum/tomb of Saadi where lie the remains of one of Iran’s greatest poets. Even from the very early days after the poet’s death, the mausoleum of Sa’di became a place of pilgrimage to lovers of poetry and literature.

Persepolis: Takht-e-Jamshid is one of the most beautiful architectural masterpieces of the second half of the first millennium BC. It covers an area of more than 130,000 sqm. Located 60

km north of Shiraz, this Superb historic building ranks among the most important architectural achievements of the world and is included in the World Heritage list of UNESCO.

Qor'an Gate (Dar vazeh Quran): the city's main entrance. The original gate was built as an ornamental decoration by the Buwayhid dynasty about 1000 years ago, but this was replaced 60 years ago by a new gate, which is considered one of the finest architectural designs in Iran and has won numerous awards. From the gate, walk up the stone stairways to enjoy picturesque and panoramic views of Shiraz.

Shiraz is also considered by many Iranians to be the city of gardens, due to the many gardens and fruit trees that can be seen in the city. Hence the popularity of the picnics, customs and habit in Shiraz: **The Eram Garden (Bagh-e Eram)** is a striking location for visitors with a variety of plants as well as a historic mansion. Historical evidence suggests it was constructed during the Seljuk Dynasty on the orders of the celebrated Seljuk monarch Sanjar.

Before you leave the city get a Souvenir or two: maybe a carpet ☺, sweets like Gaz (nougat), pistachios, and the «Meena car» miniature handmade on wood, which is the mosaic work of art, different items available such as a lighter, tray, letter opener, backgammon table, frame, tissue box... a lot of artistic and practical gift ideas, saffron, Sufi music, some Persian tea...

The Delicious authentic Persian Food:

Persian Kebab is a must; you will love the different flavors and perfumes coming from the Basmati Rice and Grilled Koubideh Kebab...different BBQs and daily dishes like Fesenjoon and Baghali polo are one of my favorite mouth watering dishes.

Written by Nivine Maktabi

Owner of the concept store "Oumnia by Nivine Maktabi"

Saifi Village, Said Akl St 01-993339

www.oumniaboutique.com

www.maktabimodern.com

Opening Hours: Mond-Frid 10am-7pm

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