

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

spring • two thousand and six

SEA ISLAND

family • tradition • discovery



THE WORLD COMES TO THE CLOISTER

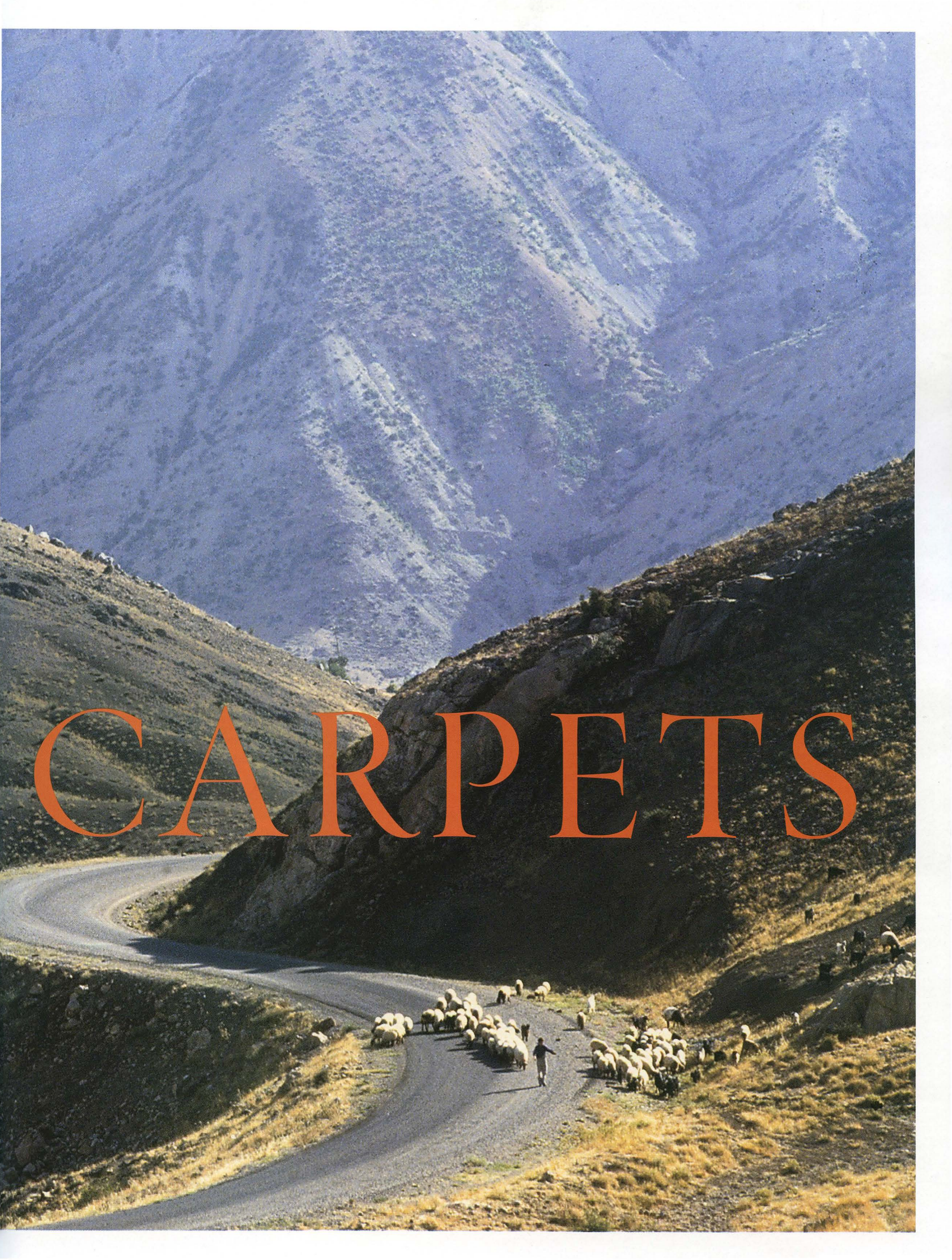
Renewing an icon's timeless traditions



magic

*The world's most skilled rug makers
weave a dramatic connection
between the mountains of Turkey
and the coastline of Georgia*

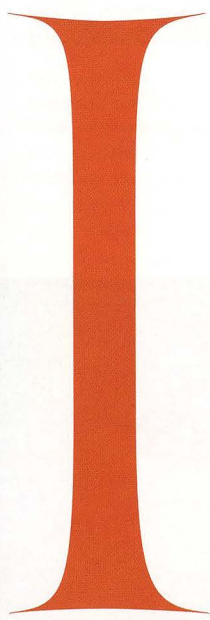
BY SUSAN DUNDON



CARPETS



Working from detailed drawings, women sit at enormous looms in this eastern Turkey carpet factory to handcraft one-of-a-kind pieces for The Cloister.



IMAGINE A WINTER MORNING, the streets still slick from a chilling rain the night before. You're at your desk, looking out the window and enjoying a cup of coffee, both hands wrapped for warmth around the mug. Then, inhaling the last delicious aromas of your favorite roast, you turn in your chair to face the piles of paper awaiting your attention and the phone rings.

On the line is a designer, eminent in her field, who is bringing together the finest materials in the world to furnish a luxury hotel, and she has chosen you to supply the carpets, hundreds upon hundreds of them, all handmade. And this isn't just one more luxury hotel. It is The Cloister at Sea Island.

More than 75 years ago, the original Cloister, designed by celebrated architect Addison Mizner, immediately caught the world's attention and inspired numerous accolades for its Mediterranean-influenced beauty. The new incarnation, meanwhile, has been painstakingly built and expanded under the guidance of Sea Island architect Peter Capone. Its striking interiors are the province of accomplished designer Pamela Hughes, the woman whose phone call you just took.

The carpet project was daunting enough, but the deadline, just a little more than a year from Hughes's call, might have seemed impossible. Still, George Jevremovic, founder of Woven Legends in Philadelphia, took it on without a moment's hesitation. Somehow, this isn't surprising. One can see in the intensity of his face a readiness to jump at a challenge. It was, after all, the biggest single com-

mission of his career. Was he scared? Opening his arms expansively, he says, "My response was, 'Great!' I wasn't scared." But, he concedes, "I was concerned about the timeline." As for how the pressure affected his life, well, he suggests the greater toll in that regard might have been taken on Sertac Cakim, his U.S. production manager.

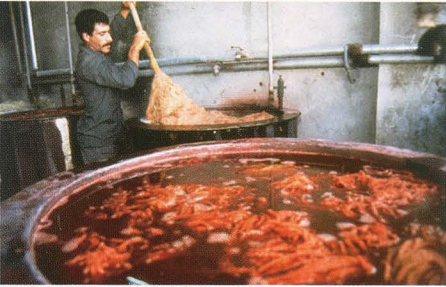
Jevremovic (pronounced Yev-rem-o-vitch) first became interested in Oriental carpets on a 1979 trip with his girlfriend, Neslihan, to her

HUNDREDS OF BREATHTAKING CARPETS ADORN THE NEW CLOISTER. NATURAL DYES AND HAND-SPUN YARNS ENSURE THAT COLORS ARE VIBRANT AND EACH RUG IS DISTINCT AND EXQUISITE IN ITS OWN WAY

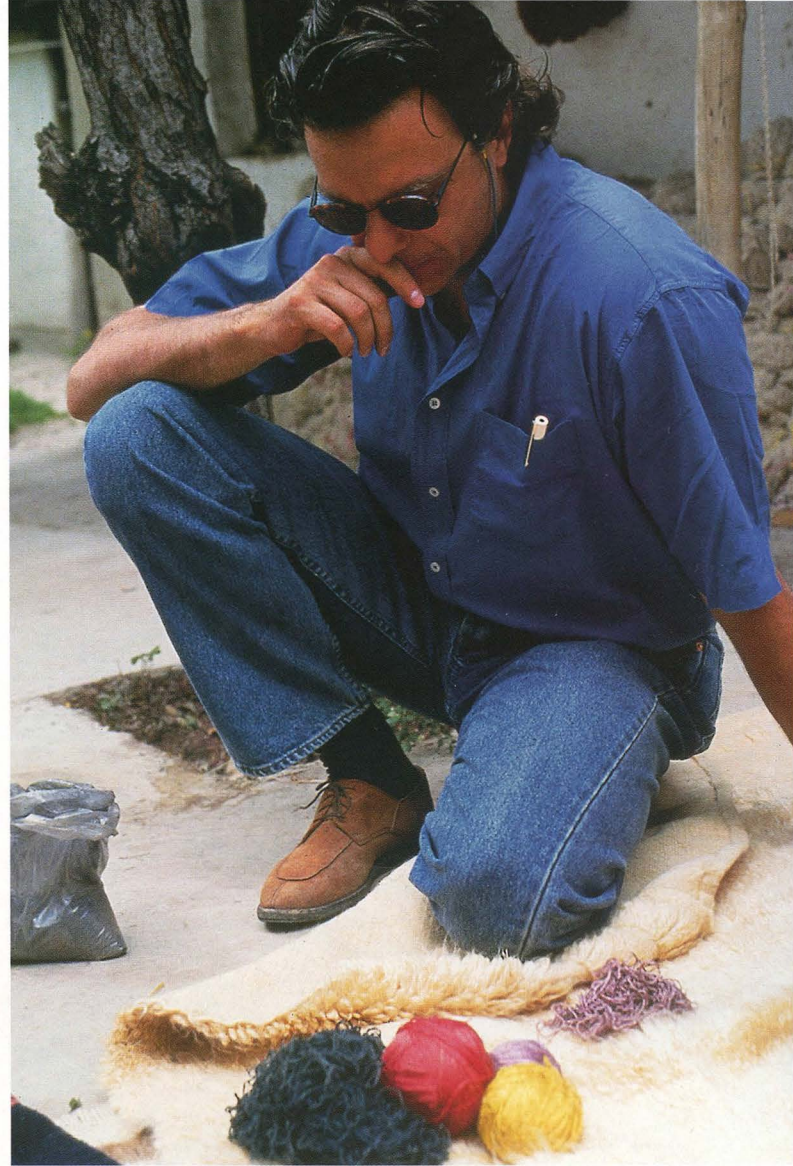
native Turkey. (Although her eventual marriage to Jevremovic ended, she remains his partner in business.) At that time, Jevremovic began combing the Turkish countryside for rugs to sell to dealers and collectors. Traveling back and forth between Turkey and the U.S., he dealt exclusively with antiques. Then one day in the early 1980s, he spotted a rug in an Istanbul bazaar. It was small but exquisite. He was stunned to learn that the rug was not an antique but new, the product of a Turkish university fine-arts project that had been established to resurrect ancient weaving practices using natural dyes and hand-spun yarns. The process had been discovered through the ingenuity of German scientist Harald Böhmer, who managed to revive the richness

THE RUGS SHOULD LOOK LIKE THEY'VE ALWAYS
BELONGED TO THE CLOISTER, THAT THEY
ARE "ORGANICALLY" A PART OF THE SPACE





Before a carpet is finished (opposite page), there are a number of different stages. First, the wool must be washed carefully (above, top), and then the yarn is soaked in natural dyes, such as madder root (above, bottom). George Jevremovic (right) examines the selection of wools destined for a Cloister rug.



of color that had once made Turkish rugs the envy of the world. But these rugs were decorative, room-sized carpets, not for public spaces but for homes. Still, this fortuitous glance at a small rug was the genesis of what became *Woven Legends*.

As Jevremovic himself puts it, "My 'lightbulb' moment was to say, Let's take this design recipe and really explore this and move out into other areas." That lightbulb showed the way from western Turkey to eastern Turkey, an undeveloped, mountainous region. In Adiyaman, an area 350 miles from the Iranian border, a government official sympathetic to Jevremovic's entrepreneurial interests gave him permission to use some large, vacant public spaces, where he experimented with expanding carpet sizes and colors. "In the course of a few years," he says, "I went from a cottage industry to employing close to ten thousand people in one hundred and twenty villages."

As he speaks, Jevremovic's face reflects the passion for his subject, and for *The Cloister* project in particular. An impressive looking man with dark wavy hair and penetrating pale blue eyes, he bounces out of his chair, all energy, pulling out sample after sample of carpets, eliciting help from his design manager, Sibel Akhad. Both are eager to explain the differences in weaves between one sample and another, first gathering the drawings that act as maps for the weavers, then darting over to a long table full of books about Oriental carpets. The table also contains the floor plans for *The Cloister*. "The project," Jevremovic says, "was really about the spirit of the arts-and-crafts movement, inspired by William Morris."

Morris, an English designer, artist and poet, is mentioned in much of the literature about *Woven Legends*. Jevremovic picks up one of these books and quotes: "To give people pleasure in the things they

must perforce use, that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce make, that is the other use of it." Putting the book back down on the table, Jevremovic remarks, "Nobody said it better."

"*The Cloister*," he continues, "is a modern-day project that is really raising the bar in terms of design." Then he adds with confidence, "That is why they engaged us as carpet makers." It takes only a quick glance around the *Woven Legends* studio to get an idea of the scope of *The Cloister* carpet-making frenzy, which, at its height, led one observer to remark, "All of Turkey knows about this project." Some of the spaces for which rugs were made include the reception area, which measures 1,600 square feet; three foyers, the center one of which is 2,000 square feet; and a ballroom of 7,140 square feet. Then there's the architectural wonder of the Spanish Lounge, itself nearly 1,500 square feet. "Grandeur" is the very first word that comes to mind for this ambitious undertaking, and yet it seems woefully inadequate. One finds it difficult to reconcile the rugged mountain terrain of the villages where these treasures were made with the oceanside stretches of *The Cloister's* home.

Jevremovic opens a large portfolio of photographs and points to a rug 12 feet wide by 22 feet long. Its magnificence elicits a small gasp. He then produces two other photos taken of rugs of the same size and of identical design. But what a difference in appearance: Because of alterations in the palette and the weave, each rug is distinct, each exquisite in its own way. The first one, its colors vibrant and yet somehow subtle, has been crafted for the Wine Cellar. All of the rugs in this portfolio are, in fact, for *The Cloister*. The works reflect seven or eight different weaves that are faithful reproductions of the Sardis

Jevremovic's and Hughes's colorful patterns were inspired by books on Oriental rugs and ancient Turkish designs. The finished carpets, such as the one pictured here, match The Cloister's unique style perfectly.

Women in a small Turkish village hold up one end of their gorgeous creation (below), commissioned by Philadelphia rug expert Jevremovic. This carpet pattern is used in The Cloister's guest rooms.



“combed through not just our own design archive but all of the Oriental-carpet literature available to choose designs that echoed both the architecture and interior design of The Cloister. Our job was to show her the best in terms of design, and then for us to work with her color requirements. Hundreds of samples were produced during this process.” Because of The Cloister’s setting on the Black Banks River and in a seaside community, and the Mizner design spirit reflected in the new space, the rugs are in Mediterranean colors.

Once again, the mind tries to wrap itself around the task. Hundreds upon hundreds of handmade rugs, each one recognized as new only by an expert, are custom made for every space and for every surface, whether marble or

collection, rugs based on old Mamluk designs produced by Turks who occupied North Africa in the 15th century.

This uniqueness is the essential aspect that designer Pamela Hughes was striving for when she called Jevremovic. She told him that the rugs should look like they belong in The Cloister; that they’re “organically” a part of the space. “Which meant that in the public spaces, there were rugs that were unique but worked together,” explains Jevremovic. “So that when one walks about, the sense is not that the place is dominated by a certain producer but that someone had been making a collection of antique rugs.” Throughout numerous meetings with Hughes, Jevremovic recounts that the two of them

wood. Sizes range from what the carpet maker calls “tiny to humongous”—the latter being a full 27 feet wide by 40 feet long. Reminded of those particular dimensions, Jevremovic himself seems uncharacteristically overwhelmed, if not downright impressed. “It’s three medallions across and about six down,” he says thoughtfully. “It’s breathtaking, a beautiful, beautiful rug.”

And so they came, these amazing carpets. Until recently, monthly shipments of them arrived at Sea Island. Though these shipments originated in many areas of Turkey, including Erzurum, Diyarbakir and Turhal—hundreds of miles apart at the farthest point—many came from the Adiyaman province, an area Jevremovic likes best for



weaving. “It is quite lovely,” he says. “The weather and landscape remind one of New Mexico; dry heat in summer, snow in the mountains in winter. Many of the villagers are semi-nomadic, so there is still a quality of the ancient pace of life with black, goat-hair tents popping up each springtime. A lot of the hand-spinning of our yarn is done by nomads in this area.”

On the Georgia coast, worlds away from those people who made it possible, these Turkish works of art will live on to enrich the lives of those who walk across them. And if these carpets lose some of the earthy scents of their origins, they’ll always have the essence. As is said of fine wine, they will only get better with age.

“Things are running smoothly,” the man who set this massive project in motion remembers saying as *The Cloister*’s opening drew near. After all, he emphasized, “A deadline is a deadline.”

Leaping at the chance to add just one more comment, and unable to contain his pride, Jevremovic says, “I’ll tell you this: No hotel or commercial project anywhere in the world, in modern memory, has made a commitment—in terms of its carpets—as this project has. In that way, I find it not only unique but inspirational. And it’s hopeful and interesting how a project like this supports arts and communities on a pretty grand scale. I wish there were more projects like this.”

Is he ready to do another one?

“Sure!”

Not that anyone needed to ask. ■



In the first step of their long journey to Sea Island, the handwoven carpets are transported by donkey over some of Turkey’s most challenging terrain.

Novelist Susan Dundon is a former columnist for The Philadelphia Inquirer and has written for Town & Country and The New York Times. She has also contributed to NPR’s Morning Edition.