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09242012 Chicago Casual Furniture Show Becoming Important Secondary Market for Rugs

By Pat Terry



CHICAGO CASUAL MARKET BECOMING IMPORTANT SECONDARY RUG SHOW



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Sandy Pauly, Couristan Illinois/Wisconsin sales rep, and Steve Codella, senior vice president of sales, pick the winner at Couristan's Ultimate Outdoor Living raffle on Friday, Sept. 21. Winner was Bob Dougherty of Green Lea Garden Center, Voorhees, N.J., who won a premium Weber grill and BBQ gift kit. shown here.

By Pat Terry

CHICAGO -- The International Casual Furniture Market, which ran Sept. 20 to 23 at Chicago's Merchandise Mart, is becoming an important secondary market for rug vendors with a stake in the dynamic outdoor furniture and accessories market. This year, major rug suppliers such as Couristan, Oriental Weavers, Trans Ocean and Nourison exhibited at the show's lively temporary exhibition area.

"This is a very important market for outdoor product categories," said Ron Couri, chief executive officer of Couristan, which was one of the first rug companies to participate in the show. "We definitely see people we don't see at the other markets, especially not Atlanta."

The four-day market, which attracted buyers from across the country, saw heavy traffic and almost crackled with energy on Thursday and Friday.



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Ron Couri, ceo of Couristan

"Opening day, was very crowded, very busy," said Couri. "At this show, we do a big business with catalog specialists as well as big boxes, garden shops and home decorators." Buyers are coming for all over, he said. "Anybody in the outdoor business comes here."



Aaron Gray, director of marketing for Oriental Weavers

Aaron Gray, director of marketing for Oriental Weavers, also reported "great foot traffic" as of Friday afternoon. "This market has become really good in the last three years or so," he said. "People may not be adding onto their homes now, but they're doing more entertaining at home, really using their outdoor spaces — and spending more on the outdoors."

Outdoor living areas are also becoming man caves. "Men are setting up TVs in their outdoor "rooms" and inviting friends over to watch," Gray said, echoing comments made by editors and publishers at a Friday morning panel of top consumer magazines.

Oriental Weavers' outdoor rug customers at the show included patio furniture shops, hardware chains and pool suppliers.



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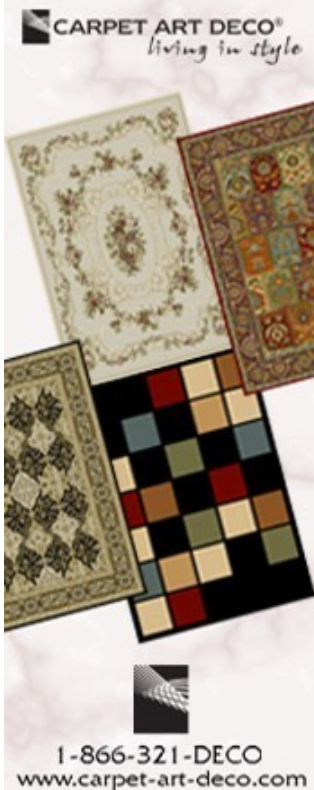


Jeff Gonzalez of Nourison. The company was a first-time exhibitor at the Casual Show.

Nourison was a first-time Casual Show exhibitor, and Jeff González, director of furniture store sales, said he was very happy with the decision.

"We were dipping a toe in the water this year, but next year we'll be jumping in," he said. "This is a whole new segment of the home furnishings market, and we saw a lot of outdoor casual furniture store buyers, as well as big box stores, Internet buyers and specialty stores. We didn't make appointments," he said. "It's a 'stop-by' market."

González noted that studies show that the most redecorated rooms now are the bathroom, the kitchen and outdoor spaces. "Homeowners are creating three-season rooms," he said.



Sales agent Greg Poteete in the Trans Ocean display which included a wide range of decorative indoor-outdoor products.

Trans Ocean's exhibit popped with color as the company showed rugs, mats, pillows and other outdoor accessories. Trans Ocean has recently entered a licensing agreement with Brown Jordan, the high end outdoor furniture maker, according to Charles Peck, president of TO. The agreement will translate into further coordination between various product categories, he noted.

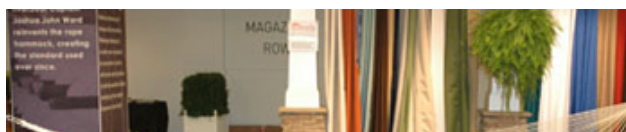
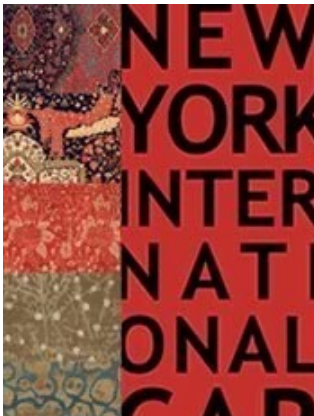
Trans Ocean sells to the patio stores, catalogs and specialty stores at this market. "It's incremental business," Peck said.

Fashion is rapidly influencing outdoor "rooms" and rug makers are moving in that direction, but Trans Ocean with its designer Liora Manné, has been in the forefront with colors, patterns and coordinated accessories.

"We've been known as a fashion-oriented company," said Peck, pointing to Trans Ocean's new lines of conversational fun mats, curtains and pillows, ottomans and floor cushions.

Rug specialists were not the only rug exhibitors at the show. Several other outdoor product makers also showed floor coverings using innovative approaches in both fashion and materials.

One company created a handsome black and tan rug fabricated from recycled rubber bicycle tires.





Sawgrass Mills hammock with coordinating area rug.

Sawgrass Mills, an expanding part of The Hammock Source, displayed a white-on-navy patterned hammock swinging atop a navy rug bordered in the same blue and white pattern. The firm also showed outdoor curtains and pillows.

The International Casual Furniture & Accessories Market is a four-day trade show for all things related to outdoor and casual living. The Casual Market has approximately 250 temporary exhibitors and permanent showrooms, totaling approximately 350,000 sq. ft. in The Chicago Merchandise Mart. Next year's show takes place Tuesday, Sept 17 to Friday, Sept. 20, 2013.

ED NOTE: *Rugnews.com* contributor Pat Terry is a free-lance writer based in Chicago. She is a long-time observer of the floor covering and home furnishings industry.

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