

The Shinola Project

270 Days, 4 Countries, 21 Designs, 277 Rugs

132-India, 97-Afghanistan, 47-Thailand, 1-Nepal

Just four years ago Gachot Studios asked Creative Matters to join with them in the creation of all the rugs for The Shinola Hotel in Detroit. Construction was to start in 2017; the Hotel was to open January 2019

Three years later, Creative Matters had designed, manufactured, delivered and installed 277 rugs for the official opening on January 2nd 2019

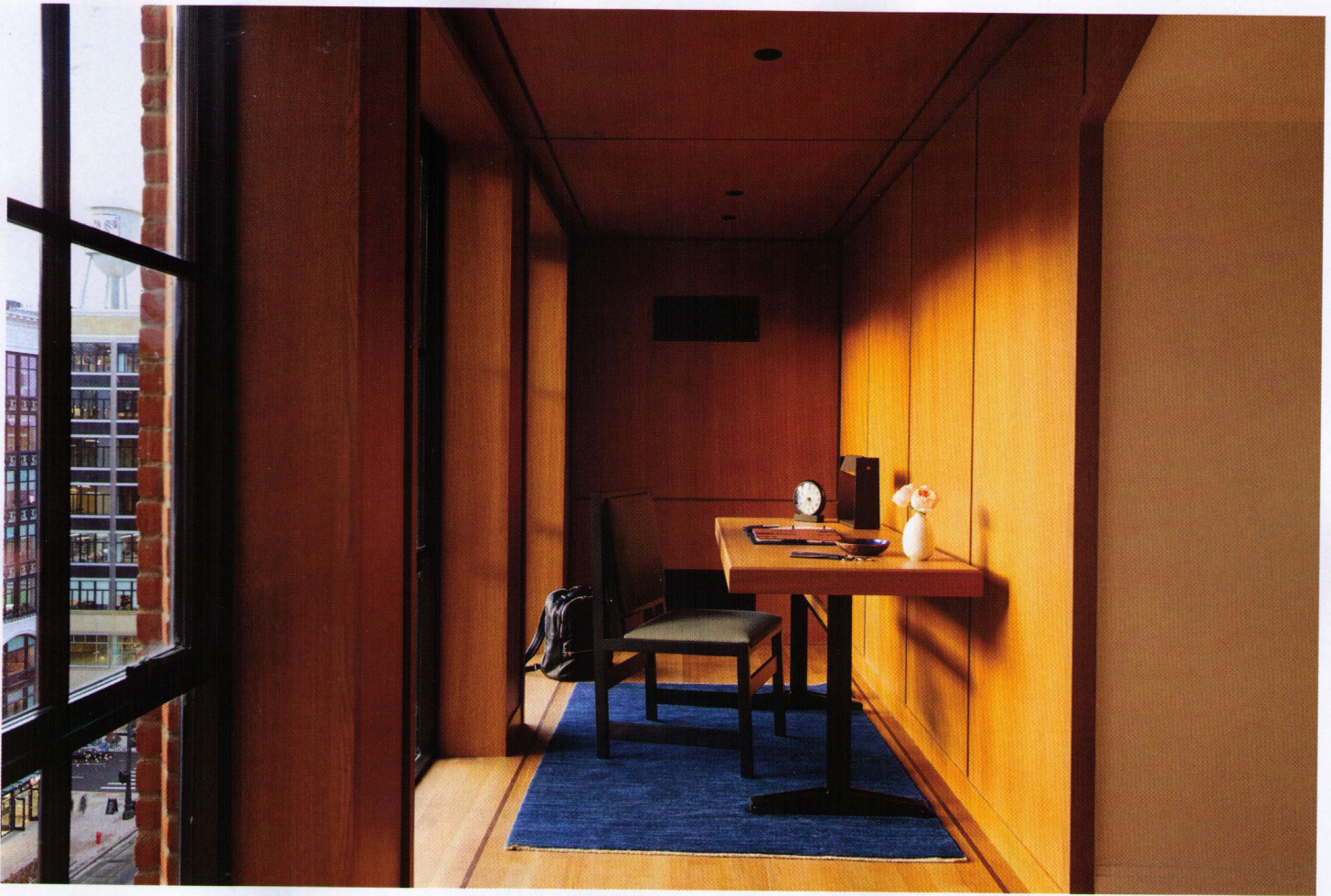
The way to this success will not be told in a “how to” article in a business magazine. For the herculean feat reaches beyond to normal business processes. “It’s what and who we are,” says Ali McMurter, VP and manager of The Shinola Project. “Nurture” is the fundamental operating principal for this all woman company. Visit the web site, listen to Ali McMurter and Carol Seibert, President. When they talk about their company, they say things like, “We acquire a client and then guide and take good care of them;” “We nurture our staff to help maintain and energize their creative enthusiasm

;” “We only use manufacturers who support their workers, because we want ‘rugs made with joy.’” CM is famous for Art Day, when the staff moves outside day-to-day jobs and creates freely with abandon. Sometimes, they blow glass. Once they all went to the beach and made sand sculptures. Often a client is struggling to describe a vision for a rug; the staff pulls an Art Day creation from the file which visualizes the client’s verbal explanation. A common understanding moves the design to fruition.

And so, this active exchange of design concepts is the genesis of The Shinola Project. According to their website, Gachot Studios first began talking to the The Shinola Hotel group in late 2015. Creative Matters and Gachot began planning in the Fall of 2016. The builder wanted The Shinola Hotel to be a living room for Detroit with “a sense of discovery to make guests want to come back for another engagement” The job of translating that vision into floor coverings for the whole hotel was the job of Ali’s team of 4: 3 designers Madeleine Bai-



Ali McMurter working with Designer, Kat Pezzano



Shinola Guest Room – Hand knotted in Afghanistan]

gent, Kayla Bortolotto and Kat Pezzano and Logistics Manager, Julie Baldwin. These ladies actively engaged the Gachot's designers to get a visceral understanding not only of the client's budget flexibility but of how the client hoped the hotel's guests would "see" each room in the hotel. Samples flew back and forth between the manufacturers, Creative Matters and Gachot and their client. Design was collaborative. For instance, the corridor rugs were designed by the Gachot team, but the Creative Matters team translated that design into rugs hand knotted in Afghanistan. During much of this time, the hotel buildings were still in the design stage, so site lines and lighting plans were in flux. Rugs sizes and color palates changed as the building's designs evolved.

Samples and pricing were approved in Spring 2018, and production began immediately to deliver the bulk of the rugs in under 5 months. The project covered rugs to be made with 21 designs in four countries, multiple weave structures, two different types of handloomed rugs from India in the guest rooms, along with hand tufted inset in carpets from Thailand in the corridors and a variety of rug types for the public areas and event spaces, including some from Afghanistan, one hand knotted rug from Nepal by the fireplace, several handloomed pieces from India throughout, and hand tufted carpeting from Thailand on the stairs.

The investment of about 18 month's labor by both, Gachot and Creative Matters, before production began in March of 2018, speaks volumes

Shinola Corridor – Hand tufted in Thailand





Shinola Living Room – Hand knotted in Afghanistan]

assured quality products without risking his or her life traveling to remote villages in exceptionally unfriendly territory. Turquoise Mountain with the help of Label STEP does it for them. Turquoise Mountain is a NGO Founded in 2006 by HRH The Prince of Wales, focusing on the sustainable development of the Afghan crafts industry.

During Domotex 2016, Reto Aschwanden of Label STEP introduced Ali McMurter and Carol Sebert to Bulent Ozozan of Turquoise Mountain. Bulent had developed the handwoven rug business for them in Afghanistan. With years of experience, first with Woven Legends and more recently (2011-2014) with the US D.O.D Afghanistan project, Bulent spoke convincingly of the expertise of his weavers. CM immediately placed a few orders with Turquoise Mountain. The results were impressive and inspiring. Subsequently, Creative Matters committed the production of 97 rugs in Afghanistan.

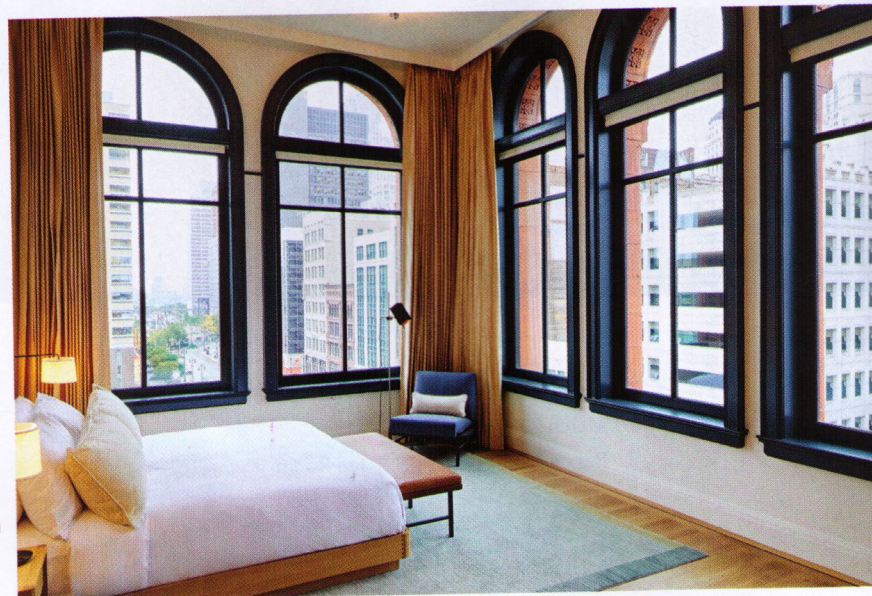
In March 2018, the final order was sent to Turquoise Mountain. Four months later, the guest room rugs with two designs were finished and shipped for installation in late summer. The corridor rugs followed in early fall, and the final public rooms of 10 different designs were received in November and December. Ali credits Julie Baldwin, Logistics Manager, for arranging to fly the last rugs from Kabul directly to Detroit just in time for the January 2nd official opening of The Shinola Hotel.

Coincidentally as The Shinola Project unfolded, The World Bank was working with Turquoise Mountain and Label STEP on a pilot project for women empowerment in

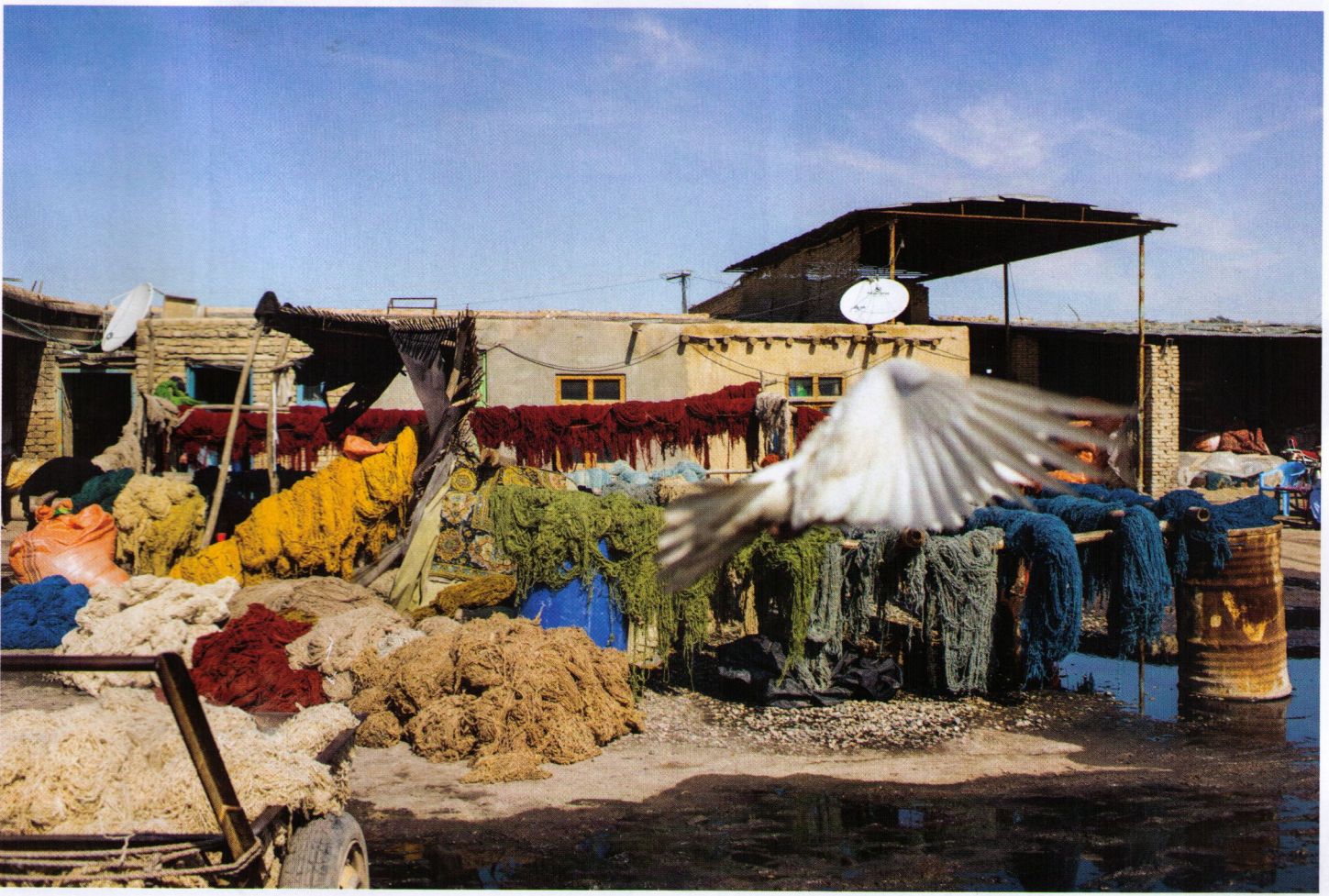
to the trust built up over years of a nurtured relationship with each other and with suppliers. Creative Matters was working with suppliers from Thailand, as well as India and Nepal, where CM has a close relationship with Label STEP. Carol Sebert requires that all the sources used are certified by Label STEP, a Swiss NGO, which regularly inspects working conditions.

A Large Part of the order goes to War-Torn Afghanistan
35% of the order (97 rugs) went to a new source, Afghanistan, hardly the most stable of environments to produce a critical component of a major job.

Afghanistan production was made possible by two organizations working together to open access commercially to highly skilled artisans: Turquoise Mountain and Label STEP. Because of these organizations, today a buyer is



Shinola Guest Room Hand knotted in Afghanistan



the carpet value chain. The goal was to provide income-generating opportunities for women by increasing the quantity and quality of high-value, fair trade-certified, women-produced carpets exported directly from Afghanistan to international markets. Two factories were located in Aqcha City, Jawzjan Province which is predominantly Turkmen and almost all weavers are Turkmen. The other two locations were in Mazar-e-Sharif City, Balkh province. The majority of the Shinola Project rugs were woven at the Kerke factory in Aqcha City.

Over the life of the pilot, the Technical Support team visited each of the 4 supported producer companies 17 times providing support in wool spinning, dyeing, weaving, washing, and finishing. Bulent and the Carpet Program Manager, Yama Noory were focused on the

The majority of The Shinola rugs were woven in Aqcha, the Bahdoih of Afghanistan. Turquoise Mountain, Photograph by Andrew Quilt

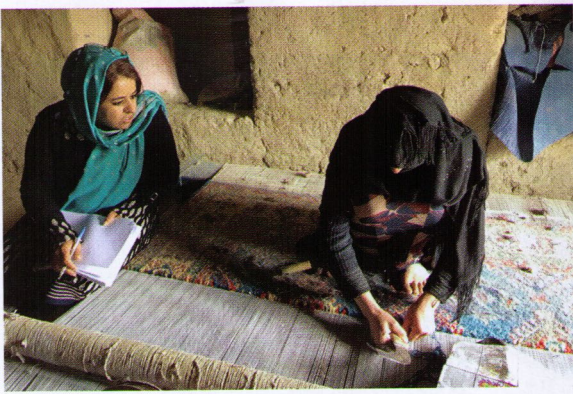
management of the quality control for custom ordered carpets and general guidance and training. The World Bank money was spent for all administrative work, technical support to the producing companies and building programs to increase the weaving capacity, as well as participation at exhibitions and Label STEP activities.

Both Label STEP and Turquoise Mountain use Auditors check the quality and progress of the jobs and the working conditions. The LabelSTEP auditors check the conditions of the work sites: no child labor, adequate lighting and security. Because men cannot go into the spaces where the women weave, at least one auditor is a woman. Between the two organizations, the work sites are visited about once a week. Retro says the Label STEP auditors not only inspect but function as friendly social workers. For instance, they show the women how to manage their newly made cash; they teach the women about basic healthcare and even give back massages as a sore back is a work-related hazard.

The auditors are part of the community; they either live in the villages or nearby in Mazar-e-Sharif City. Even when the regions are unstable, there is still constant oversight of the various projects. The Internet enables the communication structure of local auditors and managers with uninterrupted communication back and forth between the design teams in companies such as Creative Matters and Kabul, Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif, Mazar-e-Sharif to the villages, with unstable political conditions.

Weaving in Aqcha; Turquoise Mountain





Because of Label STEP, Turquoise Mountain, and KCEC (Kabul Carpets Export Council), a third organization funded by US AID, international markets now have access to a new source of skilled weavers in dangerous and remote areas. Bulent says Turquoise Mountain has approximately 5000 women weavers plus the support labor, spinning, dying and finishing, working for approximately 60 customers worldwide.

As Ali wrote. "Turquoise Mountain is quite selective about the production teams they work with, which makes a huge difference. Their oversight means that we can rest assured the work is in good hands. This means we can access highly skilled craftspeople that we normally be connected with, given the unstable political conditions in Afghanistan." ❧

Left to Right:

Label STEP auditor at work in Kapcha
 Health Check by Label STEP auditor
 Final Double Check Order for Shinola guest room rug July,
 2018. Turquoise Mountain; Photograph by Andrew Quilty

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G.A. GERTMENIAN & SONS
 300 WEST AVENUE 33
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TELEPHONE
 213-250-7777
 800-874-1236

FAX
 213-250-7776