

Empire of the Senses

A new collection of handmade custom carpeting conjures a whole state of visual and tactile bliss.

text by Peter Webster

Aronson's Floor Covering, the 150-year-old New York City-based flooring specialist, is launching a portfolio of handmade custom rugs as luxurious to the touch as they are luscious to the eye. Although the Empire Collection is named for its home state, the tufted or flatwoven rugs are actually made in Europe by artisans using traditional carpetmaking techniques and natural fibers such as wool, linen, alpaca, jute and tencel. If that sounds like a painfully slow process, think again: The company is able to deliver its made-to-order carpeting in six to eight weeks, an astonishingly short time for a high-quality, bespoke product.

"The inaugural Empire portfolio, which will be introduced in May at ICFF, comprises 19 groupings of neutrals and patterns named after specific locations in New York City," says Carol Swedlow, Aronson's owner and president. "The collection is all about color and texture. We worked with veteran textile designer Kristie Strasen to create a wide-ranging palette that's fresh and modern but also rich and subtle. It's extraordinary how classic carpetmaking methods and materials can produce such contemporary looking rugs, which we think of as the 'new basics.'"

Among Empire Collection standouts is Bedford, a serene and gently textured neutral, hand woven with 100-percent undyed alpaca yarns from the Andes. This hypoallergenic natural fiber lends the weave exceptional softness and a quiet aura of artisanal authenticity. "Those qualities, along with a choice of eight earth tones, make Bedford ideal as an area rug," Swedlow notes.

Lexington, made of hand-tufted tencel fibers in a plush, cut-pile construction, is another attention grabber that can be used as an area rug or wall-to-wall carpeting. "Tencel is a silky, natural material made from wood pulp," Swedlow explains. "It gives Lexington a luxuriantly soft texture and a faintly shimmery appearance." The palette of 18 colors runs the gamut from elegantly restrained Silver Grey to glamorously intense Indigo.

If you're looking for something slightly more rustic, Beekman might do the trick. Hand woven wool fibers threaded through a jute warp give a characterful texture and surprising durability to this charmingly unaffected pattern. The 21-color palette is almost infinitely customizable while the weave can be backed with latex, making it suitable for either wall-to-wall or area-rug installations. As is Leroy, hand-tufted felted wool and tencel carpeting in a loop-and-cut ribbed construction that's soft to the touch, pleasing to the eye, and durable underfoot. "You could say the same thing about the entire Empire Collection," Swedlow adds with justified pride.

For more information, please visit empirecollectionrugs.com.



Clockwise: Leroy, Bedford, Beekman, Lexington

