

Caring for Your Navajo Textile

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Moths

Moths, crickets, and carpet beetles can quickly render a major investment worthless. The treatment of Navajo rugs to prevent moth damage is a matter of some debate, even among experts.

Inspecting and vacuuming your rug every month or so is perhaps the best preventative measure, and should largely eliminate moths and their eggs.

One recommended procedure to treat infestation is to freeze the rug. Wrap the rug carefully in plastic to prevent damage from condensation, place it in a chest freezer that is capable of going down to -18°C (-64°F), and leave it for at least 24 hours. This procedure will kill moths, but it may not kill their eggs. Because the normal hatching period for moth eggs is about 18-20 days, repeat the procedure about 25 days after the initial treatment.

Mothballs or crystals (paradichlorobenzene, or PDB) are sometimes suggested as a treatment for infestation. However, this can result in

lessening the lanolin content in the textile, and there is a danger of oversaturating the rug with PDB vapor that can recrystallize on the textile.

Dry-cleaning will kill a moth infestation, but the treatment outlined above (nonchemical intervention) is far safer. Any chemical treatment of rugs can potentially result in deterioration of the fibers over a period of time.

Light

Sunlight is a major factor in the deterioration of Navajo rugs. Direct light will quickly fade the color of the rug and damage the rug fibers. Keep textiles away from direct sunlight, spotlights, and other sources of direct illumination. Even displayed in indirect sunlight, the colors will fade to some degree. To ensure that the fading is uniform, rotate and turn the rug over on a regular basis. Regularly rotating and vacuuming also provides the opportunity for careful inspection of possible insect infestation.

Display

If you intend to use your textile as a floor rug, you should use a padding. Carpet cushion or natural rubber pads are recommended rather than a petroleum-based carpet padding, which can discolor the rug. Rotate the rug regularly so that it wears evenly.

Most textiles purchased today are hung rather than placed on the floor. This minimizes the potential for staining and wear that can occur even if carpet padding is used. Hanging also reduces the possibility of damage from pets.

Never use nails or thumbtacks to hang a rug as they offer no support and can damage the rug fibers. The recommended procedure is to use Velcro. Velcro is available in two inch widths that offer more support than the thinner widths. Since Velcro has adhesive backing, if the backing is stuck directly onto a painted wall, the paint will peel when the Velcro is removed.

Instead, nail a thin board to the wall and attach the adhesive backing to the board. The rug

will adhere to the “hooked” side of the Velcro and can be easily removed and remounted when vacuuming and rotating the rug.

Cleaning

Never wash, steam clean or iron a Navajo rug. Some rugs will have fold marks when purchased, but these will come out naturally over a period of time after they are mounted or allowed to lie flat. Do not allow your rug to get wet.

Never shake a rug to clean it as the whip action can break the fibers. Rugs should be lightly vacuumed on a regular basis. The recommended method is to place a piece of gauze or screen (nylon or fiberglass) over the nozzle to reduce the suction and prevent possible structural damage to the weave.

Rugs should only be dry-cleaned in an emergency, such as if they become stained. Be sure to find a dry cleaner that has experience cleaning Navajo textiles.

Storage

If you own rugs that require storage, be sure that the rugs are rolled rather than folded. Rugs should be rolled in the direction of the warp threads (top to bottom, not side to side). Acid free tissue paper or washed, unbleached muslin should be used to interleave the textile during the rolling process.

Place the rolled textiles in a sealed chest. If you use mothballs or crystals, wrap them in cotton cloth or sock. Continue to inspect your rugs regularly for infestation.

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