



THE PERSIAN CARPET BUYER'S CHECKLIST

A Practical Guide to Identifying Authentic Hand-Knotted Treasures

QUICK AUTHENTICATION CHECKLIST

USE THIS GUIDE WHEN EXAMINING ANY CARPET AT ESTATE SALES, AUCTIONS, OR ANTIQUE DEALERS.

THE BACK TEST

What to look for:

- Turn the carpet over completely
- Pattern should be visible on the reverse side
- Individual knots should be visible and feel textured to the touch
- Machine-made carpets have smooth backs with printed patterns

THE FRINGE TEST

- Authentic: Fringe is a natural continuation of the warp threads (grown from the carpet)
- Fake: Fringe is sewn on separately (you can see stitching)

MATERIAL AUTHENTICITY

WOOL TEST

- Feel: Warm, soft, slightly irregular texture
- Smell: Natural, earthy scent
- Burn test (if permitted): Smells like burnt hair, crumbles to ash
- Synthetic burns with chemical smell and melts to plastic

SILK TEST (FOR FINER PIECES)

- Genuine silk shimmers differently depending on light angle
- Mercerised cotton (fake silk) has uniform shine
- Silk feels cooler to the touch than wool



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KNOT DENSITY

How to measure:

- Count knots in a 1×1 inch square (use a ruler)
- 120+ KPSI = likely valuable
- 400+ KPSI = very fine (Isfahan, Qom quality)

Remember:

Lower knot count doesn't always mean lower value—tribal rugs with 80-200 KPSI can be extremely valuable due to age and rarity.

NATURAL DYES CHECK

Look for Abrash (colour variations):

- Natural dyes: Subtle tonal shifts within the same colour
- Chemical dyes: Suspiciously uniform colour
- Natural dyes deepen with age; chemical dyes fade harshly

Dye Bleeding Test:

- Press damp white cloth on carpet
- Natural dyes: Minimal to no bleeding
- Chemical dyes: Colour often runs

REGIONAL SIGNATURE

Does the design match known regional patterns?

- **Isfahan:** Precise floral medallions, often with silk
- **Qom:** Religious/garden motifs, highest knot density
- **Tabriz:** Herati patterns, wool/silk mix, urban sophistication
- **Tribal** (Qashqai, Bakhtiari): Bold geometric designs, saturated colours



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QUESTIONS TO ASK SELLERS

Before purchasing, always ask:

Essential Questions:

- "Is this hand-knotted?"
- If seller says "I think so" → probably not authentic
- "Do you have any provenance?"
- Receipts from dealers
- Historical photographs
- Family documentation
- Previous auction records
- "Has it been restored?"
- Not a dealbreaker, but affects price
- Ask: Who did the restoration? When?
- "Where did this carpet come from originally?"
- Family heirloom vs. dealer purchase
- Region of origin (if known)
- "May I examine the back?"
- If seller refuses: **WALK AWAY**
- This is a major red flag



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RED FLAGS TO AVOID

✗ Too Perfect

Genuine antiques should show *some* wear, even if minimal. Perfect symmetry and condition in an "antique" is suspicious.

✗ Chemical Smell

Strong synthetic or chemical odour indicates artificial dyes and materials.

✗ Sewn-On Fringe

Immediate disqualification. Authentic fringe is part of the carpet structure.

✗ Overly Aggressive Sales Tactics

Quality carpets speak for themselves. Pushy sellers about "investment potential" are suspect.

✗ Price Too Good to Be True

€500 for a "17th-century Isfahan"? It's either fake, stolen, or the seller doesn't know what they have (rare but possible at true estate sales).

✗ Refusal to Allow Close Examination

You should be able to touch, flip, and examine any carpet thoroughly before purchase.



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VALUE INDICATORS

Age Hierarchy:

- Pre-1900: Investment territory, highest value
- 1900-1950: Golden decorative era, good quality
- Post-1950: Variable quality, check carefully

Condition Guidelines:

- "The earlier the rug, the more wear is acceptable. Collectors place more importance on rarity and artistic merit than perfect condition."*
— Louise Broadhurst, Christie's Oriental Rugs & Carpets

Good Wear:

- Even fading across design
- Soft pile with stable structure
- Natural patina

Problematic Damage:

- Holes or tears
- Harsh staining
- Weak foundation
- Clumsy, visible repairs
- Excessive chemical washing

Provenance Adds Value:

- Documented purchase from reputable dealer
- Historical family photographs
- Auction house records
- Previous museum loans
- Noble or significant collection history



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PRICE RANGES (APPROXIMATE)

Use these as rough guidelines only—many factors affect value:

Museum-Quality (Court Carpets):

Isfahan, Qom, Kashan (especially pre-1800)

€50,000 – €2,000,000+

High Collectible:

19th-century Heriz, Tabriz, Kerman, fine tribal pieces

€10,000 – €100,000

Decorative Quality:

Village rugs, commercial pieces (1900-1950)

€1,000 – €20,000

Estate Sale Finds:

- Vary wildly: €500 – €5,000 (depending on knowledge gap)

TRUSTED RESOURCES

For Authentication & Appraisal:

Contact specialists at established auction houses:

- Christie's Oriental Rugs & Carpets: Louise Broadhurst,
lbroadhurst@christies.com
- Sotheby's Rugs & Carpets Department: London & New York

Dealers (Vetted):

See full list of recommended antique Persian carpet dealers at:

www.mariavonmaltzahn.com/persian-carpets-dealers

- **(Always obtain multiple opinions before major purchases)**



QUICK AUTHENTICATION CHECKLIST

CARE & PRESERVATION BASICS

Daily Care:

- Rotate carpet every 6-12 months (ensures even wear)
- Vacuum with LOW suction only
- Never vacuum the fringe
- Work WITH pile direction, not against it
- Avoid direct sunlight (use curtains or UV-protective film)

Professional Maintenance:

- Professional cleaning every 3-5 years (not more frequently)
- Hand-washing with pH-neutral soap ONLY
- Never steam cleaning (damages foundation)
- Use specialists who regularly handle antique Persians

Moth Protection:

- Natural repellents: Cedar blocks, lavender sachets
- Avoid mothballs (cause chemical damage)
- Check stored carpets regularly (every 6 months)

Storage (if needed):

- ROLL, never fold (folding breaks foundation)
- Wrap in acid-free paper or cotton sheets
- Never wrap in plastic (traps moisture)
- Store in climate-controlled, dry space
- Store flat or rolled vertically



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WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Appraisers (Independent):

Use for:

- Insurance valuations
- Estate divisions
- Charitable donation documentation
- Cost: €150 – €500 (flat rate or hourly)
- Advantage: No conflict of interest (not buying your carpet)

Restoration Specialists:

Consider when:

- Carpet value exceeds €10,000
- Strong sentimental family attachment
- Structural damage (holes, tears, weak foundation)

Skip restoration if:

- Decorative piece under €2,000
- Restoration cost exceeds 50% of carpet value
 - - Over-restoration risks destroying nat

FINAL REMINDER

“Every carpet tells a story, but it has two sides. The genetic fingerprint is on the back. That's where we see how it's really made.”

— Louise Broadhurst, Director, Christie's Oriental Rugs & Carpets

The finest Persian carpets aren't bought—they're “recognised”.