



Oushak, Circa 1880

Ref: 21404

Size: 12' 6" x 18'

Content: Wool

Collection: Antique

Hand-knotted in Anatolia

Oushak Carpet, 12'6" x 18', Oushak, Turkey, late nineteenth century

Room-size Oushak carpets like this are the proud heirs to a long tradition of western Turkish or Anatolian rug weaving. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Oushak was a major center for the production of large-scale palace carpets for the Ottoman dynasty, although production of the closely related large-scale palatial 'Smyrna' carpets of the eighteenth century shifted further west to Izmir. As court productions, the large-scale palatial Oushak carpets reflected a more sophisticated urban design derived from contemporary Safavid Persian court carpets. In the nineteenth century when the western demand for Oriental carpets began to accelerate, Oushak once again emerged as a major center that could satisfy the European and American requirement for luxurious room-sized rugs. But to meet this more widespread demand, production in the nineteenth century now had to expand to the various villages surrounding Oushak, involving weavers who were more accustomed to the production of traditional smaller village rugs. So while nineteenth century Oushak weavers still strove to emulate the design sensibility of Persian and court rugs, just as their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forebears had done, they now introduced a bolder, freer and more lively village design sensibility into the production. This also involved the use of all wool foundations for the carpets, in contrast to the cotton foundations typical of Persian court carpets. All these elements combine to give Oushak carpets a unique excitement and supple handle that no room sized Persian rug can achieve.

The present example is quite extraordinary in a number of ways. It is clearly inspired by the classical Persian mina khani or trellis design – an array of lozenge or diamond-shaped vines spread out as a diagonally oriented network overlaid by various floral 'palmette' forms. But on Persian carpets with this design, the trellis itself is small in scale, emerging primarily in the spaces intervening between the larger, more dominant palmette forms. In contrast, the Oushak weavers have greatly increased the scale of the trellis itself, making it the primary design element, with the smaller palmettes distributed along the trellis as well as within the various lozenges. And in a stroke of sheer inspiration, the remaining space is further embellished with delicate stylized branching trees or shrubs derived from Persian garden carpets. The main border utilizes palmettes and shrubs like those in the field, but simply repeating them in alternation without the mina khani trellis. Yet by contrasting the burnt orange field of the main border with the soft creamy ivory of the field, we scarcely notice that it is made up of similar elements differently arranged. A particularly unusual feature of the main border is its use of small arch-like niches that expand outward into the minor borders at intervals, infusing the composition with an unexpected dynamism. The rich warmth of the autumnal palette of orange, gold and moss green is made all the more effective by the luminous Angora wool. An exceptional Oushak to be sure.