

# HALI

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ANDEAN TEXTILES  
RAGS RUGS OF  
MOROCCO  
AMISH QUILTS AT  
THE DE YOUNG  
MUSEUM

SAFAVID CARPETS AT  
THE LOS ANGELES  
COUNTY MUSEUM  
OF ART  
CAMEROONIAN  
BEADED APRONS

BAHLULI BALUCH  
RUGS DEFINED  
A POSTCARD FROM  
UZBEKISTAN  
AFRICAN TEXTILES IN  
BASEL

THE RUGS OF  
FRANCIS BACON

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# SECRETS FROM THE THE VAULT

NUNZIO CRISA

In a welcome public return as an exhibitor of antique collectable oriental carpets, Milan's Alberto Levi, never one to miss a marketing opportunity, has inaugurated an atmospheric new display space in the ancient vaults beneath his via San Maurilio gallery.

MILAN CURRENTLY ENJOYS an unrivalled status at the centre of the European rug and textile scene, as witnessed by reports elsewhere in this issue. One welcome addition to the mix has been provided by Alberto Levi, known to many in the rug world as a peripatetic dealer, regular fair exhibitor, HALI contributing editor and player in the contemporary design rug market, who has just hosted his first major exhibition devoted to antique textile art in six years.

"This is not a U-turn", he tells me, "the contemporary carpets to which much of the window display space is given over are hugely popular and are easy to fit into 'minimal' interiors. I've worked hard to establish myself in this particular market, and have no intention of leaving it. But for me, antique rugs are a deep passion, and passion makes you feel alive! So I decided to open my vaults to those who share my enthusiasm."

The vaults to which he is referring are not where he stores his latest acquisitions but, literally, the 'vaults' in the undercroft beneath his via San Maurilio showroom. Some 2,300 years ago, after an unsuccessful military alliance with the great Carthaginian general Hannibal, Milan fell under the rule of Rome and became a wealthy trading centre, where rich merchants built their houses around the Circus and the Thermae Erculee in an area slightly southwest of the Duomo. A few of these buildings still survive, with many of their lower levels and basements providing the foundations for later houses.

The Alberto Levi Gallery is such a place, and

1 The vaults at the Alberto Levi Gallery in Milan, showing antique Turkish, Persian and Tibetan rugs

2 Bijov design Kuba (Zeikhur) rug, northeast Caucasus, 19th century



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the shop's basement reveals a sequence of vaulted rooms which might once have been a cistern that renovations have turned into a permanent showroom for antique textile art. The resulting area is a sort of *salon privée*, where art lovers can relax and quietly enjoy what is on display.

Levi's opening exhibition, 'From the Vault', included just under forty exemplary antique rugs, all of which were more than simply good examples of type. Among them was a very old and interesting Bijov design Kuba rug, quite coarsely woven, that might be a rare pre-commercial or pre-*kustar* period piece, an intriguing Afshar long rug with a stylised representation of the *gol farang* pattern, attributed by Levi to the Sirjan area of southeast Iran, a lovely yellow ground *Çal yatak* with carnations and a, dare-I-say, 'unique' northwest Persian carpet with animals and palmettes that shares design elements with a number of carpets considered to be from the early 19th century that show the residue of 18th century classical Persian traditions.

Happily the vaults also provide a venue for one of Levi's other passions – music. At one end of them is a dedicated 'music room' where he plays his jazz drums in jamming sessions with friends. Oh, the well-kept secrets of Milan!

## 'FROM THE VAULT'

Alberto Levi Gallery  
Via San Maurilio 24  
20123 Milan

[www.albertolevi.com](http://www.albertolevi.com)

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