

# Dream Weaver

Design sensation Sylvie Johnson works with Merida to bring rugmaking to a whole new level of excellence. BY ROBERT KIENER

As she sits in her Paris studio, surrounded by shelves of books, piles of textiles, and strands—and more strands—of colorful yarn, noted weaver and designer Sylvie Johnson smiles when asked where she finds the inspiration for the textile and rug designs for which she has become renowned. “Everything begins with the yarn,” she explains. She picks up a handful and adds, “Yarn has a way of telling you what it wants to be. You just have to listen.”

Johnson’s ability to listen, and the innovative designs that result, have earned her international acclaim as well as the role of creative director for Merida, the Fall River, Massachusetts based textile manufacturer. “I am thrilled to be working with Merida’s talented craftspeople,” she says. “We speak the same artistic language, so ours is a true collaboration. They create a real magic.”

Johnson, who has already produced several collections for the firm, describes her work for Merida as inspired by the “less is more” school of design. “I find that it’s possible to produce striking, elegant work by keeping design simple,” she says. “You don’t need to be elaborate.” Merida has dubbed some of her work, “An ode to minimalism.”



To help decide on yarn composition, twists, and blends, designer Sylvie Johnson compares a sample strand to the yarns in her recently created collection for Merida at the firm’s Fall River, Massachusetts, headquarters.

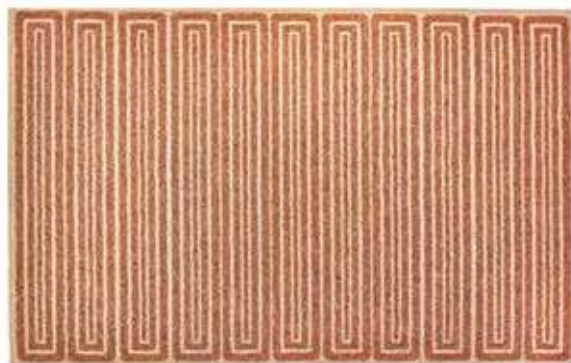
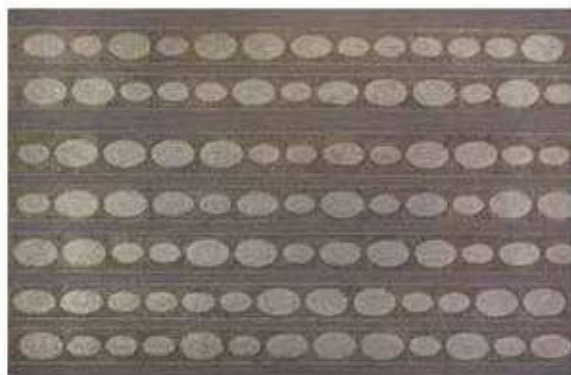




CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Stages of creation include Johnson and a staffer inspecting a work in progress; a Merida craftsperson finishing a tufted design; large pieces being "seamed" together; and a sample piece being serged, or finished.



*"IT'S POSSIBLE TO PRODUCE STRIKING, ELEGANT WORK BY KEEPING DESIGN SIMPLE," SAYS SYLVIE JOHNSON.*



LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Rugs from the Verbena line in the 2019 Atelier collection, inspired by the desert plant that blossoms in rock or sand, in Pebble, Natural, and Jasper Parchment. RIGHT: The yarns used for the collection feature the earthy colors found in natural wonders from the Sahara to Colorado's Uinta Basin.



No matter how simple the design, however, depth is a constant, and Johnson says she hopes viewers will look deeper to see how she has been inspired by architecture, nature, archeology, and even music. Among her 2019 Atelier collection for Merida are rugs with names like Verbena and Mesa in colors such as Pebble and Saffron, reflecting the influences of the natural world on her design sense. A previous collec-

tion includes a rug called Saga inspired by Chopin's music. "I love the way the design catches the light and is joyful, much like his music," she says.

A rug, Johnson says, is so much more than a floor covering or decorative accent. "Textiles are the first art, older than painting or sculpture," she says. "A rug can be a piece of art. It can have a soul."

Merida, Fall River, Mass., [meridastudio.com](http://meridastudio.com)