

Porfirio Gutierrez and Juana Gutierrez Contreras | Mexico | Rugs

Natural ways and innovative ideas

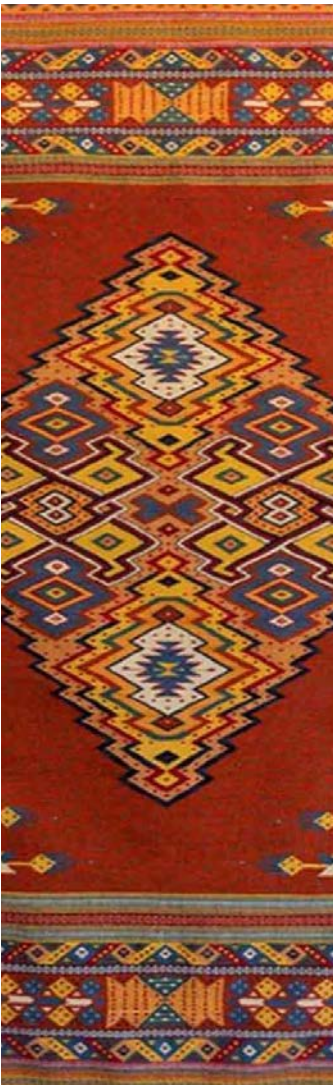


Master weaver Porfirio Gutierrez and natural dyer Juana Gutierrez Contreras don't just make art, they also work to preserve the ancient traditions of their Zapotec background. According to a recent profile of the Gutierrez atelier in The New York Times, "Mr. Gutierrez is descended from a long line of weavers. His father taught him to weave as a child; he even wove the backpack he took to school." Raised in the mountainous village of Teotitlan del Valle, Porfirio and Juana learned as children which plants to gather to create the best dyes.

Their focus on using sustainable, regionally sourced materials continues today, and they have urged both fellow weavers and consumers to seek out natural dyes and naturally dyed fabrics whenever possible. Synthetic dyes are affordable and ready-made, but cheap chemical dyes not only produce inferior colors, they also prevent artists from maintaining centuries-old traditions of gathering dye materials themselves, and learning the highly specialized process of

creating colors for their weavings. This is the impetus behind the Gutierrez family's goal of preserving natural dyes and correspondingly, preserving traditions, in their homeland.

Porfirio's use of ancient art-making methods is something of a counterpart to the fiercely innovative approach he uses when incorporating new designs into his creative repertoire. He has achieved international acclaim for his modern interpretation of traditional Zapotec designs, and his work is held in numerous private and public collections, including in the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Ventura County in California.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ARTIST