

## Teacher's Background Sheet: Basic Carpet Terms

Carpets are all about **field**, **pattern** and **borders**. "Field" is the dominant background color. "Pattern" is the repetitive, ordered arrangement of decorative images or symbols on the field. "Borders" are the decorative strips encasing both field and pattern (Adapted from www: Verde 2010).

The most common carpet design format is a central field enclosed by a **border** of patterned stripes alternating with narrow bands of solid colors. Carpet **borders** generally have three or more patterned bands. The widest is called the **main stripe** and those flanking it **minor stripes**. The narrow bands of solid color that usually separate the main and minor stripes are known as **guards** (www: Ittig 1990).

**Design:** The overall composition of decorative elements on a carpet.

**Motif:** The simplest elements in a design, frequently combined into more complex units.

**Pattern:** Combinations and sequences of motifs.

### Five Videos on Carpet Making

["Basic Carpet Structure"](#) / ["Warp, Weft, and Knots"](#) / ["Counting Symmetrical Knots"](#)  
["Counting Asymmetrical Knots"](#) / ["Oriental Carpets: Carpet Edges"](#)

Victoria and Albert Museum  
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/>

## Motifs

Most of these terms are illustrated in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* article this glossary is based on (url at bottom of page two). The Textile Museum in Washington, DC, publishes a more general textile glossary:

<<http://www.textilemuseum.org/PDFs/TextileTerms.pdf>>

**Medallion:** An ornament, usually curvilinear, that occurs frequently as the central motif in the field design. The most common variants are **ogival** [a pointed arch shape], **circular**, **shield-shaped**, and **rhomboid**. The edges are generally lobed or stepped.

**Cartouche:** An elongated ogival compartment. When used in a border pattern, a single cartouche form may be repeated, or two variant forms may alternate. Inscriptions are generally framed in cartouches.

**Arabesque (vegetal pattern):** A stylized vegetal scroll with bifurcated leaves. In border patterns arabesques can occur in continuous scrolls, contiguous pairs, or alternately reversed contiguous pairs.

**Bota** (“bush, shrub”): Resembles a leaf with a curved tip. It is familiar in the West as the “pear” or “teardrop” motif of paisley shawls.

**Palmette:** A stylized fan-shaped motif somewhat resembling a lotus flower in section. In the most frequent type of palmette border the motif faces alternately inward and outward and is flanked by arabesques.

**Rosette:** Resembles a fully opened rose seen from above.

**Sickle leaf:** A long, curved leaf with a serrated concave edge.

**Cloud band:** An extended ribbon-like motif ultimately derived from Chinese art.

### **Design Formats**

**Directional design:** Coherent when viewed from a single vantage point. Examples include pictorial, prayer-niche, and naturalistic vegetal designs.

**Non-directional designs:** Coherent when viewed from any angle. Examples include radial designs and abstract repeat patterns.

**Centralized designs:** Balanced longitudinally and transversely around a central element, usually a medallion.

**Medallion-and-corner:** A medallion in the center of the field and a quarter-medallion in each corner.

**Lattice designs:** Linear motifs intersecting to form an overall grid, or lattice. Two, three, or more lattice systems may be superimposed so that their components cross at regular intervals.

**Multiple-medallion designs.** The field is dominated by rows of medallions, either linked or overlapping. They may be arranged either directionally or non-directionally.

Adapted from:

Ittig, Annette. “CARPETS iv. Knotted-pile carpets: Designs, motifs, and patterns.”  
*Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1990.

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/carpets-iv>