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STRICTLY DECO

*Designer Catherine Martin's latest collections draw on her dramatic Art Deco designs for the upcoming feature film *The Great Gatsby*.*

Catherine Martin with her 'Night Bird' rug in the ballroom at Iona, the Sydney home she shares with director Baz Luhrmann. In the background is her 'Cockatoo' wallpaper.

Samples of Martin's new fabrics for textiles company Mokum are strewn on a chair in the ballroom. In the foreground are swatches from the Deco collection for Designer Rugs. **Opposite, from top:** 'Garden Party' is the softest in colour of Martin's five new hand-knotted designs; in the film, Gatsby's bedroom features an over-scaled version of the 'Westchester' rug; the centrepiece of the Buchanans' dining room is a re-coloured oval version of Martin's 'Night Bird'; 'Black Pearl' underwent a transformation in colour and shape to suit the Buchanan salon.



“‘Westchester’ was blown up to fit the scale of Gatsby’s bedroom, then bought as a birthday present for leading man Leonardo DiCaprio”

PHOTOGRAPHS: HUGH STEWART, DANIEL SMITH (GATSBY'S BEDROOM), OTHER IMAGES COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES AND DESIGNER RUGS. PRODUCER: ALEXANDRA GORDON

CELEBRATED PRODUCTION AND costume designer Catherine Martin is having an Art Deco moment. The driving force behind the look and feel of movie successes such as *Strictly Ballroom*, *Romeo + Juliet*, *Moulin Rouge* and *Australia*, and instrumental in conjuring their timeless visual appeal, she has been ensconced in her husband Baz Luhrmann's greatly anticipated remake of *The Great Gatsby* for more than a year. "I have always been attracted to the period. It was the birth of the modern aesthetic," explains Martin of the decorative style that has inspired Deco, her latest rug collection for Designer Rugs, as well as an upcoming textiles and wallpaper range for Mokum.

The Deco rug collection is her first foray into hand-knotting and combining Tibetan wool and silk. "My first collection was very much about translating patterns into a rug and now, as I've become more sophisticated in the medium, I'm interested in the subtlety and the difference you can get from all the available techniques," she says.

Hand-knotting has allowed the expression of more intricate designs with gentle carving and a thinner profile. As they are hand-knotted rather than hand-tufted, each edition of the designs will vary slightly. "It adds something; another dimension," says Martin. "Another hand has been on it."

Rugs which feature in *The Great Gatsby* were designed before work on the film commenced. "Knowing the film was possibly in the pipeline did make me think about where my interests lay," she says. The range is customisable, and the film illustrates this perfectly, with 'Westchester', 'Black Pearl' and 'Night Bird' all appearing with changes in colour and scale. "It was like working with a very exigent client who wanted very specific storytelling out of the rug," says Martin. "Baz loved the 'Black Pearl' design but wanted it for the Buchanan salon. In the book, the salon is the colour of red wine and the curtains make a shadow over the rug, so Baz was very specific." 'Westchester' was blown up to fit the scale of Gatsby's bedroom, then bought as a birthday present for leading man Leonardo DiCaprio because he liked it so much.

While her first fabric collection for Mokum revisits some of Martin's earlier wallpaper designs, the second, due to launch next year, will be in sync with the rugs. "I'm always looking for ways to spread my wings creatively and Mokum is such a great company to work with," she says. While the Deco rugs are more high-end, Martin hopes the fabrics and wallpapers will be desirable yet useable and reasonably priced. "I want to make really beautiful things that are aspirational but affordable. We all live busy lives where things get spilt and need to be washed," says Martin of the collection that ranges from a two-tone damask to an exquisite embroidered linen.

Whether Martin herself could live with the designs is her litmus test. Walking through her home, the rugs slip comfortably into each of the downstairs spaces. Her 'Pheasant' fabric and wallpaper in lipstick-red lines the walls and windows of one sitting room. "When we put the rugs in the house, everyone laughed and said, 'Oh, that goes perfectly.' I replied: 'Well, that's where they were designed to go.'"

A stage production of *Strictly Ballroom* is next for Martin and Luhrmann. Whether Martin's Deco moment will give way to the increasingly fashionable 1980s for subsequent collections is a story yet to be told. ALEXANDRA GORDON

For more information, designerrugs.com.au; mokumtextiles.com; catherinemartin.com.

