

A woman with blonde hair, smiling, is wearing a bright yellow coat with a wide collar and a patterned scarf. She is standing in front of a large, dark steam locomotive. The locomotive has a red circular emblem with the number '98' on its front. The background shows trees with autumn foliage.

BRANDY WINE Signature

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By Mike Renshaw

Stitches in Time

Langhorne Carpets offers a walk on the historic and luxurious side

HG. Wells would love it. Step into the old Bucks County mill that is the Langhorne Carpet Co., where time seems to have stopped. It looks and smells like yesteryear ... a sprawling view of looms, the whiff of old-world machinery and you're back in the heart of America's Industrial Revolution.

The experience equals a time-travel wonder that would delight the author of "The Time Machine."

Built in 1907, the 55,000 square-foot brick structure boasts a hand-made A-frame timber roof that looks like the bottom of Noah's ark.

Originally it was a tannery and hosiery mill. The cart-rail tracks once used to move the hides in for tanning are still visible in the original floor.

Ten broad looms and eight narrow looms strung with top-quality wool create an impression of gigantic spider webs.

For 300 years Wilton, England, produced artistic carpets known throughout the world for long-lasting quality and luxury. Not only are they created from the finest wools, they have been prized by the most discriminating consumers, including both Houses of Parliament.

Today Langhorne Carpets exports to dealers and customers in Wilton, England.

Photographs by Jennifer Corbett

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PURVEYOR

In this time of foreign competition concerns, Langhorne Carpets, an all-American company, exports its high-end products to distinguished international customers.

The fourth-generation family business continues to thrive, now under the guidance of William Morrow, president; his sisters Letitia Ruderman and Winnifred K. Morrow, executive vice president; and the matriarch of the family, 89-year-old designer and carpet artist Winnifred M. Morrow, the CEO.

The enterprise employs about 30 professionals whose creations have been in the first family's quarters in the Reagan White House and the Reagan ranch, Saudi Arabian palaces, Tavern on the Green in New York City, and a host of historic and famous sites, including the House of Representatives, Congress Hall, the Naval Observatory, American Philosophical Society, The 21 Club, Winterthur and U.S. embassies in Argentina, Belgium and Japan.

Back in 1929, Henry Ford was the top national automobile manufacturer and decided that he should profit from all the components that went into his popular Model-A Fords. He purchased rubber plantations in South America for the tires and even bought mills for the fabric interior of his cars. William Morrow's great-grandfather, John Kommer, and his grandfather, Joseph Kerr MacKay, went to Detroit when Ford decided to sell his looms and brought them back east.

As dozens of Philadelphia mills went silent by the 1950s, Langhorne Carpets continued to



William Morrow, president and Winnifred Morrow, vice president, of Langhorne Carpet Company.





Langhorne's ten broad looms and eight narrow looms are strung with a delicate rainbow of top-quality wool.

Langhorne carpets have been featured in the White House, Saudi palaces, Winterthur, U.S. embassies and a host of other historic and famous sites.



prosper due to the quality and craftsmanship of its work.

One of their most remarkable achievements was a re-creation of historic carpets for the Virginia Old House Chamber and the Governor's Office from 19th-century paintings. That accomplishment resulted in a licensing agreement between Virginia and Langhorne Carpets in which the mill can make the Virginia Capitol designs for homes, offices and public buildings.

Re-creating Wilton carpet for the Old House Chamber and the Governor's Office – dating back respectively to 1830 and 1910 – was no small task given the absence of a single surviving carpet fiber let alone a swatch in the Palladian-style structure (one of the few state capitols without a dome).

The carpet was captured in a George Catlin painting, and the Bucks County mill was able to re-create it from that.

In all, the Pennsylvania looms wove about 500 square yards to be used in the two interiors.

The Old House Chamber carpet is an elegant Empire design featuring 18- to 24-inch gold medallions set against a terra-cotta background. The Governor's Office carpet emotes an Edwardian-period design highlighted by gold and beige rosettes framed by a blue background.



Langhorne Carpets crafts their own original designs as well as re-creating historic patterns for use in period spaces.

"In our 80-year history, this is the first time we have entered a co-venture with one of our historic-restoration clients," explained Morrow. "It is only fitting that one of America's most historically significant public buildings debuts our new Capitol Collection."

But while steeped in history, the old mill is looking to the 21st century with a most remarkable, durable fiber – alpaca fleece – which is even finer than the best wool. Touching it has been compared to petting a kitten. Others have described it as walking on a cloud. The cost for this luxury is expected to be twice that of its finest wool carpets.

Private clients usually work through a designer or art assistant to arrange for their personal residence design.

The business success of this old mill has always been based on producing high-end custom carpet. "We are a small, artisan mill, unlike big box, Walmart-like producers and retailers focused on synthetics, low prices and high volume," Morrow said with a smile. "Our goal is the highest quality all-wool carpet, low volume, yielding high value."

While the quality is undeniable, the artistic expressions stitched in vibrant colors and design specificity make for true works of art. Walking on one almost seems sacrilegious. The seem more worth for the wall in a tapestry pose.

"Once you buy it, we don't care if you put it on the floor or the wall," Morrow chuckled.

In the community

Langhorne Carpets has been active in giving back to the community. The firm designed a special carpet for its effort in working with Habit for Humanity to build homes in Bristol Borough, a historic area nearby.

The mill donated its services to weave the "Tree of Life" design by Alex Papachristidis, of New York, as part of a fundraising effort with Habit for Humanity, which has built homes in that community.

Langhorne is also sponsoring a collegiate design competition to bring young designers and artists into their artistic/loom pastiche.

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