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Magic carpets

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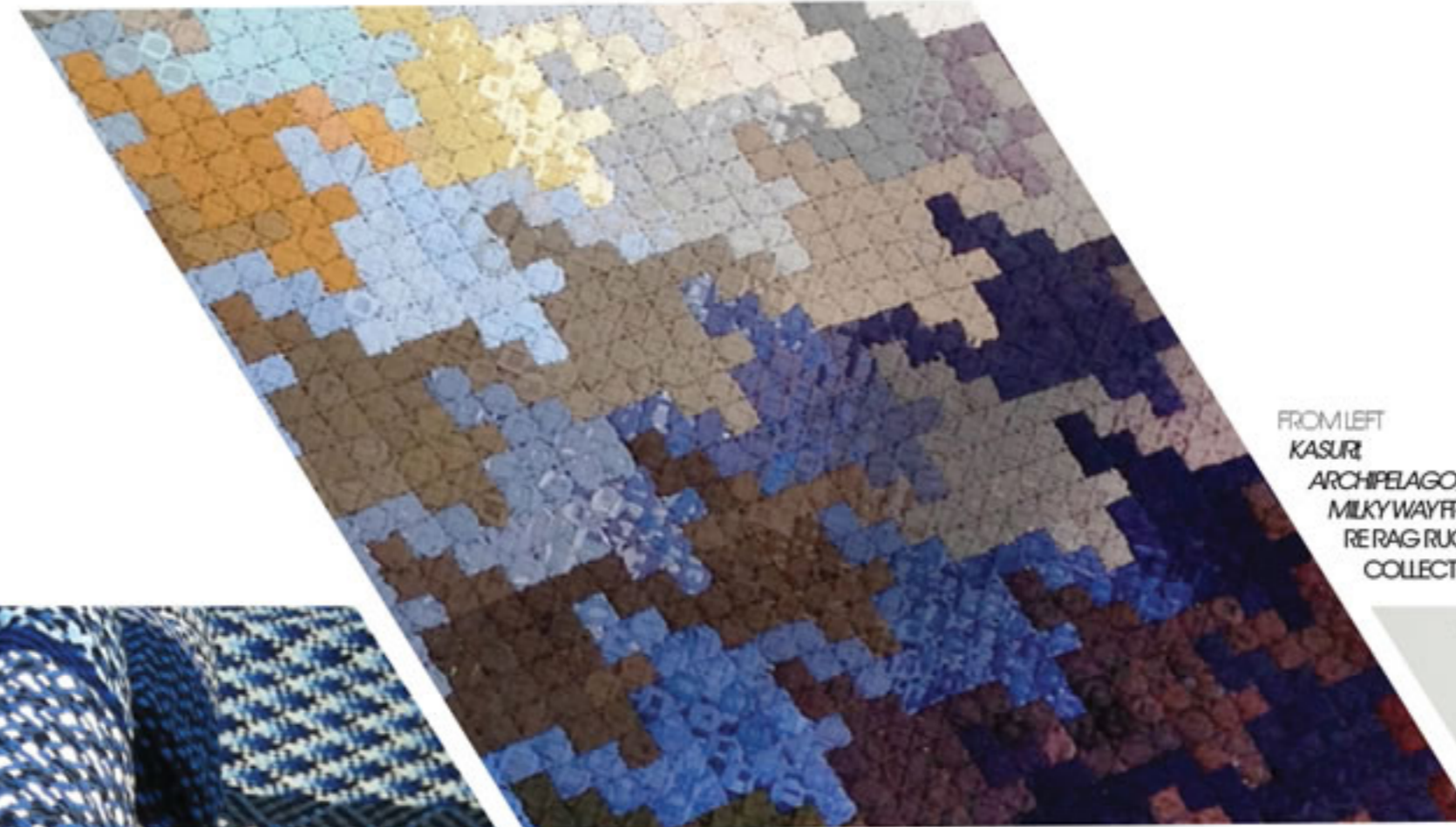
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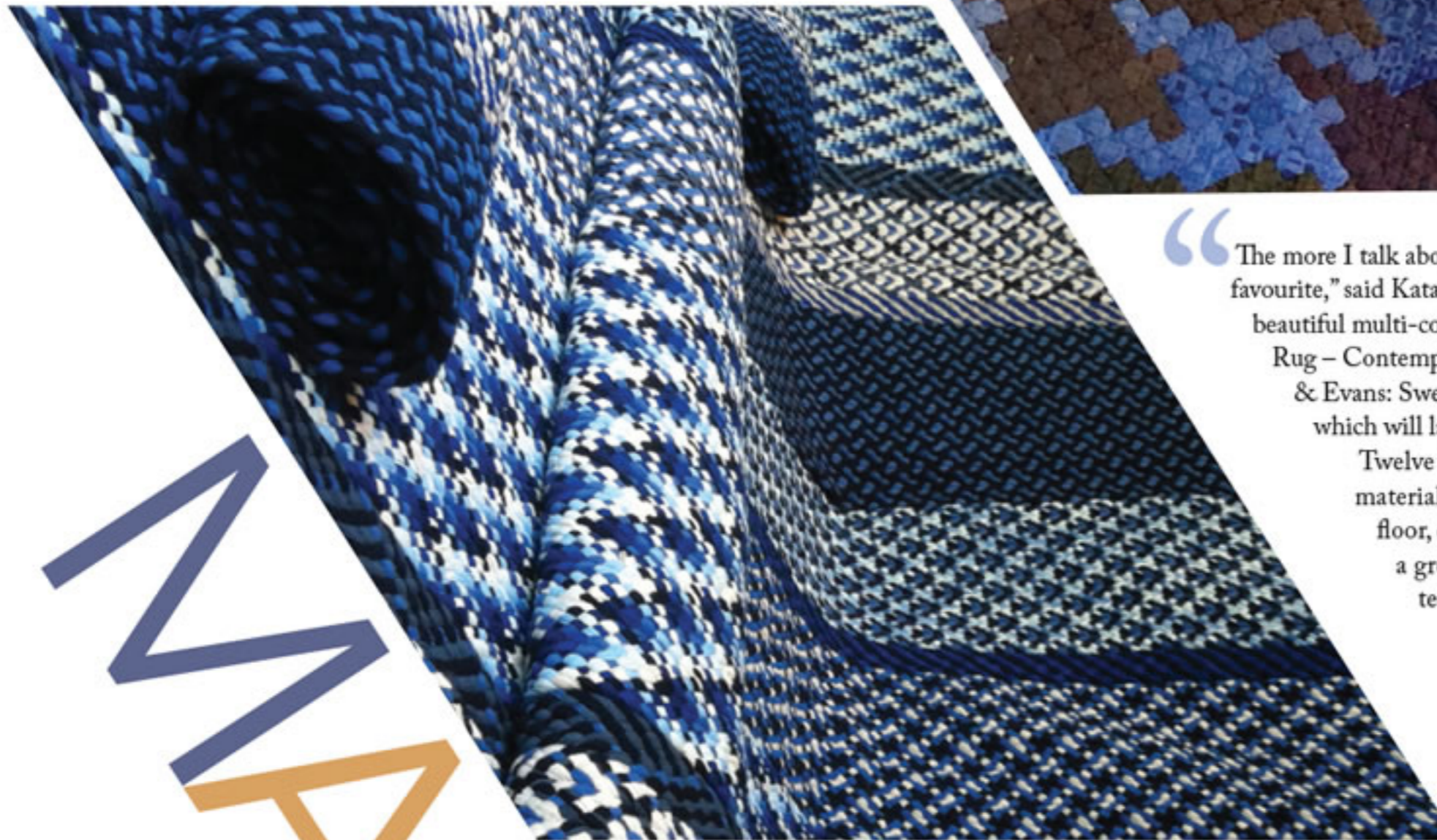
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Two designers have harnessed creativity and innovation to recreate and invigorate a traditional Swedish handicraft using recycled materials. As LIBBY ZENG reports their goal is to persuade the whole world to embrace sustainable design.



FROM LEFT
KASURI
ARCHIPELAGO,
MILKYWAYFROM
RE RAG RUG
COLLECTION



“The more I talk about it, the more it becomes my favourite,” said Katarina Evans as she pointed at a beautiful multi-coloured rug during our tour of “Re Rag Rug – Contemporary Rug Design by Studio Brieditis & Evans: Sweden”, an exhibition at the HKDI Gallery which will last until the end of March next year. Twelve beautiful rag rugs formed from unwanted material from the textile industry lay serenely on the floor, eloquently telling enchanting stories through a great variety of shapes, colours, materials, textile techniques and styles.

Re Rag Rug is an innovative project begun in 2012 that has created a stir around the globe and won several prestigious awards. Renowned Swedish designers Katarina Brieditis and Katarina Evans set out with a mission to promote sustainable design through creating Swedish rag rugs with recycled materials and innovative techniques.

All the rag rugs are made of discarded materials. Half of them are created from old T-shirts whilst the other half is formed from second-hand woolen sweaters. Not only do the rugs meet people’s demands for functionality, they have an aesthetic charm that is both rustic yet progressive – a sophistication that belies the fact they are created from discarded materials.

MAGIC

CARPETS



OPPOSITE A DESIGNER WORKING
ON OFF PIST FROM
RE RAG RUG COLLECTION
RIGHT KATARINA BRIEDITIS AND
KATARINA EVANS
BELOW STUDIO IN WHICH RE RAG
RUG COLLECTION IS CREATED



“This is exactly what we want to prove through the project, that recycled products don’t have to look like something being recycled. You should use them just like any other material,” emphasised Brieditis.

Recycled materials can bring more value and generate more possibilities to designers compared to the use of new materials. This is the essence of upcycling, a word coined by the famous German engineer Reiner Pilz in 1994 who said “what we need is upcycling – where old products are given more value, not less.”

There are many examples in the *Re Rag Rug* collection and *OFF PIST* is one of them. Made of second-hand white T-shirts that have been torn into strips and embellished with embroidery, the rag rug has a non-traditional, curved shape and appears like waves and ripples flowing with a vivid and vibrant sense of movement. The different textures of the T-shirts endow it with a number of tones and shades.

“It would be boring if it was in just one shade of white, which is what we might end up with when we use new materials. But with all these used T-shirts, we had a complete palette to paint with,” recalls Brieditis. Using old materials also provides opportunities to reminisce about the past, bestowing designs with unique associations that could never be attained with new materials.

The physical limitations of using recycled materials are evident – designers must relinquish control over sourcing, textures and colours. However, it is these limitations



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that compel designers to use their skills of observation, craftsmanship, imagination and creativity to the fullest. The use of recycled materials thus becomes a source of inspiration and a muse to the creative mind.

Compared to their European counterparts, Swedish designers are pioneers of upcycling. By integrating this concept to their arts and crafts practice, they are in fact reinventing a tradition with deep roots in Swedish society.

Rag rugs were originally made using old household materials such as worn-out shirts, threadbare dresses and gowns – these were commonplace in cottages, farmhouses and mansions throughout Sweden for more than 150 years. *Re Rag Rug* is hoped by the designers to extend and redefine this discipline.

“We want to inspire people to think outside of the



EVENT

box and that's why we set so many rules for this project at the beginning. For example, each textile technique is only allowed to be used once," says Brieditis.

In total, *Re Rag Rug* showcases 12 different textile techniques including sewing, crocheting, knitting and embroidery. "The techniques we have used come from everywhere including Japan, Bangladesh and America. They are so common and simple that almost everybody knows how to use them, but it's the way we use them that make them special," says Evans.

The duo prepared for the exhibition for more than 10 years. From 2003 to 2007, they made the first attempt to demonstrate their creative ideas to the public and peer designers through a recycle and handicraft project called *Do Redo*. The initial project was a huge success and laid a solid foundation for making *Re Rag Rug* come to fruition.

Their innovative, unorthodox ways of combining recycled materials has led to a new stylistic expression, one of the initial goals of the project. "In this sense the expression is more important than the material," Brieditis explains.

Although the designers embrace and spare no efforts to promote the concept of sustainable design, they don't want it to be regarded as a new fashion trend.

A fashion trend will always fade sooner or later. The rich knowledge and experience possessed by the duo establishes a solid foundation and a strong vision for what the *Re Rag Rug* project can achieve. "We want to create something real, we want to do things beneficial to the environment in as many ways as possible and we want to develop handicraft productions all around the globe," says Brieditis.

To the designers, the *Re Rag Rug* project is just one more stage on a long journey. They are walking firmly towards sustainable design on two legs, "one leg is exhibition, through which our messages can reach a wider audience with the help of different media channels, and the other leg is production, with a hope to pursue reproduction opportunities for the rag rugs in the project," says Evans.

As environmental issues become more pressing, it's inevitable that designers worldwide will integrate the concept of upcycling into their design process, adding value to products, but also boosting their

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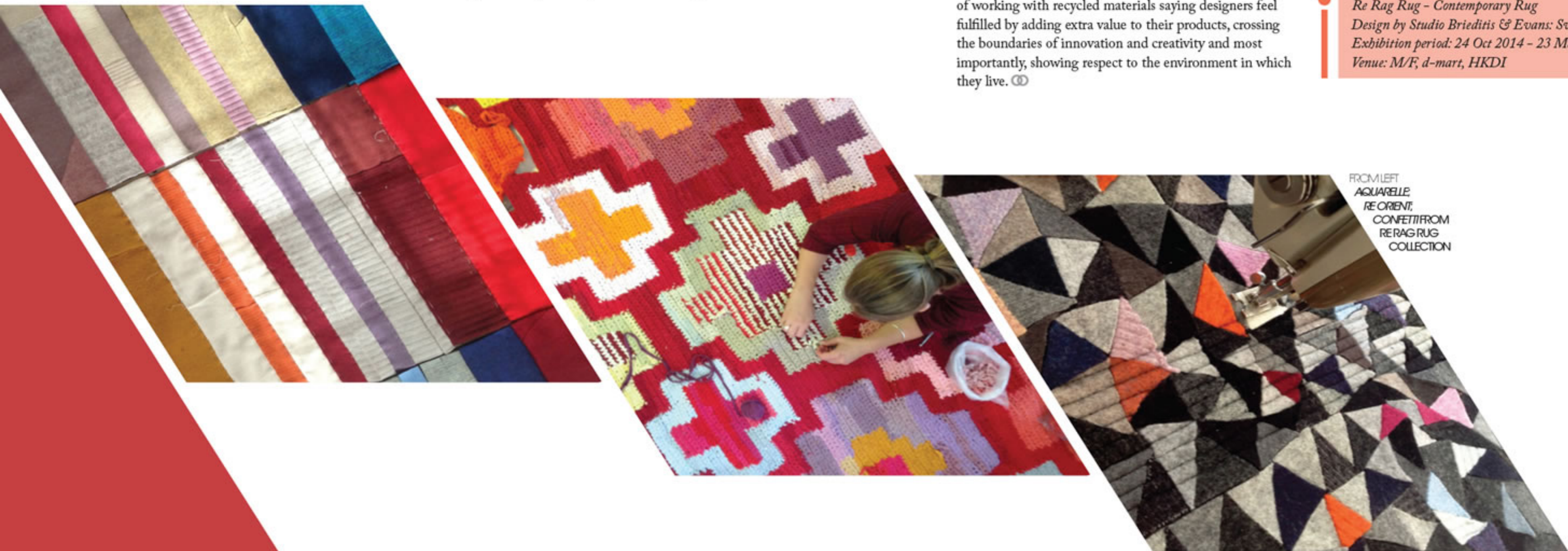
international competitiveness.

The role that designers serve as a link between producers and consumers has become more important during the process of implementing sustainable design. In Sweden, designers are getting involved in the production process more closely than ever before due to producers' urgent demand for finding solutions to industrial waste. According to Brieditis, in the future designers will be inextricably involved in the production process as early as possible.

Brieditis and Evans also have great expectations of the students at HKDI, who are fortunate to be given opportunities to work closely with the upcycling industry at an early stage, so that they can be better prepared for the fierce competition of sustainable design.

"Young designers have to inform themselves in the practice of sustainable design because this is the only way for them to remain competitive in the future. There is no other way," emphasises Evans. The pair extol the virtues of working with recycled materials saying designers feel fulfilled by adding extra value to their products, crossing the boundaries of innovation and creativity and most importantly, showing respect to the environment in which they live. ©

Re Rag Rug - Contemporary Rug
Design by Studio Brieditis & Evans: Sweden
Exhibition period: 24 Oct 2014 - 23 Mar 2015
Venue: M/F, d-mart, HKDI



FROM LEFT
AQUARELLE,
RE ORIENT,
CONFETTI FROM
RE RAG RUG
COLLECTION