

Why Did Your Custom Rug From India Arrive a Different Colour?



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A custom rug from India usually arrives off-colour for one of five reasons: the colour was approved on a screen, the bulk yarn went into a different dye lot, the yarn looks different once woven into pile, the post-weaving wash shifted it, or it is being judged in different light or from the other end of the pile. Each has its own approval. Because returning a large rug to India is slow and costly, the approvals and the remedy belong in the order before weaving starts.

The Short Version

- A made-to-order rug does not exist when it is photographed, so a listing photo or render proves nothing about colour.
- Approve the yarn from the actual dye lot, then a woven and washed strike-off, then a photo of the finished rug in daylight.
- Turn a suspect rug round 180 degrees before you complain. Pile direction changes how light the colour looks.
- Write who judges colour, against what and in which light, and what happens if it fails: remake, credit or return at whose cost.
- Return freight on a large rug is heavy, and some sellers offer a replacement rather than pay for a return.

Most often because the colour you approved was never the colour that got dyed. A made-to-order rug is dyed and woven after you order it, so a photo, a render or a screen swatch tells you nothing about the yarn that ends up in it. The other usual causes are a different dye lot for bulk, the way yarn darkens or lightens once it's woven into pile, and the wash Indian rugs get after weaving. Each one has an approval step that catches it, and because

sending a big rug back to India is slow and heavy, those steps belong in the order before the loom starts.

The complaint keeps coming back in our forum log. Foreign buyers ordering custom rugs from Indian sellers on global marketplaces report pieces in a clearly different colour from the listing, often from listings built on renders, and sellers often put it down to "lighting". One US buyer's version is the one that sticks: "The rug was listed as pink, and the rug they sent me is gray" (forum, April 2026). It's a retail story, but a wholesale buyer with a strike-off and a contract can get the same result if the approvals stop too early. We've told you on the [Bhadohi-Mirzapur cluster](#) page to approve a strike-off. This page is about what goes wrong even then, and what to do with a rug that's already on your floor.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

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- 01 **Colour is the repeat complaint on made-to-order Indian rugs.** In our review of buyer forum threads, four or more independent buyers reported custom rugs arriving in a different colour from the listing, with Bhadohi named as the source of many listings. A counter-voice had bought three Indian rugs and was "totally pleased". (*Our forum signals log, 2024 to 2026*)
- 02 **The return is the expensive part.** Buyers describe return shipping on a single large rug as costing far more than they expected, "given it's a 50lb rug", and report sellers offering a replacement rather than a prepaid return. One buyer avoided the return only because the marketplace's buyer protection let the buyer keep the rug. (*Same log, 2026*)
- 03 **Most custom knotted rugs from India come from one belt.** Bhadohi-addressed shippers hold 4,334 of 8,775 named US bills of hand-knotted carpet, and six

carpet towns hold 93.5%. (*Our count of US bill-of-lading records, HS 5701, read 23 Sep 2026*)

What we don't know yet

- How often wholesale custom orders from India miss their approved colour. Forum evidence is mostly retail.

1. Why Doesn't the Photo Match the Rug?

Because the rug in the photo usually isn't your rug, and sometimes isn't a rug at all. A made-to-order listing often shows a render, or a photo of an earlier piece woven in another dye lot. Your screen then adds its own colour setting on top. None of that is fraud on its own. It's simply that colour for a custom rug is decided in a dye house after you pay, so the only thing that proves it is dyed yarn you've seen.

Which is why "lighting" is a half-truth. Light does change how a rug looks, as section 2 shows. But it doesn't turn pink into grey. When the difference is that large, the colour was never controlled.

2. What Changes the Colour Between Sample and Rug?

Five things, and only the first is about screens.

The dye lot. Wool takes dye a little differently in every batch, depending on the fleece, the water and the dyer. If your yarn poms came from one batch and the bulk yarn was dyed later in another, the two can differ even with the same recipe. For a set of rugs that must match, ask for all the yarn for the order to be dyed in one lot.

Pom against pile. A small wound pom shows you the yarn's surface. A rug shows you the ends of thousands of cut fibres packed together, which reads deeper and sometimes darker. A colour that looks right on a pom card

can look heavier across a large field, which is why a woven strike-off matters more than the pom.

The wash. Indian rugs are commonly washed after weaving to soften the wool, settle the dyes and give the finish. A heavier or antique wash mutes and lightens colours. If your strike-off wasn't washed the same way as the bulk rug, you approved a colour that no longer exists by the time the rug ships.

Abrash. Hand-dyed wool varies, and in many traditional designs those bands of slightly different shade, called abrash, are wanted. In a modern plain-field design they read as a fault. Say which you want.

Pile direction and light. A cut-pile rug looks lighter from one end and darker from the other, because you see either the sides or the tips of the fibres. Showroom lights, daylight and warm home bulbs all shift it again. Before you complain, turn the rug 180 degrees and look again in daylight.

3. Which Approvals Stop It?

One approval isn't enough. Each of the causes above slips in at a different stage, so the approvals follow the stages.

1. **Yarn from the real dye lot.** Approve poms cut from the yarn that will go into your rug, not a stock pom card. Keep half of each.
2. **A woven, washed strike-off.** A small woven corner using that yarn, washed with the same finish the bulk rug will get. This is where pom-against-pile and the wash both show up.
3. **The light you'll judge in.** Agree that both sides look at approvals in daylight, and name it. If you sell to customers who'll see the rug under warm indoor light, look at it there too.

4. A photo of the finished rug before it's rolled. Laid flat, in daylight, next to your retained strike-off, shot from both ends of the pile.

Approving a strike-off adds weeks before weaving begins. That's the time a hand-knotted rug needs anyway, so ask for a loom-start date after strike-off approval rather than a ship date from order, as the cluster page suggests.

4. What Should the Order Say About Colour?

Rug makers rarely write a colour tolerance into an order, so write your own, in words both sides can apply.

- The retained strike-off and poms are the standard, and the bulk rug is judged side by side with them.
- Who judges, where and in what light.
- Whether abrash is accepted, and how much.
- That all yarn for the order is dyed in one lot, or that any second lot is approved before use.
- What happens on a fail: remake, credit or return, and who pays the freight each way.

That last line is the one buyers skip and later regret. A seller who offers a free replacement but not a prepaid return is relying on the cost of shipping a big rug back. Settle it while you still have bargaining power, which is before the deposit.

If you buy several rugs to one colourway, a spectrophotometer reading of the approved strike-off gives the dye house a number to aim at as well as a sample. That's optional, and a good pom and strike-off routine does most of the work.

5. What Can You Do Now the Rug Is Here?

First, check it's really wrong. Lay the rug flat in daylight, look from both ends, and hold your strike-off or the approved photo against it. If the difference disappears from one end, it's pile direction, not colour.

If it's still wrong, document it. Daylight photos from both ends with the strike-off in shot, the order and approval emails, and the batch or label details. Then be clear about what you want.

- **A remake** costs you the weaving time again. Insist on a new strike-off from the new dye lot first, or you'll get the same rug twice.
- **A credit** keeps the rug and avoids freight. It's often the most sensible outcome on a retail-sized order.
- **A return** is the most expensive option, as the buyers in our log found. Check what your contract says about freight before you agree to anything, and don't ship a rug back without written agreement on who pays.

If you bought through a marketplace, its buyer protection may decide the outcome without a return, as it did for one buyer we read about. A wholesale order has no such cushion, which is why section 4 matters.

6. Who Approves Colour at the Loom?

Ideally, someone who can stand in the dye house and at the loom with your retained poms. Most foreign buyers can't, which is why custom rug colour goes wrong far from home. Visiting at the [India Carpet Expo](#) lets you see how exhibitors handle approvals, and the weaving belt is a short drive away. If you want the yarn lot, the washed strike-off and the finished rug checked against your sample before it's rolled, [SourcingSync](#) does that in the carpet towns.

Questions Buyers Ask

Is it normal for a handmade rug to vary from the sample? ^

A little, yes, especially with abrash or a heavy wash. A shift from one colour family to another isn't normal and means an approval step was missed.

Why does my rug look different from each end? v

Should I approve colour from a photo if I can't get a strike-off? v

Who pays to send a wrong rug back to India? v

7. Back to Pink and Grey

The buyer whose pink rug arrived grey wasn't let down by Bhadohi's weavers. Plenty of buyers in the same threads were happy with theirs. The buyer was let down by a process that never put dyed yarn in front of her. Approve the yarn, the washed strike-off and the finished rug, write down what happens if it fails, and the colour on the floor will be the colour you chose.