THE WONDERS OF THE GRAND BAZAAR

Maria Eliades, **Antoine Remise**, and **Julius Motal** discover the real spirit of Istanbul's legendary *Grand Bazaar* in its larger-than-life merchants. Photos by **Julius Motal**.

Istanbul has a walloping array of shopping malls, but none of them compare to the one that started it all. The Grand Bazaar, perennially marked as a must-see on every visitor's checklist, is more than just a place to buy souvenirs. Even though it is filled with repeats of the same copies of Iznik pottery, Turkish tea sets in improbable colors, and Oriental lamps, it is also a place with a rich legacy of shopkeeping at its finest, a tradition that is also diminished by a maze of small shops selling cheap imitations of designer logo-bedecked merchandise for overblown prices. Despite all of this, the real Grand Bazaar, the one made up of passionate merchants and craftsmen who believe in their products, does live on.

We set out to find the true soul of the Bazaar through getting to know these fascinating and unique purveyors of goods that can't be found anywhere else. From works of jewelry art, carpets, antiques, and belly dancing gear to genuine Turkish leather, antique cloth, and leaves imbued with calligraphy, this insider's take on one of the oldest covered markets in the world is an enthralling journey made of wonderful encounters with people whose unique expertise on their crafts is incomparable. Our guide even has a few side trips to places to rest, have another cup of tea, and soak up the atmosphere of centuries worth of history.

Lord of the *Leaves*

You'll almost always find Nick Merdenyan, the "Lord of the Leaves," sitting in his peaceful shop at the corner of the oldest part of the Bazaar, the İç Bedestan, which dates back to Byzantine times. He has been there since 1968 selling Meerschaum pipes, but it was in 1991 that he made the sale of his first dieffenbachia leaves decorated with illustrations in gold leaf and paint for which he is now famous.

Merdenyan's unusual art began purely by chance. A cousin of his had given him a dieffenbachia plant for his son's baptism. Merdenyan had cut off two yellowing leaves from the plant, stuck them in a book in his library and forgot all about them until he came across them a few years later, perfectly dried and flat. He asked a friend who happened to be a calligrapher working with untraditional materials like glass and leather if he could work with leaves as well.

The friend said that he would try, and as a result produced one with the *tuğra* (the sultan's stylized signature) of Suleyman the Magnificent and the other with a line from the 13th century Sufi poet Yunus Emre, "Love the one who loves you."

That very day, an American couple passed through Merdenyan's shop and loved the leaves so much that they wanted to buy them, though Merdenyan says he never had the intention of selling them.

Now, 24 years on, he's still producing and selling these beautiful leaves, but with a team that includes two graduates of Mimar Sinan University. The process takes time. A leaf needs to be dried for a full year between the pages of a book before it can be painted on, with the first three months as the most crucial. Merdenyan calls the drying process "sleeping."

"Especially in the first three months their position on the page needs to be changed," Merdenyan said. "If you leave them too long on the same page they stick on the paper because of the moisture."

Once the leaves "awaken," Merdenyan illustrates them with images that correspond with ideas that he has researched and mulled over with friends and his team. These ideas follow the same themes with images and messages - in English, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, and Armenian among others languages - that promote love across religions and tolerance with soothing and striking colors that catch the eye. His "leaves of peace" feature symbols belonging to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism.

There are no guarantees as to how long the process of illustration will take. Merdenyan typically works with three to four leaves at the same time, and depending on how intricate the designs is, the process may even take several months.

"There are so many different details," he said. "I can finish some leaves in a week or ten days. It's different when I work on a leaf under a magnifying glass, that type of work can take a really long time. Writing is not like painting. If you make a mistake you repaint, but letters, there's no way to do it again."

Nick's Calligraphy, *Kapalıçarşı İç Bedesten 24, (0212) 513 54 73, www.nickscalligraphy.com*

© Sevan Bıçakçı

Sevan Bıçakçı, *the rock star*

There is no better word to describe Sevan Bıçakçı and his jewelry than "original." The 50-year-old jewelry craftsman, designer, and visionary began his path to his current visual extravaganza at the age of 12 when he apprenticed for a master jewelry craftsman right here in the Grand Bazaar. By the age of 17, his master told him that he no longer had anything to teach him, and so Sevan opened his first shop.

His creations – bishop-worthy rings with sculptures cut into the stones, rings set with orchids delicate enough in appearance that they look as if they may fly off the finger in a breeze, and cuffs with his signature dagger, to name a few pieces of his work – are set in cases in the walls of his understated yet sleek store located just a couple streets outside the Grand Bazaar's mess.

Sevan's cousin, Herman Bıçakçı, who is also trained in jewelry craftsmanship and who has worked with Sevan since 2001, guided us to a room specially set for viewing and trying out Sevan's work up close. With each tray of Sevan's exquisite designs, Herman took the time to explain the origins of each piece. In particular, he showcased an octopus bracelet with a large Japanese pearl that mirrored the shape of the animal's bulbous head. Tiny pearls also stood in for the tentacles' suckers and the whole piece moved surprisingly fluidly.

We learned that the bracelet took over a year to produce with the articulations alone taking seven to eight months. Nine to ten masters of different disciplines worked on it, including engravers, miniature painters, goldsmiths, stone polishers, stone carvers, and sculptors – an array that is not unusual in Sevan's creations, which are all one-of-a-kind, with no exceptions as Sevan does not recreate his past work.

Early on, his refusal to copy big brands led to bankruptcy several times, most notably in 2001. Instead of accepting that he had to produce imitations of brands like Bulgari and Cartier to please tourists, Sevan was emboldened even further to follow the dreams he had as an apprentice of incorporating the architectural elements of the buildings around him into jewelry design.

"Being a survivor after his final bankruptcy helped him," said Emre Dilaver, his creative director. "It helped him not to care."

In 2001, Sevan had created a ring for a customer with a large colored gemstone in the center that he thought looked very empty, giving him the idea for the first time to

insert the three dimensional objects he's now famous for into the stone. Dilaver says this progressed into other shapes to the point where Sevan's own skill level was not enough to carry out the work, which was when his workshop began to expand. In a little over a year, with 50 rings having been created, he managed to bounce back from his bankruptcy, and he has not looked back since.

A lot has changed since Sevan first began as an apprentice in the Grand Bazaar, most notably the apprentice system itself, which is on the decline. Apprenticing used to be much more common, especially for children who were not academically minded. Thus, learning a trade in the Grand Bazaar was the alternative career path.

At this point, Sevan said,

those who collaborate with him are "usually crazy minds," which is how his cousin would describe Sevan's own way of working, that is, as a creator of everything, from the cookies offered to clients to the domed sweet containers in the reception space of his shop.

In the case of the craftspeople working in Sevan's workshop, they must all be their own masters who are capable of being pushed beyond their own boundaries. Indeed, Sevan's test of whom he will hire is to take a skill they say they already have and see if they can go beyond it.

"If someone comes up and asserts that she can create the tiniest ant sculpture in the world," Dilaver said, "Sevan would tell her to make the ant walk and then seeing if she's truly trying or if she's saying the impossible cannot be done. He would literally push her towards breaking boundaries. He wants them to do something really unusual which has not existed before if possible."

This boundary breaking typifies all of Sevan's magnificent work. He sees each piece as "the intermediary step to the next level," which is the mark of a true artist.

Sevan Bıçakçı, *Gazi Sinan Paşa Sokak 16, 0212 520 45 16, www.sevanbicakci.com*

Step Into *Another Epoch*

Beyond the throngs of bazaar-goers and *lokum* salesman, there's a quiet shop with a 19th-century décor. The gold lettering above the door reads "Epoque," no doubt a reference to La Belle Époque, the prosperous, lush and vibrant period from the 1870s to the first Word War. On one of the storefront windows, you'll see the Turkish variant 'Epok' set against a display of antiques from disparate periods.

"This is a small Topkapı museum," said Ibrahim, a veteran employee of the shop.

From 19th century paintings and precious old Ottoman handmade objects for the house to pocket watches and Russian silverware, Epoque has a sizable collection of antiques. It's a museum you could buy from if your wallet is deep enough. Nothing comes cheap here, as the most affordable item by Epoque's standards is about $1,000. A painting could run you close to $200,000. The shop counts two of Turkey's most affluent families, Koç and Sabancı, among its clients, so that should give you an idea of the kind of bank account you'd need to comfortably shop here.

If you're in the mood, however, for a quiet respite from the bazaar's chaos, Epoque is an intriguing place to have a look around. Ibrahim and the store's manager, an elegant old Armenian named Yetvart, won't pressure you into buying anything, as they understand their collection is more than the average bazaar-goer can afford.

If you have an appreciation for religion, you can gaze upon their collection of icons from different time periods. For romantic and old-fashioned smokers, there are beautifully painted silver cigarette cases. There's no shortage of tea sets either if you find

you've been in the mood for a classy tea party. The shop is also renowned in all the Grand Bazaar for its exquisite collection of jewels. This is not the place, however, to go for rugs, but there is a small collection tucked into the cupboards beneath the main pieces.

All told, there's a nice array of antiques at Epoque, and don't be surprised if you find yourself jumping from one time period to the next as you move from display to display.

Epoque, *Sandalbedestani Sokak 38, 0212 527 78 65*

Bellies and beads

Beyond the bazaar's boundless bustle rests a quiet shop across the way from a *çaycı*. Brassieres, skirts, and fully costumed mannequins line the walls of Gülseren Camcı, a shop for belly dancers. The space is a kaleidoscope of reds, blues, greens, pinks and purples in fabric and beads.

The woman behind it all is Gülseren, who's been running the shop for 30 years, and when she started, she was the only woman running a shop in the entire bazaar. "Everyone was looking at me," she said.

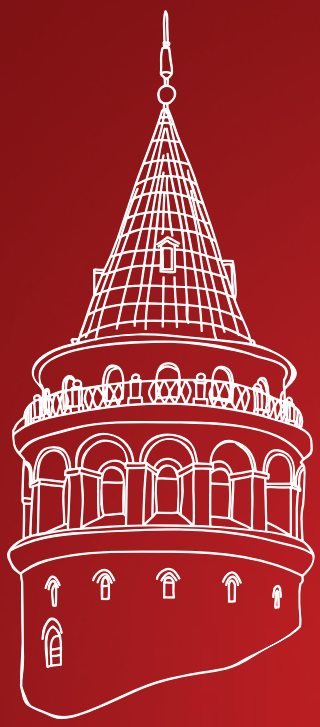
It was a man's game back then, and still is in many ways. Gülseren, however, persisted, and her hard work earned her the respect of her peers, though she has met opposition in some instances. Early on, she tried to buy fabrics from a religious man, but he rebuffed her. If she wanted to buy from him, she had to get her husband to do it. Gülseren had no husband, and she wasn't about to get married for the sake of fabric. So she took her business elsewhere. When the religious man saw how much fabric she bought at the other shop, he ran after her to apologize. Was that enough to get her business? Certainly not.

Gülseren is animated when she speaks, and you could easily mistake her for Jeanne Moreau, the famous actress from the French New Wave cinema. It's a comparison she welcomes wholeheartedly with a gentle smile.

Gülseren originally designed and made all the costumes herself, but she later enlisted the help of local women to put the clothes together. Outfits can range anywhere from 50 TL to several hundred depending on the intricacy of the design and the materials used. Most of her customers are understandably belly dancers from all over the world, but not only. Many women come to her shop because they always wanted to have an authentic belly-dancing dress in their wardrobe.

Towards the back of the shop, there's a corkboard with old photographs from Gülseren's past both in the shop and away from it. In one, you'll see her posing with Bette Midler, the American singer and actress. In another, a dancer performs in one of Gülseren's many designs. It's a collection of memories that tells a part of her story.

Gülseren Camcı, *Kapalıcarşı Alemşah Sokak 12, 0212 512 97 51*



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The rug *caravanserai*

When you step inside the different rooms of Punto in Vezir Han, one of Istanbul's oldest caravanserais, the perfume of old stone, the myriad piles of thick wool and silk rugs, the woman in village clothes busy weaving on her modest wooden loom, and the fresco just past the entrance would make you feel as if you walked some hundred years back in time if it weren't for the shop's merchants with their elegant modern suits, cell phones and perfect English.

Punto is located just a few steps from the Grand Bazaar for a very good reason.

"We wanted to be away from the big rush because we don't try to pull people in the store to make a sale and survive the day. Our business requires time and trust. We need to do a demonstration and explain the different type of rugs to the clients. To sell one rug, we show maybe a hundred," said Nedim Doğan, one of Punto's salesmen.

Time is indeed required to understand the intricacies of the rug business and asking simplistic questions such as "How long does it take to weave a rug?" or "How much does it cost?" won't get you anywhere because the answers depend on so many factors like the quality of material, craftsmanship and dyeing process as well as the density of nodes per square centimeter. It can be confusing at first, but Punto's merchants are more than happy to explain the little details as well as the differences between the antique rugs, the semi-old rugs (between 30 and 80 years old) and the recent handmade rugs.

In its collection of

around 2,000 rugs, Punto sells mostly semi-old and handmade new models as they're used for decorative purposes. The families of Punto's owner Metin Ulakçı and his team have been in the carpet business for five generations as their ancestors were carpet makers. "Most of us were born on a rug," one salesman laughed.

They work with around 1,200 families from villages in Central and Eastern Anatolia who keep weaving in the traditional way, like Şenay, the experienced craftswoman meticulously weaving in one of Punto's showrooms. At the time of our visit, she was making a fine silk rug of a hundred nodes per square centimeter that will take more than a year to finish. She will be the only person working on it until it's complete as the piece is so thin and precise that a change of hands would be visible. That's why all handmade rugs are one-of-a-kind pieces that can't be duplicated.

Estimated at around $12,000, Şenay's rug-in-progress will be one of the shop's most expensive pieces. That's because it's silk and when it reaches its square-meter size, it will end up having a million nodes. For a one-square-meter wool rug, prices are lower, ranging from $300 to $1,200. With silk, though, prices tend to skyrocket like the stunning sky blue rug Metin unrolled for us, which took more than two years of hard work and for which he said he wouldn't be happy if he ended up selling it for less than $30,000. Of course, there is always the possibility to negotiate, but don't expect the price to suddenly drop 50% like in some other places.

"Too much bargaining is bad for the client as well as for the merchant. You end up never knowing if you're getting a good deal. 10 to 15% is enough, just for the thrill of bargaining," said Hakan Navdar, Punto's international salesman. About 80% of shop's clientele comes from the U.S. and Punto still thanks Madeleine Albright for it.

The first woman to become Secretary of State under Bill Clinton honored the shop with her visit in the early 2000s. Since then, it became the place that embassies and consulates recommend when it comes to purchasing authentic and handmade rugs in Istanbul. Even Dan Brown paid a visit, and he's supposed to know all of Istanbul's little secrets.

Punto, *Gazi Sinanpaşa Sokak, Vezirhan 17, (0212) 511 08 53, puntocarpet.com*

An Alternative Tour of the Grand Bazaar with *Monica Fritz*

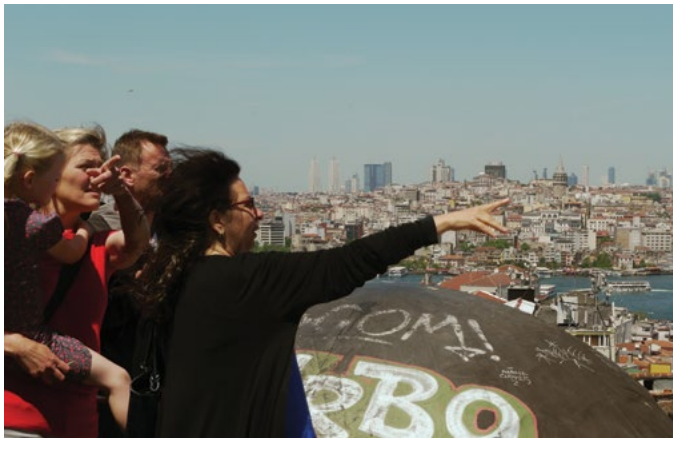
The Grand Bazaar can be sensory overload for the unitiated, so much so that its visual splendor can get lost. Yet, the true magic of the Bazaar, beyond the seemingly endless amount of things you can buy, is its aesthetics. Every street and every corridor is a kaleidoscope of colors, shapes and people. It's a photographer's dream, which is what American photographer Monica Fritz seeks to share with everyone through her Photography Walks.

Monica's a traveling photographer who's lived in several countries throught her life, and for the last 19 years, she's been in Istanbul. Photography's always been her passion, and with her camera, she's been able to go beyond the superficial.

She's spent a tremendous amount of time in the Grand Bazaar, and a walk with her will show you just how well known she is. With her Photography Walks, she wants to show people the bazaar beyond the chaos. Monica advocates taking a slow approach.

"I believe in slowing down the pace, slow travel opens up a whole new world around us," she said.

She's often booked up because her tours are that popular as she can take you to secret places you didn't know existed. We could tell you more, but you'd have to find out for yourself by getting in touch with her through her website (*alternativecitytours.com*)



The real *leather deal*

A few months back, Bilgili Leather's manager Özgür Bilgili was in Paris during Fashion Week to work with the trendy Parisian brand American Retro on a special line of leather jackets that actually sell for quite a sum (£1320) at Selfridges in London. But don't expect that kind of price in his Grand Bazaar shop and don't expect Özgür to appear in the pages of *Vogue Paris*. His usual designs are neither very flashy nor haute couture. Rather, they're the kind of casual leather jackets you would find on your uncle's shoulders – the cool uncle, not the grumpy one – rather than on your hipster cousin's. If he's occasionally invited to collaborate with hip brands, that's simply because he's a master of his craft.

His family has run the Bilgili shop for 73 years now. It was founded by his grandfather whose father was already working in the Grand Bazaar as a watchmaker. "We've been here for four generations now and the fifth generation is at home," Özgür said with a smile.

About 90% of Bilgili's collection is made of baby-lamb skin from northern Turkey where "the weather is right, the lambs eat right, they're treated right and the price is right." Only for very cold days, Özgür would suggest leather jacket made of buffalo skin from Argentina to his clients.

Özgür adds new designs to his store every two months and his models can only be found there. All his products are handmade and his team of tailors can only produce in small quantities. Prices range from $180 to $400, which are fair prices for good quality leather jackets and like Özgür rightly pointed out, "There's a basic value of leather in the end and we're not Armani or Prada."

If every jacket at Bilgili goes with a price tag – always a good sign for a shop in the Grand Bazaar – that doesn't mean that you shouldn't try to negotiate. "Not too much though. We can do up to 15%... and only if we like the customer," he guffawed.

Word-of-mouth is Bilgili's main marketing strategy and the shop can count on a regular clientele of expats who recommend the shop to visiting friends who want to bring back home a jacket made of that genuine Turkish leather whose reputation crosses boundaries. Of course, tourists come, too, even prestigious ones like Hillary Clinton whose picture with Özgür's father hangs on the wall.

"It's a very important symbol for us. Now consulates trust us and send us people, too, because they know we don't cheat. We spent more than 30 years to come to that point," he said with pride.

When asked how tourists on a short visit can end up to his shop instead of being ripped of in some of the less respectable businesses that mushroom in the Grand Bazaar, Özgür simply answered, "I don't put pressure on visitors passing by. I rely on destiny." Well, if destiny has it, Özgür and his dad might end up having dressed the future president of the United States.

Bilgili Leather, *Takkeciler Sk 93-95, 0212 527 63 59, www.bilgili.info*

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The textile *doctor*

Everybody knows Eğin Tekstil's owner, Süleyman Ertaş, in the Grand Bazaar. He's one of its most respected figures and if people refer to him as Hoca Süleyman, it's not only out of respect but because he's also a medical doctor. And how does a medical doctor end up selling *peştamal*, blankets and bathrobes in the Grand Bazaar you may enquire?

"Tradition!" answered Dr. Ertaş, "the show must go on." Indeed, founded in 1861, Eğin Tekstil is the oldest store in the Grand Bazaar owned by the same family. As his father's only son, he couldn't possibly abandon to foreign hands this monument of Turkish textile history that's been handed down through six generations now, as Ertaş's son and daughter are working with him, despite their respective degrees in Public Relations and Environmental Engineering.

Süleyman Ertaş is THE expert on traditional textiles in Turkey. In the voluminous book *Studies in the History of Textiles in Turkey* written by Turkey's most prestigious historian Halil Inalik, 10 pages are entirely dedicated to his story. As a matter of fact, his chapter starts like this: "When speaking of traditional textiles, the first name that comes to mind is that of Dr. Süleyman Ertaş." That's the kind of introduction that commands respect.

As the name of the shop suggests, Dr. Ertaş was born in a village near Eğin, a town in Southeast Anatolia historically known for textile weaving and he inherited his precious knowledge from his family of textile-makers.

"Some people find America twice but that's not how things are transmitted in the Grand Bazaar. I always tell my children to use the experience of former generations. Otherwise, it's a waste of time and energy," he remarked.

Eğin Tekstil is a relatively modest shop in size that's crossed by an L-shaped counter where Dr. Süleyman and his son amiably attend to a never-ending flow of customers, coming from abroad for the most part to admire the shop's colorful shelves stacked with impressive myriads of *peştamals*, shawls, bedspreads, blankets, scarfs, bath gloves, bathrobes and other pieces of traditional Turkish textiles. There's no language barrier for the "Crazy Doctor" – as he's sometimes referred to – who playfully answers his clients' questions in Arabic, English or German if need be.

However, Dr. Süleyman is not only a traditional textile maven and a polyglot, charismatic salesman, he's also a remarkable designer and craftsman. All of the shop's designs are officially patented to his name. Grabbing a white *peştamal* with thin sky blue lines from a shelf behind him, he explained: "Many think it's a classic design and actually it's a popular one and you can find similar models all around the Grand Bazaar, but I was the first one making these patterns and I have an official patent to prove that."

Eğin Tekstil has two workshops, one in Istanbul and one in Denizli, a town that's also famous for textile making. "We work with cotton for towels, bedspreads and other things in Denizli. For wool and mixed fabrics, we have a smaller workshop here. It's difficult to

manage them both but when you produce cotton, you can't work with other fabrics because fibers fly and if they get into other types of tissue, that's a big problem," he explained.

His expertise and meticulous attention to detail obviously make Eğin Tekstil's products stand out, but his background in medicine also helps, too. With his daughter, they make sure that none of the material used, like the dyeing agents, are harmful. "In every country, my goods ate tested for anything carcinogenic," he assured.

"Endless customer happiness and satisfaction is found in this store. It is the result of a 140-year-old tradition and our experiences. If you are not pleased with any good you can bring it back any time and without any reason," reads a sign in the shop. Only a few bedspreads were ever returned, simply because they were too big. On the other hand, who would dare to insult Turkey's reverential man in traditional textiles by returning one of his products? Dr. Süleyman Ertaş even has Hollywood's production teams coming to him for advice on costumes for their historical dramas and blockbusters.

If Brad Pitt was such a sexy Achilles in *Troy*, it was not because of his impressive muscles or his long hair, but because he was wearing an antique cloak designed by Ertaş. True story.

Eğin Tekstil, *Yağlıkçılar Caddesi 1, (0212) 527 73 75, www.egintekstil.com*

Places to Relax in the Grand Bazaar

The Grand Bazaar is chaos in one of its purest forms. It's a maze of what seems like the same nine shops over and over again and of shopkeepers calling out to you in your language (they're usually correct). Just an hour in the bazaar can be exhausting. Fortunately, there are places, think of them as comfort bubbles, where you can sit down, rest, and have a glass of *çay*.

Before we continue with our recommendations, plug "grand bazaar map" into Google Images and download either one of the first two results. Now, make your way to Halcılar Sokak for a handful of cafes. You'll know you're there when you see a series of repeating arches.

For a hearty meal, head to the end of Halcılar (use that map again), hang a right on Yağlıkçılar Caddesi and then another right on Perdahçılar. There, you'll find **Burc Ocakbaşı**, a restaurant with genuinely delicious food, better than what you'll find elsewhere in the bazaar. The adana kebap is choice.

If you want to get to a truly quiet place, head to Aynacılar Sokak, which leads out to the Mahmutpaşa Gate. There's a very narrow pathway between two stores that you'd miss if you weren't looking for it. Take that pathway up to Sıraodalar, turn right, walk all the way until it ends, and then turn left. There, you'll find yourself in Kalcılar Han, where the silversmiths work. It's an exceptionally quiet place that gets a lot of beautiful light around midday. Hang around enough, and you'll see a *çaycı* pass by.

Kalcılar Han

The Tiny Shop of a Thousand Fabric Wonders

An unnamed shop crammed with vintage fabric treasures of every sort belongs to a man known to everyone as *hoca*, an honorific title that means teacher, but can also be given to a highly respected and knowledgeable individual. In the case of Mustafa Yılmaz, a former chemistry teacher from Diyarbakır, both are true.

Yılmaz can tell the age of the fabric he receives through the existence of three colors: black, brown and bordeaux. The oxidation process, he said, causes those colors to disappear after 70 years, so any cloth that is close to that will begin to lose those hues. At first, traces of those colors become bare, eventually with gaping holes left where they once were.

"It all fades away," he said, so that if someone claims that a carpet or a garment is over 100 years old but still retains those colors, the seller is lying.

This tidbit is a useful one to keep in mind from the man who learned from experience. He said that he didn't know a lot about antique cloths when he began his shop, really two tiny shops that are brimming with fabric and pieces from all over the world. He bought what he liked, and at this current juncture, he had pieces from Peru, Guatemala, China, Africa, the Kohistan Mountains in Pakistan, Morocco, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Sindh Mountains, the Balkans, Uzbekistan, Italy, Turkey, Hungary, and Palestine. Other shops that have vintage fabric are more restricted in their origins, with older work coming from Uzbekistan and Ottoman-era Turkey, but never from such a vast geography.

Hoca Yılmaz's collection includes a stunning tribal-looking garment from the Ottoman Era that he said was borrowed for a recent Turkish television series, *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (The Awakening: Ertuğrul). A lot of his clients, in fact, are from the television or film industry, but those interested in fabric and who are in the know - usually designers or fabric professionals - also stop by to snatch up the unique pieces. "Whatever special fabrics I buy get sold immediately," he said.

If you see something you like, you'd better snatch it up quickly.

Hoca Mustafa Yılmaz, *Yaglıkçılar Caddesi, Terlikçiler* Sokak 13-15

What's with the restoration of the Grand Bazaar?

Conflicting reports on the controversial renewal of the Grand Bazaar by the Fatih Municipality have most of the shopkeepers we met opposed to the proposed changes.

Aziz Özcan, a shop owner who sells central Asian textiles and pottery and was profiled in *The Guardian* on the renovations, says that they are all happening for money. "You can't build on the existing hans because they're historical," Özcan says.

In April, businesses in the Sandal Bedestan were issued eviction notices and the twenty shopkeepers who resisted were forcibly turned out, as the area is said to be leased out to a single owner. That area is still eerily closed off, fueling the fears of shopkeepers who believe that their part of the Bazaar will also be destroyed.

"We're like a family here," says Ali, a seller of Uzbek fabric in Cebeci Han, who believes that the hans are the last place where the old spirit lives on. "If there's a problem, we help each other. When the renovation happens, they'll destroy all the hans and they'll give it to one person. It's the same every time: the poor give up their places to the rich."

Not all the shopkeepers, though, believe that the restoration is a bad idea. The leaf master Nick Merdenyan (see p.5) says that the repairs are long overdue. "It's very old here. When the rain comes, it's like being under a shower. So much of the Grand Bazaar has cracks and if earthquake comes again, we'll be in trouble," he says.

Merdenyan doesn't think that the proposed hotels will change the Bazaar, or that even the rumored chain stores will either. "The Grand Bazaar is not like other malls. We are not open late night. We are not open on Sundays. We have no parking around here. If we let them come, it doesn't hurt."

According to several reports, 300 million TL are to be dedicated to this project to overhaul the market, which will be carried out in three stages. The first stage will repair the roofs. The second stage will repair the walls of 440 shops and eight hans. The third stage will usher two hotels in the Sarınçlı and Güllekeş Hans according to a *Sabah* article from earlier this year. The restoration is scheduled to be finished in 2020.