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{SEWING PROJECTS FOR FALL}

SPECIAL ISSUE

Quilting Arts
MAGAZINE

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creating with fabric & thread

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japan

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i ♥ Japan

Japanese-inspired crafting is the hottest trend taking the sewing world by storm. From traditional to contemporary, this guide takes you through the fascinating world of Japanese clothing, craft, and textiles.

Text **ELAINE LIPSON**

● THE TINY COUNTRY of Japan has something to enchant everyone who loves fabric and craft. Stitchers everywhere are in love with zakka-style gifts, “softies,” and contemporary Japanese garment-sewing books and magazines. Surface designers, art quilters, and textile artists have long been intrigued by vintage kimono fabric and techniques such as shibori, katazome, and sashiko. Fashion sewists are devoted to patterns by avant-garde designers like Issey Miyake, while others adore the mystery of the kimono and other traditional garments and accessories.

Old or new, Japanese style always centers on fabulous fabric, careful construction, and imaginative design that makes the most of what’s available. Add an aesthetic rooted in simplicity, beauty, and nature, and you’ve got the look.

I ♥ TRADITION **Authentic Garments** **& Vintage Kimono Fabrics**

For centuries, the kimono—the word translates as “the thing worn”—was the predominant garment structure for the Japanese. Today, most Japanese wear contemporary clothing, but kimonos are still made and worn by some, and the style continues to inspire textile artists and artisans.

Simple in construction but offering endless possibilities, the kimono provides a blank canvas for the art of textile design. Like other traditional Japanese garments, the kimono is ingeniously constructed: it’s made with rectangles of fabric that leave little or no waste, expandable seams that allow it to fit more than one person or to grow as needed, and belts and closures designed for easy adjustment and comfort as well as beauty.

Even more than the garment itself, kimono fabrics with unique patterns and color are tantalizing to textile lovers. Japan’s long tradition of reusing and repurposing clothing has given crafters a rich supply of vintage

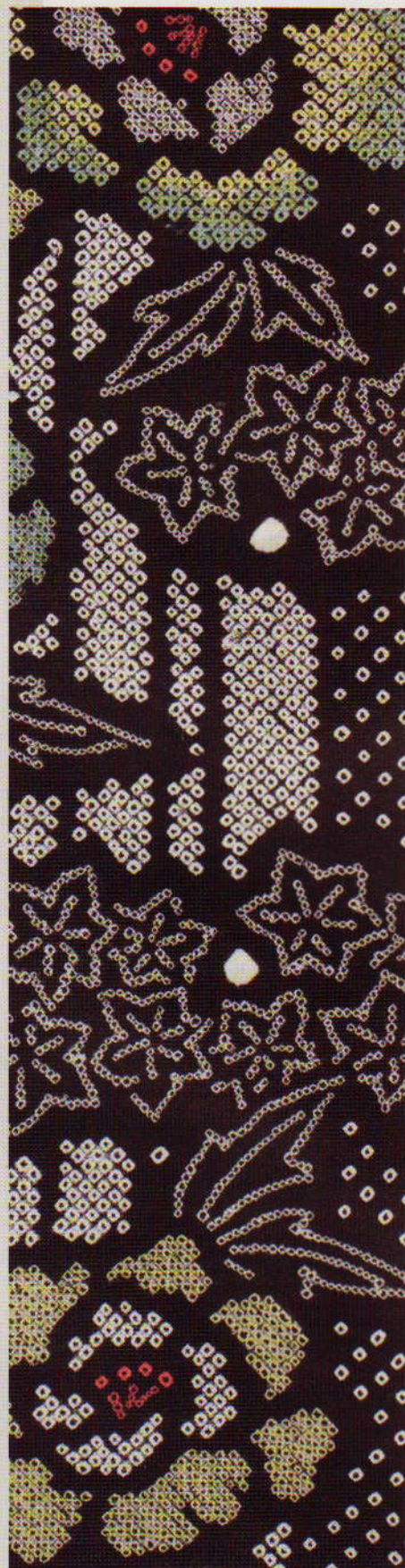
kimono fabric. Small fragments of vintage fabrics are suited to a range of textile art and craft techniques, and they add depth and variety to piecework.

Vintage Japanese cloth isn’t limited to silky kimono fabrics. Rustic indigo-dyed cottons were often patchworked into utilitarian textiles called *boro*, now valued by collectors for their expressive simplicity and instinctive harmony and balance in design.

I ♥ ARTISAN **Surface Design** **& Stitching Traditions**

Over the centuries, skilled artisans devised highly refined methods of coloring and patterning kimono fabric, including the art of shibori, where sections of fabric are tied or clamped to resist dye (usually natural indigo dye) and create patterns. In the 1960s, a loose form of shibori became popular in the West as tie-dye; today’s textile artists approach shibori with refinement and sophistication. Textile artist Carter Smith is known for his dramatic shibori techniques, while Glennis Dolce of Shibori Girl Studios specializes in dyeing silk and velvet ribbons in gorgeous shades.

Opposite: Vintage kimono courtesy of Carol Ziogas of KimonoMomo. **Right:** Classic indigo-dyed fabric featuring sashiko.



If shibori (along with resist techniques like katazome, where a rice paste resist is applied through a stencil to create pattern) is the foremost dyeing tradition still thriving today, then sashiko is Japan's best-known hand-stitching art. White cotton thread on indigo-dyed fabric is the oldest form of sashiko. This unique decorative handstitching holds layers of fabric together while creating patterns on the top surface of the cloth sandwich and strengthening the pieced fabric.

I ♥ MODERN CRAFT

Softies & Zakka

A global leader in technology and industrial design, Japan also has a contemporary crafting movement that's taken the handmade world by storm. Japanese craft, patchwork, and sewing pattern books are full of inspired designs. Although the books are rarely translated and use metric measurements, the craze for Japanese crafting continues to grow, and many of these books are readily available online through domestic sellers or international shippers.

Where to begin with Japanese crafting? The charming, quintessentially Japanese small stuffed toys called softies are easy to make and offer a painless introduction to using these pattern books. Even grown-ups can't seem to have too many softies—the odder, uglier, or more alien-looking, the better!

If you love softies, you're sure to embrace zakka-style projects, too. This uniquely Japanese concept is as simple as "everything and anything that spruces up your home, life and outlook," according to a May 15, 2001, article in the *New York Times*. Handmade zakka might be a tote bag made with a charming patchwork of linen and small prints; a pillow in an Eiffel tower print; a whimsical iPod case in the shape of an owl; or a hand towel embellished with simple hand embroidery. Zakka is pleasurable to make, look at, use, or especially give. It's quirky, soulful, and cool. See the Travel Sewing Kit on page 16 for a zakka-style project to try from the upcoming book *I Love Patchwork: 21 Irresistible Zakka Projects to Sew* by Rashida Coleman-Hale (Interweave).



Have fun making these irresistible zakka-inspired projects. Try the Cat Pillow (page 53) or the Count to Five Baby Book (page 57). Ayumi Takahashi, our cover project designer, featured this adorable softie (right) she made on her popular blog *Pink Penguin*.

PROFILES

Elizabeth Wilson, Asiatica

LONG BEFORE IT WAS CALLED sustainable fashion or repurposed fabric, and before the current craze for Japanese fabric and design was in full gear, Elizabeth Wilson and design partner Fifi White began to make sophisticated, beautiful, and timeless garments from vintage Japanese kimono fabrics. Today, Wilson's Asiatica shop in Kansas City is a destination for worldly, creative women everywhere, her collection of fabrics is an art gallery installation, and her brand is beloved by green fashion connoisseurs for its environmental awareness and for defining a new way of dressing.

In addition to her palette of thousands of vintage Japanese fabrics, Wilson uses exclusive fabrics from the cutting-edge Nuno Corporation, one of the most innovative textile design studios in the world. This blending of ancient and modern earned Asiatica a nomination for the Cooper-Hewitt Design Award in fashion in 2009. "The fabrics do different things," Wilson says. "For pattern we use vintage; the texture comes from Nuno. If you're very sophisticated at it, it's pretty spectacular."

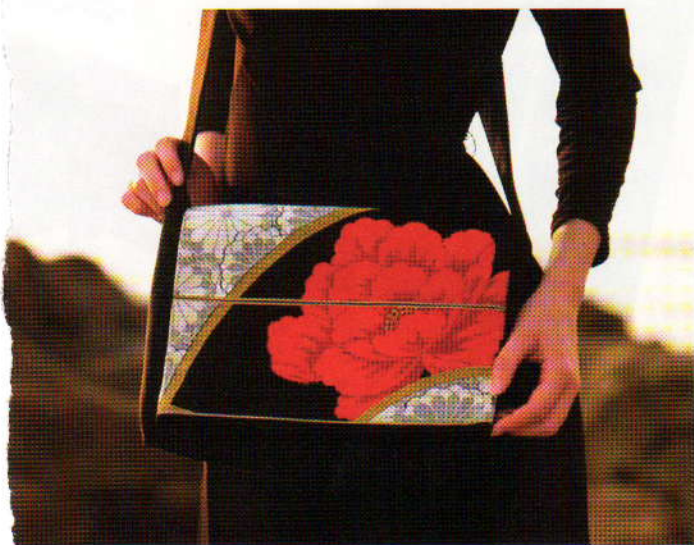
Wilson has been developing her eye for exquisite Japanese cloth for forty years. "There are no limitations in Japanese fab-



rics," she says. "There are big patterns, small patterns, color, and of course if you choose with a constant eye you get a certain sensibility that results." She sees old techniques being used in new and fresh ways, resulting in "lots of energy being released in a variety of ways in Japan."

Rather than going for mainstream mass production, Asiatica has chosen to remain a small, nimble, and creative company that continues to showcase Japan's amazing textile past and future. After forty years of working with Japanese fabrics, Wilson says, "I'm not bored yet."

● For more information, visit asiaticakc.com.



Top right: Installation view, Asiatica Collection, Dolphin Gallery, Kansas City (photo by Mike Sinclair). Above: KimonoMomo Obi Messenger Bag made from vintage Japanese obi (photo by Carol Ziogas).

Carol Ziogas, KimonoMomo

UNDERSTANDING JAPANESE ART and style—and falling in love with it—doesn't require a trip overseas; a willing student can learn a lot from a vibrant Asian community in, say, California. That's what happened to Berkeley-born Carol Ziogas, founder of the online KimonoMomo.com shop and author of The Ardent Thread blog. "Growing up on the West Coast, you're entrenched in Asian culture and you don't know it. It was always a visual influence." At KimonoMomo, Ziogas sells carefully selected vintage Japanese fabrics and garments, supplies for sashiko stitching, and contemporary Japanese craft books, as well as bags and scarves of her own design made with Japanese fabrics.

Ziogas's passion for Japan is evident in her blog, where she provides a rich cultural context for everything she sells. At trunk shows of her collection and the frequent talks she gives on Japanese textile arts, every object, technique, and trend is deeply researched. Asked about the appeal of vintage kimono, Ziogas says, "There's nothing that compares to the quality workmanship. [Vintage] kimono are hand sewn; anything that a Japanese woman would have put on her body was handmade. The workmanship wasn't just a job, it was a gift; you were creating something to give to someone to make her comfortable or safe or beautiful or warm, which gives so much more meaning to a garment than going and buying a T-shirt off the rack. Some garments are electric—they have a whole story to them."

● For more information, visit kimonomomo.com and theardentthread.wordpress.com.

I ♥ FASHION Intelligent Style for Intrepid Sewists

Even as Japan's legacy traditions live on, modern Japanese fashion designers have set an avant-garde standard that has captured the world's admiration. Issey Miyake, one of the most famous of these designers, is a favorite of fashion sewists; he's produced more than seventy designs for *Vogue Patterns* over the past thirty years. Though many are out of print, these highly collectible patterns are traded, bought, sold, and shared on vintage pattern and sewing websites. Some independent pattern companies, such as The Sewing Workshop, specialize in Miyake-influenced garments with a Japanese flavor.

For more unique, contemporary clothes, Japanese garment-sewing magazines and books offer some of the most appealing designs to be found anywhere. Pattern sources range from the hip and youthful *Mrs. Stylebook* magazine to the experimental *Pattern Magic* books to an assortment of specialty books for children's clothes, skirts, accessories, even aprons. Styles are elegant, quirky, and modern, with an easy and attractive fit, and the best part is that patterns are included in the book (either full-size or with diagrams and measurements). If you've been frustrated with a lack of style and imagination in Western mass-market patterns, these books are a treasure trove of ideas.

Be ready to do some careful preliminary work. You'll need to familiarize yourself with metric measurements, be prepared to

work from diagrams, trace or draft your own pattern pieces, and in some cases, create a sloper (a basic pattern block) from your measurements that can then be adapted for various styles. The gorgeous photography in the books will inspire you, and the diagrams will guide you, but a spirit of experimentation and persistence is essential. (See our step-by-step guide to sewing with Japanese pattern books on page 31.)

Using great fabrics will also help you succeed. Many modern Japanese styles use linen or cotton fabrics in solid colors—black, white, natural, and soft shades of taupe, sage, and indigo. Others use bright or richly colored prints that are uniquely Japanese in character. Although any fabrics that you love can be substituted, imported Japanese fabric brands like Kokka, Yuwa, and Seven Islands are available from U.S. retailers (check with your local fabric store, or start with our resource guide, on page 32). Add vintage trim or buttons and you'll achieve the intangible, organic elegance and charm of a true Japanophile.

ELAINE LIPSON is a book editor at Interweave and freelance writer specializing in textile art, craft, culture and sustainability. Visit her blog on textile arts and *Slow Cloth* at lainie.typepad.com/redthread.



At left, Issey Miyake designs from *Vogue Patterns*. Above: a sampling of Japanese sewing books.



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A Step-by-Step Guide to Sewing with Japanese Pattern Books

Text CATHY BULLINGTON

EXPLORING THE INTRIGUING WORLD of Japanese sewing books is an exciting and rewarding adventure. Don't worry about the language barrier; though the text in these books is mostly Japanese, excellent diagrams show step-by-step procedures. With book in hand, do a simple online search for "Japanese sewing terms" to translate basic terms, and you'll be off and running.

Start with an easy bag, hat, or craft pattern to familiarize yourself with the patterns and diagrams, and remember three key things:

1. Measurements are metric (centimeters and millimeters). Convert to inches with a calculator or an online converter.
2. Seam and hem allowances must be added; these are not included on the pattern pieces.
3. Diagrams will show measurements for seam and hem allowances to be added and any variations to the pattern, as well as the order of construction.

Although you might see these items as limitations, it's really a great opportunity to sew it your way. Be creative! Here's our step-by-step guide for successful stitching.

◆ **FIND A PATTERN BOOK.** Japanese craft and sewing pattern books and magazines, such as the popular *Mrs. Stylebook*, are available from many online sources in the United States and abroad (see our resource guide, page 32); international bookstores in urban areas sometimes sell them as well.

◆ **CHOOSE A DESIGN.** Japanese sewing books typically have a front section with beautiful photographs of the projects being modeled and an instruction section in the back. Some or all of the pattern pieces appear on a pull-out pattern sheet and others are diagrammed on the instruction page. Frequently, the instructions will showcase one specific project that includes detailed step-by-step construction techniques with color photographs; these projects are great for beginners.

◆ **CHOOSE FABRIC & NOTIONS.** The instruction page lists required yardage (in

metric) by size and other needed items (interfacing, buttons, etc.). Imported Japanese fabric will help you achieve the look, or work with the fabric you have as you gain skill and confidence in working with this sewing system.

◆ **FIND YOUR SIZE.** As a general rule, Japanese sizes run smaller than American sizes. If you're petite, you may be able to use the pattern as is. Look for a size chart in the book; most include bust, waist, hips, and height (in some charts, additional measurements, such as sleeve length, may follow these). Choose the size closest to your measurements. A Japanese S is close to a size 0/2 (M = 4/6, L = 8/10, LL = 12). Americans tend to be slightly taller as well, so be sure to check the length and adjust accordingly. Japanese garments usually have a good amount of ease built in.

Locate your pattern pieces on the pattern sheet and trace them onto pattern paper. Patterns may overlap on the pattern sheet and will appear on both sides of the sheet, so carefully identify the correct pieces. Be sure to add seam and hem allowances on your traced pattern; the cutting layout will show recommended allowances, as well as diagrams for cutting any pieces not on the pattern sheet. A T-square, metric ruler, and grid paper will come in handy for these pieces.

◆ **DRAFT FROM A SLOPER IF NEEDED.**

Some Japanese pattern books offer only a basic fitted pattern, or sloper. Diagrams within the book illustrate how to adapt the sloper to create the design elements. This is a great way to get the feel of real fashion and pattern design if you have patience and some familiarity with dressmaking.

◆ **MAKE NECESSARY ALTERATIONS.**

Japanese patterns are usually based on simple shapes that are easiest to alter using the "slash and spread" method. If you are not familiar with altering patterns, look for a basic sewing or fitting reference book or online tutorial to guide you.

◆ **ADD SEAM & HEM ALLOWANCES.** Although U.S. patterns typically use a $\frac{5}{8}$ " (1.5 cm) seam allowance, most foreign patterns recommend a narrower $\frac{3}{8}$ " (1 cm) or $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.3 cm) allowance. Use what you're comfortable

with, but if you add a larger allowance, consider trimming seam allowances after stitching. a Seam tracer from Clotilde, which holds two pencils exactly $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6 mm) or $\frac{5}{8}$ " (1.5 cm) apart, is a useful tool.

◆ MAKE A MUSLIN (TEST GARMENT).

After completing the preliminary work, it's time to test your pattern by making a muslin using cheap muslin or inexpensive fabric before cutting into your fashion fabric. this doesn't have to be a detailed finished garment; you need only sew enough to test the fit and style of your pattern, and it's fine to use long basting stitches and leave edges unfinished. as you make the muslin, follow the diagrams for order of construction. if you're familiar with garment sewing, you'll be able to follow them easily, or consult an english-language pattern with a similar style to get an idea of what to do first.

◆ CUT & SEW YOUR FASHION FABRIC. After you're satisfied with the fit of the muslin, transfer any changes to the paper pattern and cut out and sew your fashion fabric.

◆ ADD HANDMADE JAPANESE STYLE. Plan your garment with the Japanese aesthetic in mind. emphasize clean, simple lines with topstitching, embroidery, or piping. Cut yokes or other design elements from a coordinating fabric. when you're ready to expand your knowledge, try creating your own shibori, katazome, or sashiko fabric, or invest in vintage or new Japanese fabric. don't forget you're on a sewing adventure, so be creative and have fun!

CATHY BULLINGTON is an art teacher and textile artist/explorer. Visit *Elephant Booty Studio* at elephantbooty.blogspot.com to read more about her textile explorations.



Resources

TRADITIONAL + ARTISAN JAPAN

Garment Patterns

FOLKWEAR PATTERNS
folkwear.com

JOHN MARSHALL
Johnmarshall.to

Fabric

AH! KIMONO ahkimono.com
—Vintage kimono fabric

BOHEMIAN ELEMENT
bohemianelement.com
—Kasuri cloth (Japanese cotton indigo-dyed handwoven ikat fabric)

FABRIC INDULGENCE & ART SUPPLY
fabricandart.com
—Japanese cotton, linen, dobby weaves, sashiko fabric, and yuzen fabric

KATIE'S VINTAGE KIMONO
katie'svintagekimono.com
—Vintage kimono fabric

KIMONO LILY kimonolily.com
—Vintage Japanese garments & fabrics

KIMONOMOMO kimonomomo.com
—Vintage kimono fabric & sashiko supplies

WUHAO NYC wuhaonyc.com
—Tenugui towels (printed Japanese hand towels)

Online Inspiration & Blogs
CARTER SMITH shibori.com

ENTWINEMENTS:
MAKING SHIBORI NOW
entwinements.com/blog-mt3

ROWLAND & CHINAMI RICKETTS
rickettsindigo.com

SHIBORI GIRL STUDIOS
shiborigirl.wordpress.com

SRI THREADS
threads.srithreads.com

THE ARDENT THREAD
theardentthread.wordpress.com

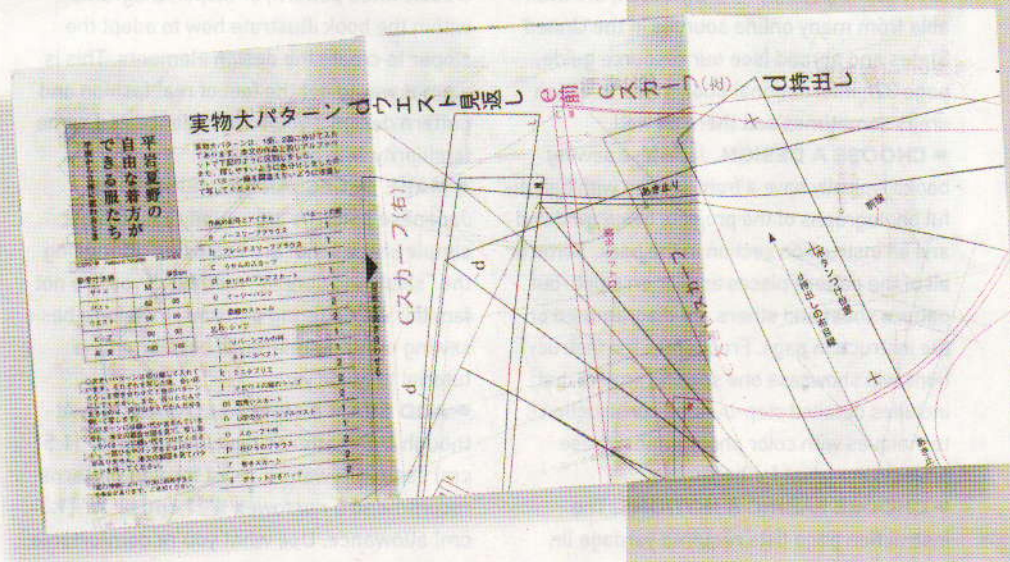
CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

Japanese-Language Craft & Sewing Books & Magazines

AMAZON JAPAN
Amazon.co.jp

BUNKA PUBLISHING
books.bunka.ac.jp/teiki/eng_teiki.html

At left: A typical pullout pattern from a Japanese sewing book.
Above: A sampling of contemporary Japanese fabrics.





CRAFTING JAPANESE

craftlog.org/craftingjapanese

—This site catalogs currently available books and provides a list of sources.

MODERN CRAFT modern-craft.net/shop

SUPERBUZZY superbuzzy.com
—Books and fabric

YESASIA.COM
—Books and magazines

U.S. Patterns

THE SEWING WORKSHOP
sewingworkshop.com
—Japanese-influenced garment patterns

VOGUE PATTERNS
Voguepatterns.com
—Vogue has published more than seventy Issey Miyake designs over the years. Many are out of print; look online for collectors and sellers.

Sources for Japanese Fabric

PURL SOHO Purlsoho.com

REPRODEPOT Reprodepot.com

SEW, MAMA, SEW! Sewmamasew.com

FOG LINEN WORK Foglinenwork.com
—TIP: Search Etsy.com and eBay.com for sellers of vintage and contemporary Japanese fabrics.

Online Inspiration & Blogs

MOVING HANDS BLOG
movinghands.wordpress.com/japanese-sewing-and-pattern-terms
—Japanese sewing and pattern terms

MIYAKE, KAWAKUBO, AND YAMAMOTO:
Japanese Fashion in the Twentieth Century
metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jafa/hd_jafa.htm

—Images and essays from the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Sweet
inspiration...

no sugar added



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