



The Wedding Kimono Given New Life.



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Donna Webster

By Jane Swainson

Donna Webster, designer and creator of Kimono Collections handbags, has lived in Asia half of her adult life. Beginning with a visit to Japan as an impressionable 18 year old dancer, Donna's love affair with the beauty of the East continues to this day, and is given tangible form in her collection of handbags made from the fabulously embroidered and brocaded traditional Japanese wedding kimono.

These kimonos are the gorgeous things that might have inspired W B Yeats to write:

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under
your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under
your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my
dreams.*

Once worn on ceremonial occasions by the noble ladies of the imperial and shogunate courts, the stunning silk uchikake, or “outer robe”, is now only worn by brides at their weddings. Stuff of dreams indeed.

The majority of these traditional outer kimonos are created on an orange-red silk base. This colour was historically believed to ward off evil spirits. Motifs include dancing cranes, pine trees,

cascading water, and cherry blossoms, all associated with Spring and good fortune. Not just the realm of specialist kimono-makers, many of Japan's most famous designers have put their hands to making one-off designs for wedding kimonos, creating true works of art.

Donna Webster decided to honour these rare and beautiful creations by giving them a new lease of life. Each kimono is unstitched by hand, meticulously studied to make the most artistic use of the fabric and then carefully hand cut. The cutting is done to preserve as much of the kimono-maker's art as possible. The selected pieces are then stitched to a sturdy leather backing and framework, double-lined, to ensure a lifetime's use.

Every Kimono Collections Classic handbag is unique. No two are the same anywhere in the world. The rarity and expense of wedding kimonos means that there can only be a finite few handbags produced. These are bags that mothers will pass on to their daughters, and they to theirs.

When Donna created her first Kimono handbag, it was frankly rather experimental. But there was no doubt about the dramatic impact. The Kimono Bag seemed to have a life of its own. No matter which country she was in, men and women stopped her and wanted to comment on it or ask where it had been bought. After 6 months of this, Donna decided to perfect the design

and create a line of wearable art forms that would last a lifetime. The Kimono Collection was created.

Donna explains, “It is a complicated process to blend the fine silk and embroidery in a Kimono Collections Classic handbag/purse with leather. It requires an artistic sensibility and a flexible approach to enable two contradictory fabrics to work seamlessly together to create a beautiful piece of art. We were lucky to find Tone-San, a Japanese artisan who has the skill and experience to produce Kimono Collections creations”.

The range is now growing. In addition to the original two lines of completely individual bags made from the uchikake wedding kimonos, there are three lines of bags made from the Obi. An Obi is a woven, brocaded silk sash, worn around the waist, often with a repeating pattern, but as unique, in itself, as a wedding kimono. And they can be as expensive.

Donna is careful to cut her Obis in such a way as to ensure that each obi-based bag is unique. The three lines, nicknamed Obi-Retro, Obi-Glam and Obi-Oh!, have a distinctive style and go well with the two mainstays of the Classic Collection.
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