

## HaaT, Sind & Porter Classic: Channeling Japanese Traditions for Contemporary Clothing

### Introduction

#### HaaT

#### Sind

The name behind the Japanese label Sind is textile/clothing designer Ryoko Haraguchi. Central to her signature is a combination of Japanese and Indian cultures – her textiles use ancient Japanese traditional dyeing techniques on Indian woven silks while her elegant and comfortable womenswear suggests Japanese modes of dress and Indian *sarees* with their layering and wrapping. ‘Sind’ references a region of western India known for its cotton production/exportation and Ryoko Haraguchi likens the shape of the cotton boll to her design studio/gallery/shop - Sind in Suginami-ku, Tokyo. The studio and gallery were founded in 1992, followed by the retail shop in 1996.

Her contemporary clothing - shirts, dresses, tunics, trousers, jackets, coats and accessories – scarves, shawls show her fascination for colour, texture and pattern. Ryoko Haraguchi wishes to revitalise certain Japanese dyeing methods for future generations. The technique of *kakishibu* has become part of her signature. This uses fermented juice from unripe persimmons, a Japanese fruit, to create a natural dye that responds to strong heat and sunlight. Rich colour variations are possible that range from light beige to dark brown through deep tans, rusts and tobaccos when the persimmon tannin molecules link together to form a coating. *Kakishibu* colours, strengthens, imparts an anti-bacterial finish, protects from insects/decay and adds a waterproofing property, being used for umbrellas and outdoor clothing for centuries. *Kakishibu* is currently enjoying a revival in today’s eco-aware world being ideal for those with sensitive skin as no chemicals are used in its processing and no pollutants caused. Ryoko Haraguchi dyes and over-dyes her fabrics with the persimmon tannin on her chosen Indian silks. She used to take the fabric/finished garment to Japan to over-dye but now sends the persimmon tannin powder to her Indian agent who liaises with artisans in New Delhi and Jaipur; she visits often to oversee the work.

Another technique that has also become her signature is *itajime*, a type of *shibori* (resist-dyeing typically achieved through stitching/binding) that uses wooden boards to create pressure. *Itajime* involves folding fabric several times concertina-style, first in one direction, then the other - pleating almost. The folded fabric is then sandwiched between two wooden blocks - ‘resists’ that are carved with a patterned design. They are tightly clamped together before being introduced to the dye. The folds and pressure create areas that are masked off from the dye and colour penetrates certain areas resulting in ‘negative space’ patterns. By creating different folds and pressing them between different shapes hundreds of variations are possible. This technique used to be used for kimonos but Ryoko Haraguchi adapts it for her beautifully engineered collections to fully express the textiles. Just like *kakishibu*, only a few artisans in Japan still specialise in the process of *itajime*.

Ryoko Haraguchi was born in Kyushu, the most southwesterly of the main islands of Japan, at the end of its long archipelago. She studied Textile Art at Otsuka Textile Design Institute, Tokyo and has worked for the Fashion Planning Department of Toray Industries, Inc., a major textile manufacturer before working as an independent textile designer and an advisor/designer for the Japanese retail giant MUJI where she made frequent visits to India searching for unique textiles. It was seeing the work of such crafts people firsthand that inspired her to further investigate Japanese textile traditions and set up Sind. Her work is shown in galleries in both Japan and India, demonstrating a true trans-cultural collaboration, one that is innovative while embodying tradition.

### **Porter Classic**

The names behind Porter Classic are well-known bag designer Katsuyuki Yoshida and his son Leo Yoshida. Porter Classic was founded in 2007 with the aim of promoting Japanese culture and craft – ‘Made in Japan’ while also reaching a global appeal. Their work is both traditional and experimental where artisanal techniques are honoured and new technologies explored. Their focus is menswear (that women also frequently borrow from) with some dedicated womenswear and accessories.

Materials are chosen that only improve with age and cuts of the clothing are kept simple and timeless to last generations. Cotton is favoured, and an extra-long staple length is selected for a supreme quality that is then typically indigo-dyed for a deep blue. Indigo dyeing has many advantages in addition to its wonderful colour – it is known to repel bugs, insects and even snakes and was used by workers in the countryside. The fading of the blue indigo dye over time creates an attractive appearance with uneven shades and irregular textures being revealed. For today, the indigo-dyed cotton has a relaxed, crumpled quality that works well with Porter Classic’s rugged, worn-in looks.

This indigo-dyed cotton is used as a substrate for *sashiko*, a Porter Classic signature. The Japanese word *sashiko* translates as ‘little stabs’ and typically features tiny, plain running stitches undertaken by hand in white thread on indigo-dyed cotton to create rhythmic patterns – generally in straight lines, rows or diamond grid outlines. Repetition of mark-making is a key aesthetic. This technique was traditionally used to reinforce wear and tear or to repair clothing. It also adds warmth. Classed as ancient Japanese folk embroidery, the practice of this type of stitch work began during the Japanese Edo period (1603 - 1867). It was mainly to be found on clothing of working classes and those living in remote rural communities as fabric was not widely available to farmers and fishermen. When a garment was beginning to fall apart - softening and yielding to human usage, it was cut and intact areas used to patchwork into a new item of clothing – recycled/repurposed *sashiko* clothing was passed down from generation to generation.

Porter Classic continues with this aesthetic where *sashiko* is used for both clothing and accessories. In Autumn 2015 the Porter Classic *Sashiko* collection was launched with a pop-up store called *SASHIKO LOVE* in the

Shinjuku region of Tokyo. This proved to be popular. Seeing and responding to the demand Porter Classic offer on their website 'Standard Items - PC Classics' in addition to their seasonal collections. PC Classics features *sashiko* for both men's and women's clothing (with some custom-made garments as unique pieces) together with accessories where bags feature prominently.

Functional workwear is a key inspiration for their collections with many designs alluding to European and American sportswear/off-duty wear. These include shirts – Jack Kerouac style in plaids; waistcoats; trousers; smocks; overalls; jumpsuits; jackets – utilitarian or more tailored - French-style, Norfolk, safari and shirt/jacket styles; coats – peacoats, duffle coats, trench coats. Multi pockets are often to be seen as is contrast-coloured topstitching to delineate construction and strengthen the cloth while occasional differently coloured buttons/buttonholes enliven fastening systems.

Porter Classic clothing is accessorised with berets, baseball caps, flat caps, trouser suspenders (for men and women), footwear – slip-on shoes and boots and a wonderful range of bags. The bags can be for every day or luggage for travel and come in the form of tote bags, rucksacks, shoulder bags, cross-the-body styles and reversible designs for difference.

Porter Classic have an almost cult following for their defined, 'layered-up' looks that work in both urban and rural environments. Tradition is certainly being seen to continue with Porter Classic's contemporary lived-in aesthetic.

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