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SPECIAL Selection

The Shozo Izuishi Selection No. 3

Top quality garments woven in Masuda, Shimane Prefecture

Refined Uchikake for the 21st Century

Photography/Tomoki Futaishi

A famous costume contest was held in Kyoto in the late 17th century. This period, known as the Genroku era (1688–1704), was the apex of Edo Period culture under Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, the fifth shogun. Three wives of wealthy merchants from Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo paraded around Higashiyama, Kyoto, wrapped in their finest garments. The wife of Osaka merchant Nambaya Juemon¹ wore a scarlet kimono with famous scenes from Kyoto embroidered in gold and silver thread. The wife of Edo merchant Ishikawa Rokubei wore a kimono covered in a sacred-bamboo design embroidered with pieces of red coral representing berries. The wife of Kyoto merchant, Nakamura Kuranosuke, wore a black habutae-silk kimono over a pure white under-kimono tied with an imported gold-brocade obi sash. Without deliberation, everyone decided the simple beauty of Nakamura's black on white with gold brocade outshone the others. Her husband was a silver mint owner in Kyoto at the time and the patron of painter Ogata Korin, who actually coordinated the costume.

The true star of this Genroku fashion contest was the kosode short-sleeved kimono—the kimono style worn today. A discussion on the uchikake kimono robe is incomplete without first looking at the kosode. Before the kosode was worn as an outer kimono in the early 16th century, it was an undergarment. Modest for the times, it had short sleeves—as the Japanese name implies—and was suited to being worn in layers. During the Heian Period (794–1185), when noble women wore multilayered garments, the kosode was worn first, followed by the unlined hitoe kimono, multiple uchigi inner kimonos of shorter lengths to show their edges, the uchiginu kimono to support and stiffen the outer robe, the uwagi top kimono and the karaginu coat. As you can imagine, these garments were enjoyed for their intricacy and delicacy. Once the kosode became a garment in its own right, it became more decorative and was completed with an obi tied about the waist, as it is still seen today. The unbound robe worn over this outfit is called an uchikake. The uchikake swings freely and resembles a western

robe or mantle. As Kitamura Nobuyo explains in his book, *Kiyu Shoran* (1830): “Samurai class women draped [uchikakeru] a kosode over their garments instead of outdoor wear and held [kaidoru] the hems of the folds. Hence this garment came to be known as an uchikake or a kaidori.” As you can see, whereas one kosode was sufficient in ordinary situations as an everyday garment, another kosode—called the uchikake or kaidori—came to be worn on top as a robe for more formal situations. As the name implies, the uchikake flows unbound and draped over the kosode. The wearer must hold the front folds, called tatezuma, when standing, sitting and walking. The fact that the uchikake must be held gives the wearer composure and grace, and even dignity and glamour. When wearing the uchikake, the wearer's hands are not free for everyday household chores. Her hands holding the folds, her fingers' shape, and her shoulders' movement would have set men's hearts aflutter, a thousand years



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TSURUBARA
つる薔薇

The uchikake has a lingering charm, leaving one with a deep, indescribable impression. The more a lady tries to hide her figure, the more harmonious the elegance and charm she exudes. 840,000 yen (incl. tax)

編打掛

ago. The train from behind, too, was no doubt an elegant sight. Author Sakae Tsuboi (1900–1967) wrote in her novel, *Uchikake* (1955): “In particular the shuchin uchikake with embroidered pine, bamboo and plum trees fascinated the poor villagers. The village girls who inspected the garments were overawed by the uchikake with its turned-back red shioze-habutae hem hanging on the kimono rack and had no chance to feel it. Owning one was a distant dream. ‘I want to tear off some habutae silk lining; it’s so hard to come by,’ was all one could say.” Shuchin is a satin-woven silk cloth. Habutae is traditional Japanese silk woven from unspun wefts and warps. Shioze-habutae is thick, ribbed, habutae silk. Nothing was more extravagant than using habutae silk as lining. When used as a kimono lining, a three-centimeter portion of the habutae silk is turned on the front, hence the turned-back hem on the uchikake. In most cases, cotton is inserted into these hems to fill them out. Uchikake robes are white, red, or black, and decorated with nature motifs. This uchikake was red. The uchikake itself has over 1,000 years of history, but one uchikake is elegant perfection, and can be worn for one or two hundred years. The uchikake featured in Sakae Tsuboi’s novel belonged to local village

TSUBAKI

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“Behold! A camellia falls/Spilling a jewel of water.” The camellia casts a vivid, fresh light and its vibrancy touches everyone, as shown in this haiku by famous haiku poet Matsuo Basho. Interestingly, in the language of flowers the Camellia Japonica means “unpretending excellence.”
840,000 yen (incl. tax)



UMOREBARA

埋もれ薔薇

“A large red rose may unexpectedly bloom in crimson,” wrote tanka poet Hakushu Kitahara. The rose symbolizes beauty, love and passion. There is a provoking grace expressed by these dazzling roses, which cover the entire uchikake.
840,000 yen (incl. tax)



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headman Fukumotoya Hachiroemon, and from the late Edo Period onwards was inherited by at least five generations of women.

Kanami Saito, the third-generation designer at Toyoko Saito’s Elance Corporation, launched a revolution in the history of the uchikake—an elegant garment embodying refinement. Saito was inspired to weave an uchikake using Elance’s original thread, while retaining the uchikake’s beauty. Accomplished weavers take many days to carefully and slowly knit one uchikake using this traditional method. Delicately knitted, the uchikake is thick and heavy, draping beautifully over the shoulders. Knitwear is soft, so these splendid uchikake robes, shown here, can be folded and easily carried without creasing.

These uchikake can be worn as bridal robes or even evening robes. With some adjustment, a bridal uchikake robe can be altered into a dress for any occasion. The 21st century uchikake is born.

Born 1944. Joined the fashion industry in 1964. Izuishi has forged a career as a fashion designer, consultant and critic. Author of numerous books including *Otoko wa Naze Nekutai wo Musubu no ka* (Why do Men Wear Neckties?) (Shinchosha) and *Bruu Jiinzu no Bunkashi* (Blue Jeans: a Cultural History) (NTT Shuppan). His recent work, *Suutsu no Hyakka Jiten* (An Encyclopedia of Suits) (Banraisha), instructs men on how to wear a suit and has attracted favorable reviews.

