

Handmade fashions that last  
By Louie Opatz

Fashion can be fleeting. Trends and tastes change with the seasons; new collections are embraced and old ones eschewed as the consumer struggles to keep up with fickle and particular designers.

The fashion designers and vendors of the Portland Saturday Market, however, manage to create and construct fashions that outlast the changing seasons with both their enduring beauty and handmade durability.

Jason and Jerusha Costello, of Tree Town Batiks, Kathryn Matsuura, of Atelier Exclusively Yours and Fumiko Hiroi of Fumiko's Fabric Art are three PSM vendors who pride themselves in making wearable, fashionable garments that stand the test of time.

The Costellos sold at PSM briefly in 2008 before taking time away to focus on their jobs. Upon visiting PSM again in 2014 on a rainy day, the couple was blown away by the large crowds and decided to give it another shot in April of 2014.

“We thought the PSM would be a good fit for us because we did well at other street fairs and thought we would do really well at a top tourist attraction,” Jerusha Costello said in an email. “PSM draws in so many people that it's like having a storefront right downtown.”

The Costellos specialize in batiks, a technique of wax-resist dyeing with cloth to create garments that feature a variety of designs fit for all ages.

As Jerusha Costello put it, “we are known for making bright, detailed designs that appeal to all types of people.”

Tree Town Batiks offer numerous one-of-a-kind designs that run the gamut: the Costellos' shirts feature giraffes, peacocks, unicorns, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, a banjo-playing turtle, trains, monster trucks, Godzilla, a storm trooper, broccoli, cupcakes, rainbows and much more.

The wide-ranging designs adorn a variety of garments, from women's scoop summer tees and long-sleeve tees, to youth tees and tank tops to short-sleeve onesies and long-sleeve lap shoulder tees for the wee ones.

The secret to Tree Town Batiks' singular look is the batik process, which begins with the Costellos waxing a design on a plain white T-shirt. After the design is in place, the picture is hand-painted inside the design cover—both front and back—with wax before the shirt is dyed. Once the shirt has been dyed, the wax is boiled out and it's washed and dried.

The result of Jason and Jerusha Costello's hard work is a distinctive design on an attractive, handmade batik shirt good for all seasons.

As a relative newcomer to Portland, Kathryn Matsuura of Atelier Exclusively Yours has had to adjust to the seasons—specifically the long, rainy winter months.

Matsuura started in May of 2014, and initially found the sales of her fashionable bags, dresses and visors slow-going in the warmer summer months.

During the slow weeks, Matsuura was heartened by the supportive community of PSM, especially Jose, a member of the support staff.

“He said, ‘Kathryn, don’t give up. Because all these people, they’ve been here 10, 15 years, and they’ve had a hard time but they stick with it,’” Matsuura said. “Jose, he really encouraged me.”

But as the weather cooled, Matsuura hit on a practical, attractive item that would become her signature: a light wool poncho with leather

The poncho is both more angular and symmetrical, contouring to the body much more naturally than a typical store-bought poncho. Not only does Matsuura's poncho fit better, it's also versatile.

“It's so easy to wear,” Matsuura said. “It's thin, you can wear it in the morning, evening—even summertime. And I think that's why it became a little bit popular.”

The thin wool ponchos are so popular that Matsuura's living space is inundated with wool for future garments.

“I have tons of material,” Matsuura said. “I just moved into a two-bedroom apartment, and I can't even walk because I have so much material!”

Matsuura also incorporates her Japanese heritage with her dresses, bags and other garments, which she crafts from vintage Japanese kimonos.

“I have unusual things, materials from Japan, bags, scarves,” Matsuura said. “I've got a little bit of everything here.”

Fumiko Hiroi of Fumiko's Fabric Art has also incorporated kimonos and other Japanese styles into her handmade bags since she began selling part-time in 2003.

Hiroi uses kimonos and obis, a cloth stash used like a belt for kimonos, to construct her bags; she also designs the inner lining to match the exterior fabric after a customer suggested it may make it easier to find one's belongings.

“My creative process differs from each bag because each bag has its own personality,” Hiroi said. “I usually start by laying out my fabrics and overlapping the colors to see what stands out and speaks to me.”

After she conceptualizes the individual bag, Hiroi begins the process of trying to determine the bag's shape and design—and lets the process take her where her mind wanders.

“It's similar to a writer, just writing what's on their mind,” Hiroi said. “I have a rough idea of what I want to craft: you just start and let the creative process take over.”

Hiroi has enjoyed her time selling at PSM and all the relationships she's forged over the years, especially in the past six since she's opened her own booth and started selling full-time.

“Saturday Market is a great place to meet not just your local artists and craftsmen,” she said. “It's a great place to make new friends.”

Come make friends and meet vendors like Hiroi, Matsuura and the Costellos every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. from now until Christmas at Tom McCall Waterfront Park.