

JAPANESE PAPERMAKING

By Marilyn Sward

"Work which does not seek beauty
Beauty which follows work"

Kawai

It is extremely hard work to make Japanese paper, but the papermaker who undertakes the labor is rewarded with paper of incomparable beauty and strength.

The materials necessary are:

- bucket
- large cooking pot
- soda ash or washing soda
- kozo fiber
- pounding sticks (baseball bat or wooden mallet)
- formation aid (neri)
- vat with mase or stirring stick
- thread or raffia strings
- su ketta
- press or boards and weights
- flat boards or surface for drying
- large soft brush

The steps are as follows:

1. Place kozo in large bucket and cover with water. Soak 2-3 days changing water several times.
2. Fill large cook pot with water (2 gallons per lb. of dry fiber), add soda ash or washing soda (approx. one cup per lb. of dry fiber) and simmer approximately four hours or until fiber pulls apart easily. I suggest changing the water and adding new caustic at least once during this time to help keep fiber from becoming dark.
3. Upon completion of cooking, rinse fiber in clear cold water for 10-15 minutes to remove all caustic.
4. Stretch out strips of fiber and scrape and pick with knife blade to remove "cheri" or dark specks.
5. Gather a clump of fiber about the size of a baseball and begin to beat by pounding against a flat surface.
6. Test fiber by putting a small amount in a jar of water and shaking it to see the dispersal of the fiber. When strands are no longer visible and it appears "cloud like" it is ready to use.

7. Mix neri or PMP or PNS in running cold water and allow to sit for 2-3 hours or overnight.
8. Add fiber to the vat, small amounts at a time, mixing thoroughly after each addition of fiber.
9. Add neri (formation aid) to vat. This will change the consistency of the vat. The water will become heavier and shiny. It is a question of feel to determine the exact proportions. The formation aid helps the fibers to disperse evenly and slows the drainage of water from the su. Add slowly, mixing heaving with a beating action in the vat.
10. The sheets are formed by dipping the bottom edge of the su and ketta into the vat and scooping up some water/fiber onto the surface. This is thrown back and forth across the surface and the excess is thrown off the back side of the su and ketta. This process is repeated 3-4 times with motions back to front and side to side. This layers the fiber into thin strong sheets.
11. The su is lifted from the ketta, turned toward the stand (prepared by placing a wet felt covered with a wet cloth). The heavy edge of the su is placed down, a guide post which may be built on the edge of the table used, and gently rolled onto the wet surface of the cloth. It is then lifted from the end that was first placed down. A string or thread is laid across the bottom edge to separate the sheets.
12. This process is repeated placing one sheet directly upon the next sheet until a "post" is built.
13. The "post" is covered with a damp sheet and felt. It is then gently pressed for 20-30 minutes in a hydraulic press with almost no pressure or overnight with a heavy board or water bucket on top.
14. Each sheet is gently lifted from the post and brushed against a board or flat upright surface to dry.

You now have
 kozo washi

Japanese paper