

Silkwinds

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Kuching & its Wonders Beyond

Delightful Da Nang
Fish Sauce



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10 Tips for Buying THAI SILK

Words by Lori Ashton

In a world of technology and futuristic fabrics, the smoothness of silk seduces our senses into a comfort that we desire more and more. To be in touch with nature again every time we slip into our favourite silk shirt, trousers, boxer shorts or shawl. Walking into a room accented with silk adorned furniture, elegantly dressed windows in hues only possible with such a luxurious natural fibre and bedrooms full of fun cushions tasseled in silk threads creates a connection for relaxation. For centuries global cultures have known the unprecedented luster of sensual silks.

- 1.** Get to know silk when you see it. First feel it. Some very good imitations are being man made today, however they will never produce the feeling, hues or fluidity that only silks can.
- 2.** The burn test. If you are buying yardage, cut a small sample. Set fire to this. Synthetics when extinguished will smell like synthetic and feel like a plastic ball, while silk will produce ash and smell like burning hair. If your vendor does not want to do this test, be aware. Ask them for a sample, step outside and do it yourself.
- 3.** Obviously the burn test won't work when buying finished goods. Most regulations state that the fibre content of the product must be listed on a sewn-in washable label. If it is not, ask the seller or contact the manufacturer.
- 4.** Handwoven or machine-woven silk? The selvedge edges can usually tell this story. For handwoven, the edges will be uneven while machine made silks produce very even selvedges.
- 5.** When held to the light, handwoven silk fabrics expose that the yarns may not be evenly 'beaten' to each other. Some may be loose

and some tighter creating uneven spaces. This, to me is the beauty of hands beating each thread whether the shuttle is mechanically or hand thrown.

- 6.** Earthy colours in varying hues can tell you that the fabrics may be naturally dyed. Chemically dyed materials are deeper in their tones. Some naturally dyed silks may retain some of the dye residue, meaning that the colour may run for the first few washings. To fix the colour, to a pot of hot water add a couple tablespoons of salt. Place your garment in this pot and 'cook' it for about 10 minutes. Hang dry then launder as usual. This fixing method does not apply for indigo dyed pieces.
- 7.** Thai silks are distinctive in themselves. The silk worms produce a yellowish, slubby filament seen only in Thailand while Japanese and Chinese threads are whiter in colour. As the latter are smoother, the uniqueness of Thai silk is being threatened by the recent combination of these foreign filaments with Thai threads.
- 8.** Mudmee or ikat weaving is an age-old method of tie dyeing. The threads are dipped and dyed numerous times depending on the pattern before the weaving begins. The more complex the design the more difficult the weaving. Look for clear, precise patterns. If they are repeated check one against the next and the next for accuracy. The selvedges should stop and start sharply without any loops in the threads.
- 9.** Mudmee patterns running on the weft of the silks (across) are more prominent from the north east provinces of Thailand while warp mudmee, which is more difficult to obtain a precision pattern due to the warp's movement, are traditionally woven in Chiang Mai province in the north.
- 10.** Most of the silks in Thailand are produced in the North and Northeast. Various villages in these regions weave their own historical patterns. Look for Mae Chaem's famous 'tin jok' patterns and in Surin mudmee silks, for example.

Endless choices are found worldwide. Countless quality books make interesting reading about the threads that tie together rural Thai life – weaving of silks and cottons. [SW](#)



Hailing from Canada, Lori Ashton, the marketing director, conceptualist and publisher of Art & Culture, studied costume design and spent 13 years designing and producing Victorian-style sleepwear and bridal gowns winning the Award of Excellence in Atlantic Canada for her work. The feminine, timeless designs could be found in Saks Fifth Avenue, NYC, Neiman Marcus and in higher-end boutiques across Canada, including two of her own. Taking a break in Asia for 18 months, she and her husband are still enjoying life here after eight years. She was working in 5-Star hotel public relations in Phuket when she recognised the need for an art and culture guide for areas in Thailand.