

nankkeen

*Three Thousand
year old Art Form*

in the **bag**



STORY BY NICOLE M. BOUCHARD
EXCLUSIVE TO COASTAL LIFE



The Liu-Song, South Dynasty, 420-479 AD, was known for its shift in artwork toward more portable formats and this movement unknowingly led to the longevity of the artwork as it was more easily preserved. Seen as having a lasting impression on forthcoming generations of artists subsequent to the Song dynasty, the work of that time period has come to be understood as one of the most significant cultural achievements in Chinese history, as they give a close view of the aesthetic tastes and values of daily life and customs which is often unavailable in written forms of expression in that period.

Nankeen Style located in Tiverton, RI, came about as the result of a fortuitous accident. Anne Page and her husband, whose background focuses on historic architectural preservation, were visiting their daughter in China and had set up a tour of shops in Shanghai. Anne had a fever on this particularly cold day and a mis-turn took them through an old back alley with laundry, tiny gardens and bicycles, off the beaten track. There lay the small museum dedicated to the Nankeen art form "We stumbled into it," Anne says with an adventuresome grin, "...we were not looking at getting into trouble at all! But we discovered what I

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What they discovered was the beginning of a venture that would preserve an ancient art form and take the 3,000 year old tradition into versatile modern use. There is a legend about how the Nankeen design was discovered. A child left their clothes out on the ground in the rain. The leaves of an indigo plant dripped stains in beautiful patterns on the white cloth. Indigo as a plant is best known for its

deep blue color when boiled- a classic example is denim jeans. The hand-dyed cloth of Nankeen fabric however, originated on the Silk Road. The thick cotton cloth was used for the working class as it was durable and lasting. Original patterns were made by hand-carved wooden stencils. Now heavy paper is used, maintaining the artistry of being hand-carved, and a blend of soya bean flour and slaked lime is spread over the stencil. The fabric without the paste mixture, between

the stenciled designs, will take the dark blue color which is obtained by dipping the fabric from column-like hangers (for consistency) ten times. Lighter blue is obtained with dipping the fabric five times. The paste easily flicks off and beneath are intricate white patterns against the blue background of the dyed fabric- both sides are done. Allowed to dry in twelve meter lengths on drying poles of the same height, the patterns come to life, often with symbols for good luck



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and longevity in keeping with Asian philosophy.

The patterns used can be more modern or more traditional. Documented historical patterns were assembled and exhibited in Toronto during 2003. These pieces of history are put to good use on bags and accessories which celebrate their tradition. The more contemporary aspects come from Anne's thirty-years of interior design experience as well as her innate artistic talents which she pursued through taking drawing and painting courses at The Rhode Island School of Design. The fabric is made in China in an environmentally-friendly fashion in keeping with fair labor practices and the textiles are then sent and ready for Anne's designs. With an affinity for Matisse, Anne pairs these simply elegant, take-anywhere, durable bags with vivid shots of color for interiors. The colors on the interiors speak so well to the themes of the patterns and the item/accessory for which they are being used. Bursts of dandelion yellow suit more rustic patterns, while emerald green might enhance a contemporary or a strong pink hue will go with the flow of the butterflies' wings.

The fabric is re-enforced with pressed rubber to hold firm and yet stay flexible as well. The products can be washed and hold up well to time and use. They fit all manner of personal styles and not only a treat for women, there is a line for men as well. Envisioned on chic city streets or retreats by the sea, the items work to suit your lifestyle. The feminine quality of the Jasmine pillow could be on a casual, cream-hued couch in a Narragansett cottage or a bold contemporary bed in an upper Manhattan loft.

Featured on NBC News, Good Morning America and in InStyle, The New York Post and Lucky Magazine, the Nankeen Style 'fever', so to speak, has caught on both here and abroad. ☺

For more information on Nankeen Style, the artistic process, their products and their philanthropic pursuits which support art and education, visit www.nankeenstyle.com

Nankeen's Flagship Store is now open and located at 3848 Main Road in Tiverton Four Corners, Rhode Island right in the heart of the historic district. Hours are Tuesday-Saturday 10-4, Sundays 12-5 Closed Mondays.

