



# Kurashiki Canvas

Kurashiki, Okayama

## Brand Highlights

- Seventy percent of the canvas produced in Japan is made in Kurashiki
- A high-density weave yields the luxury look and fine quality of made-in-Japan canvas
- The extra-thick, leather-like No. 2 canvas and the versatile No. 8—the preferred choice of many bag makers—are woven on vintage shuttle looms

Kurashiki, located in south central Okayama prefecture, is well known for its historical district and picturesque canal lined with white-walled storehouses. A lesser-known fact is that the city produces 70 percent of the canvas made in all of Japan. From truck canopies and industrial gear to the fabrics used in name-brand backpacks and bags, two Kurashiki-based concerns, Takeyari Co., Ltd. and Marushin Industry K.K., carry the lion's share of canvas production in Japan. While much of their output is sold as raw material to other manufacturers, the firms also sew and fashion a wide variety of finished products under OEM license. Baistone, a popular retail shop established by the two manufacturers, carries original brands.

The beauty of Kurashiki canvas lies in its high-density weave. The fabric's unblemished, uniform surface shows clearly when compared with American-made canvases. Of special note are the extra-thick No. 1, 2, and 3 fabrics. Woven on old-fashioned shuttle looms, these high-quality weaves are unlike any canvas product made elsewhere in the world. The No. 2 especially, densest of them all, enjoys a cult-like following among lovers of Kurashiki canvas.

**Opposite page:** A bolt of thick, extra-durable No. 2 canvas rests atop a length of the versatile No. 8 fabric used in the manufacture of handbags and other items. Both are by Takeyari. Note the tight, dense weave made possible by carefully tuned old-style looms. Fine-textured as well as durable, high-quality Kurashiki canvas is used in all manner of items that become treasured, long-lasting personal accessories.



**Above left:** The white-plaster design of *kura*-style architecture adorns a building at Marushin Industry in Kurashiki's Sobara district. The Baistone shop, a favorite haunt of those seeking out Kurashiki canvas, is down a side street just a minute away.

**Above right:** Immaculate piles of freshly woven canvas await shipment at Marushin Industry.

**Left:** Automated Picanol looms from Belgium like this one are no longer made. Lovingly cared for in the Takeyari factory, they are key players in the production of Kurashiki's quality canvas. With each flight of the shuttle through the warp, another piece of fine white canvas comes closer to completion.







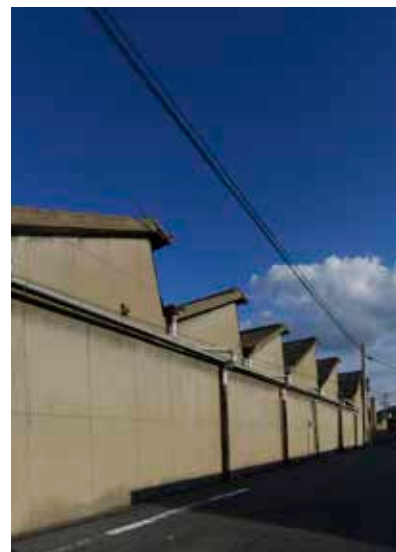
## From cotton fields to canvas weaves

Cotton cultivation began in Kurashiki and the surrounding Bizen region in the late 16th to early 17th centuries and flourished in these areas reclaimed from the sea, where the salty soil was unsuited to rice production. Manufacture of plain-weave, undyed sailcloth made from handspun cotton developed from the Meiji era (1868–1912) onward. Takeyari was founded in 1888 by a farmer named Ishigoro Takeyari. His wife, Ume, was an accomplished weaver whose cloth was much sought after in the area. They started the business to market the products of her loom.

The Takeyaris' concern expanded when a cotton wholesaler began to order Ume's cloth to make men's obi sashes, *tabi*-sock soles, and other products. In due course the cloth won prizes at fairs in Osaka and Tokyo and then in industrial exhibitions.

Second-generation head Takue Takeyari oversaw the shift from handwoven cloth to machine-loom weaving, and then from water-wheel- to steam-engine-driven power. During his time production also shifted from *tabi*-sock bottoms to sailcloth, marking the advent of Takeyari canvas. In 1933, Takue's brother Shin'ei founded Marushin Industry.

In 1968, third-generation head Kazuo Takeyari introduced Picanol shuttle looms to Takeyari's operations. They remain in use today, right alongside their high-speed modern counterparts.



**Opposite page:** Natural light streams in from the windows of the canvas warehouse at Takeyari, bathing piles of pure-white canvas awaiting shipment.

**Top three photos:** At top left is Ishigoro Takeyari, founder of the company, and at right is his wife, Ume, an accomplished weaver. The canvas specialty shop Baistone takes its name from the couple—"bai" being an alternate reading of the character for her name, *ume*, and "stone" a translation of *ishi*. The lower photo shows a mechanized power loom installed at Takeyari in 1909.

**Above left:** A Belgium-made Picanol loom in action at Takeyari. The machines are fondly maintained by skilled technicians who make adjustments as needed to keep them running smoothly.

**Above right:** The "sawtooth roof" of the Takeyari factory, now an architectural rarity. The face beneath each pent roof is fitted with windows, drawing ample natural light into the floors below.

**Right:** The younger generation is charged with getting the word out about quality Kurashiki canvas. Pictured here are Manami Edamatsu and Shota Kagawa of Takeyari, and Ayaka Takeyari of Marushin Industry.



**No. 1**



30 warp x 20.0 weft/inch; thickness 1.45 mm; weight 980 g/sq m;  
horse tack

**No. 8**



35 warp x 25.0 weft/inch; thickness .80 mm; weight 484 g/sq m;  
bags, satchels, shoes, upholstery cloth

**No. 2**



30 warp x 19.5 weft/inch; thickness 1.62 mm; weight 932 g/sq m;  
conveyor belts, wheel dolly storage bags; rescue tool storage bags

**No. 9**



46 warp x 33.5 weft/inch; thickness .82 mm; weight 517 g/sq m;  
vehicle canopies and cover sheets, white denim, sumo belts

**No. 3**



30.5 warp x 21.0 weft/inch; thickness 1.37 mm; weight 846 g/sq m;  
sumo belts; boat hatch covers

**No. 10**



46 warp x 35.5 weft/inch; thickness .65 mm; weight 434 g/sq m; truck  
canopies and tacks, ship sails, martial-arts uniforms, *mochi* cloth

**No. 4**



31 warp x 20.5 weft/inch; thickness 1.31 mm; weight 787 g/sq m;  
gymnasium floor coverings; boat tackle, boat hatch covers

**No. 11**



43 warp x 39.0 weft/inch; thickness .65 mm; weight 333 g/sq m;  
shopping totes, aprons, jackets

**No. 6**



34 warp x 25.0 weft/inch; thickness 1.12 mm; weight 656 g/sq m;  
totes, gymnasium practice mats

**No. 79A**



63 warp x 43.0 weft/inch; thickness 0.5 mm; weight 280 g/sq m;  
bags, aprons, shoes, karate uniforms, *noren* curtains



# Sturdy, versatile canvas

In the heyday of sailing ships vast amounts of canvas were produced for sailcloth. Today this durable fabric is found in everything from kitchen goods to stylish street fashions and even the canopies of trucks. At Takeyari, both vintage and modern-day looms are used to weave all grades of canvas from No. 1 to No. 11. All are JIS compliant; in fact, the firm adheres to the stricter standards that were in place before these industrial provisions for textile engineering were relaxed.

The versatile No. 8 canvas is the choice of many clients for use in making backpacks and bags. The extra-thick No. 2 made on Takeyari's Belgian looms is strong enough to equip conveyor belts, but its application to bag designs has generated new interest in and appreciation of canvas among fashion-conscious consumers. The No. 1, 2, and 3 fabrics, produced only in Kurashiki, are sturdy enough to stand up on their own, opening up a realm of interior design possibilities such as colorful storage bins and shelf organizers.

Canvas is a 100 percent natural fabric that becomes more attractive the longer it is used. Its eco-friendly qualities are in step with the growing inclination on the part of makers and consumers alike to favor designs that stanch the environmental damage wrought by fast fashions.



**Left and below:** Striped canvas by Marushin, popular for handbag and coaster designs. The pattern is created by weaving pre-colored yarns, rather than printing or dyeing finished cloth. Made mainly for OEM products, this fabric can be produced in any combination of colors, and the widths and numbers of the stripes can be altered to customer specifications. The threading of the loom is entirely manual and demands great skill and patience, but discerning eyes can see the difference in the final product. Because the design is generated by the weave itself, the colors remain sharp and the pattern appears on both sides of the fabric.



**Opposite page:** Canvas of different weights is used across all areas of life. Samples by Takeyari are shown with their density, thickness, weight, and most common uses listed.

**Above left:** Freshly finished canvas woven on a vintage shuttle loom is soft and silky to the touch. (Marushin)

**Left:** Warping in sections is a useful technique for small-lot production and striped products. (Marushin)

**Right:** A collaboration between Takeyari and British designer Faye Toogood produced "ABCD"—outsized canvas cushions in the shape of those letters. The cushions can be used separately or assembled easily with a simple rope to form an armchair or modular sofa. ABCD was exhibited at Milan Design Week as a new interior design product highlighting the attractive texture and durable nature of canvas.



## Bag collection

A variety of bags feature in the original product lineups offered by the Takeyari and Baistone brands. Some are made from extra-thick canvas, others make resourceful use of the selvage produced by the old-style looms, and still more stylish items unite canvas fabric and leather. Bags made of the No. 2 weight are classic Kurashiki canvas, favored by fans for the way the fabric ages over time and deepens in character.



Takeyari production manager Chizuru Ooka holds a tall tote made of No. 2 canvas.

**Opposite page:** The bags shown against a dark background are from Takeyari's own line; the others are branded by Baistone.

- Top row: Standard flap tote, coated canvas bag, selvage flap tote
- Middle row: Tall No. 2 canvas tote, vertical selvage tote, extra-thick chambray tote made of cloth woven with charcoal-gray weft
- Bottom row: Standard flap tote, extra-thick chambray one-strap shoulder bag, tall selvage tote











## Expert quality control

No matter how remarkable the looms used to produce Kurashiki canvas might be, their capabilities would be nothing without the practiced hands and eyes of the veteran technicians on the floor.

At Marushin, the weaving process begins with formation of the cotton thread. Two to eight strands are combined to make each one, the number determining the thickness of the finished canvas. The thread is then twisted and measured off into the right lengths for loading onto the loom. The warp is wound onto the beam and placed on the machine.

The condition of the thread is affected by the season and weather. Relatively high levels of humidity are best, as the threads become brittle when dry. The technicians make adjustments as necessary. True artisans, they keep their hands constantly in touch with the process, feeling the condition and tension of the thread as it moves through the machines and moving nimbly to prevent unevenness or breakage.

Every inch of the fabric is visually checked to identify any flaws in its weave. Repairs are made by hand. Whether the canvas has been woven on a vintage Picanol shuttle loom or a modern-day high-speed loom, it is the product of people committed to fine workmanship.



**Opposite page:** Multiple strands of cotton thread are twisted together to increase their strength and prevent the warp and weft threads from napping.  
**Above left:** The warp to be loaded onto the loom is first wound onto giant drums in 6 to 10 bundles of 200 to 300 threads each.  
**Above right:** Threading the warp through the comb-like reeds is painstaking manual work. For a striped canvas, the threads are inserted one at a time in accordance with the color and width of the stripe. The process can take anywhere from one to three days. (All photos on this page: Marushin)



A careful visual inspection of the woven canvas is made to locate any flaws in the weave—knots resulting from tangles in the thread, set marks that can occur when the loom is stopped, dust or fluff lodged in the fabric during weaving, and so on.

In one corner of the well-lit Takeyari factory, workers examine each new roll of cloth, checking carefully yard by yard. The fabric is stamped wherever a flaw has been found. Takeyari further grades the fabric as class A for bolts with few flaws and class B for those with relatively more. No machine produces perfect results, so minimizing the number of class B bolts also depends on how many flaws can be removed through touch-up and repair.



Flaws that can be easily fixed are taken care of at the inspection stage. Some, such as the repair of set marks and other more intricate errors, will require the skills of another artisan, a next step in the finishing process.

As shown in the five photos at right, if the weft has skipped a few warp ends, the resulting “float” is carefully removed with a needle and the fabric smoothed with a special tool, leaving no trace of unevenness.

Such attention to the finer details of workmanship explains why Kurashiki canvas accounts for 70 percent of the canvas produced in Japan. From the thread formation to weaving and finishing, hands-on dedication shapes each step of the process.

