

M E M O I R S O F A G E I S H A

*“My world is as forbidden as it is fragile;
without its mysteries, it cannot survive.”*

In 1997, author Arthur Golden offered readers an intoxicating and riveting story of a hidden world in his acclaimed novel, *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The sweeping romantic epic spent two years on *The New York Times* best-seller list, sold more than four million copies in English, and has been translated into 32 languages.

Now, Oscar®-nominated director Rob Marshall (*Chicago*) and producers Douglas Wick & Lucy Fisher, and Steven Spielberg, along with an acclaimed international cast and an award-winning behind-the-camera team have brought this mesmerizing fable to the screen.

Butterflies of the night ...

Geisha have long been figures of fascination in Japan and throughout the world. For centuries, they have emerged from their homes at dusk like butterflies from a cocoon for a night's round of teahouse engagements. Social evenings have always been an important part of business in Japan, and the presence of geisha reflects well on the host who can afford such glamorous companions.

Neither wife nor prostitute, a geisha is an artist who earns her living entertaining powerful men. The word *gei* (pronounced gay) means “art” in Japanese. A geisha

is a trained dancer, singer and musician, as well as a witty conversationalist. She laughs at her client's jokes — and never tells his secrets. She creates drama with a simple flick of her fan.

Years of hard work and self-discipline have transformed her into this refined creature, but underneath her binding layers of kimono and neutral mask of make-up is a flesh and blood woman with her own history, disappointments and dreams. The secrets she guards most closely belong to her own heart.

The geisha districts described so vividly in Arthur Golden's novel still exist today, and authentic geisha continue to entertain in elegant old teahouses. They dress, groom themselves and perform as geisha have for centuries. Women who become geisha today are often drawn to the profession through an interest in the traditional arts and may remain in it only a few years. Once their country's most fashionable women, top geisha were the supermodels of their day until "modern" came to be defined as Western in Japan.

Memoirs of a Geisha begins in 1929, near the end of the geishas' golden era. Told as a fable from a disappearing world, the film is set in a fictional *hanamachi* or geisha district.

As Sayuri (Ziyi Zhang) enters this hidden world, she is taught that a geisha is not free to love, or to pursue her own destiny. Her mentor, the legendary geisha Mameha (Michelle Yeoh), understands the limits of an intimate relationship with a special patron or *danna*, and teaches Sayuri to keep her feelings tightly reined. Unlike Sayuri's defiant rival Hatsumomo (Gong Li), Mameha knows that a proper geisha cannot afford to indulge her passion for any man.

Yet Sayuri cannot forget a moment of unexpected kindness she experienced at an early age. The memory of that moment shimmers like a mirage, and sustains her through years of suffering. Looking back at her life, she remembers "a little girl with

more courage than she knew,” and reflects, “These are not the memoirs of an Empress, nor of a Queen. These are memoirs of another kind.”

The Perfect Fit ...

Ziyi Zhang experienced a not uncommon reaction after reading Arthur Golden’s novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*. “I couldn’t believe that a man wrote this book about the life of a woman,” said the actress. “And I couldn’t believe it was an American man writing with such detail about a little-known Japanese sub-culture.”

Director Rob Marshall savored the exotic world in which the story unfolds, but said he was just as taken by the universality of the young orphan Chiyo’s plight, and her eventual triumph after an accidental meeting changes the course of her life. “This story lives in a very specific world, and yet the underlying theme of the triumph of the human spirit against all odds connects to any culture,” said Marshall. “The fact that this one child, after being taken from her home and sold into slavery, can survive and ultimately find love is deeply moving to me. Especially when that love is forbidden to her.”

The novel’s themes of hope and survival inspired producers Douglas Wick and Lucy Fisher, partners in Red Wagon Entertainment, in their quest to adapt the novel for a feature film. “It was about a triumphant character in a strange and sumptuous world,” said Wick, “and it just cried out for the big screen.”

Wick, the Academy Award®-winning producer of *Gladiator*, acquired the film rights soon after the novel was published, and gave a copy to Columbia Pictures chairman Amy Pascal (then head of production at the studio). Fisher, who was then vice chairman of the Columbia TriStar Motion Picture Group, said, “It was so captivating, I just could not put the book down. We all believed it had such vivid movie potential in terms of its roles and its visual life.”

Among the book's great strengths were Sayuri's keen observations as she encounters a world that she (along with most readers) had never even imagined. "We knew that capturing the essence of her interior monologue would be a challenge," said Fisher, "but it was also an opportunity. We were recounting the reminiscences of a woman whose life took an amazing turn when she was just nine years old. Much of what she shares is first seen through the eyes of a child, which gave us freedom to tell her story as more of a fable."

After working as an executive on many films with Steven Spielberg, Fisher anticipated that he would also fall under the novel's spell. He signed on as director, and preliminary pre-production work began.

"Culturally, it was one of the most fascinating stories I had ever encountered," said Spielberg. "I was very moved by the love story, by the rivalry between Sayuri and Hatsumomo, and by the test of friendship between the Chairman and Nobu. I thought audiences all over the world would be fascinated because it's not just culturally significant as legend or history from Japan. It's relevant to people in every country. It was certainly relevant to me."

However, after several near-starts, it became clear that Spielberg's calendar could not accommodate the demanding project, so he stepped aside, remaining on board as a producer. With the director's chair open and dozens of candidates vying for the project, Wick and Fisher began their search for the perfect fit.

An Impression of Time and Place ...

As soon as Fisher and Wick saw an advance screening of *Chicago*, they knew they had found their director. A boldly modern presentation of a tale from an earlier era, Rob Marshall's feature film debut was a critical and commercial sensation recognized with a string of major awards including the Oscar® for Best Picture and

five additional Academy Awards®. Marshall himself received a Best Director Oscar® nomination and the Director's Guild Award.

When Fisher and Wick first sat down with Marshall and heard his vision of the movie, "it was exhilarating," said Wick. Transforming a beloved work of art from one medium to another is a huge challenge, but Rob had absolute clarity about his path through the novel. The look and feel of the film would reflect that it is a memory piece told years later – an impression of a time and place experienced at a young age rather than a literal recreation. We could almost see the movie as he talked about it. Rob would not be afraid to bring his own aesthetic vision to the material, just as he demonstrated with his innovative approach to *Chicago*. He wanted the audience to experience the wonder Sayuri felt as she discovered the geisha world."

Author Arthur Golden was similarly enthused when he heard that Marshall would be directing the film. "I was madly in love with *Chicago*," he said. "It was a better version of the play that I had loved. So when I heard that Rob was interested in directing the movie of my novel, I was thrilled!"

The first thing Marshall did to prepare for the project was reread the book. "I needed to take the journey from the beginning and see what hit me," he said.

The director was well aware that he was not preparing to make a geisha documentary. "I knew that the drama of these characters combined with the allure and exoticism of their world would allow us to achieve something unique and compelling," he said. "And while I knew I would veer from tradition when it was necessary to serve my vision of the story, I needed to thoroughly understand the reality first."

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Soon after, Robin Swicord (*Little Women*, *Matilda*) came on board to write a draft of the script, and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Doug Wright (“I Am My Own Wife,” *Quills*) was later brought in for revisions and polishing. Marshall and the producers stayed in regular contact with Golden as the script took shape. “Rob said to me very early on, ‘I want to make a movie you love,’” Golden recalled. “We spent many hours talking about how the story is put together and ways to make things better for the film. He sent me every draft of the screenplay.”

Marshall then gathered the key members of his team for a trip to Japan. “I had decided to tell Sayuri’s story as an impression of a time and place, but needed to **thoroughly** understand the reality first,” the director explained. “We all agreed that total immersion in Sayuri’s world was the only way to begin, so we traveled to Kyoto together to experience everything we could.”

The group of 10 visited museums and shrines, toured a kimono factory, attended a sumo match, rode in rickshaws, scouted the coast of the Sea of Japan, attended spring festival dances and watched an apprentice geisha (*maiko*) apply her makeup and dress. Marshall and John DeLuca, the film’s co-producer and choreographer, were invited backstage to witness the legendary actor-dancer Tamasaburo Bando prepare for a Kabuki performance. Their Japanese hosts also arranged for an evening of geisha entertainment at the exclusive Ichiriki Teahouse.

Absorbing the atmosphere of Gion and other *hanamachi* (geisha districts) was essential to their mission. “Dion (Beebe, the film’s director of photography) and Rob and I would let ourselves get lost and just take photographs,” said Oscar®-winning production designer John Myhre. “When it came time to construct our buildings, we’d go through our pictures and say ‘that roof would look really nice with this type of window, which would look great with this type of door.’”

Potential locations for filming were identified, but Marshall, Myhre, Beebe and executive producer Patricia Whitcher realized they could not shoot the entire movie

in Japan. “When we analyzed the amount of work we had to do in the streets,” Whitcher explained, “there was just no way we could disrupt an active community for that long to recreate what we needed to tell this story.”

Also, Japan’s *hanamachi*, or geisha districts, had changed greatly since the period during which the film occurs. “Even in the beautiful ancient cities, we could not find an area of businesses that was untouched by modern elements,” Marshall said. But the group came home inspired by their shared experience and by the collective set of references that they would draw from over the coming months.

Finding Sayuri ...

Portraying the geisha Sayuri had been the dream of many actresses, but the role had several demanding requirements. The actress playing the luminous adult Sayuri would also have to portray her as the adolescent housemaid Chiyo. “We see this character blossom from girl to woman, and from servant girl to superstar, and we didn’t want to split that into two different parts,” Marshall emphasized. “Our actress had to be credible as a 15-year-old and as a 30-year-old. She also had to be a strong actress, and speak English. And we needed a brilliant dancer because dance is so important in the geisha world and a key element in Sayuri’s personal story.”

Zhang followed up her memorable performance in Ang Lee’s Oscar®-nominated *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, for which she won the Independent Spirit and Toronto Film Critics Awards for Best Supporting Actress, with roles in *House of Flying Daggers* and the Oscar®-nominated *Hero* for director Zhang Yimou. She was nominated for BAFTA’s Best Actress Award for *House of Flying Daggers*, and won the Hong Kong Film Critics’ Society’s 2005 Best Actress Award for her performance in Wong Kar-Wei’s critically acclaimed *2046*. Zhang sang and danced in *Raccoon Palace*, the latest film from 82-year-old Japanese director Seijun Suzuki.

The pivotal roles of Mameha (Sayuri's mentor) and Hatsumomo (Sayuri's nemesis) went to two superstars of Asian film, the glamorous Michelle Yeoh, who had appeared with Zhang in the popular *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and the legendary Gong Li.

Li, who also starred in *2046*, makes her debut in a major American film as Sayuri's rival. Her screen work includes a string of astonishing performances in films for director Zhang Yimou including *Ju Dou*, *Red Sorghum*, *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Shanghai Triad*. *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* were the first Chinese films to be nominated for Academy Awards®. Li won the Best Actress prize at the Venice International Film Festival and China's Golden Rooster Award for her performance in Zhang Yimou's *The Story of Qiu Ju*. Her credits also include *The Emperor and the Assassin*, *Tempress Moon* and *Farewell My Concubine*.

Yeoh, who was Zhang's co-star and sparring partner in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, portrays the elegant and experienced geisha who guides Sayuri. Yeoh's work in *Crouching Tiger* brought her Best Actress nominations for the Taipei Golden Horse Award, the Hong Kong Film Award and the BAFTA Award. She is also known for her starring role in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

The fact that both Zhang and Yeoh were dancers was a big bonus for *Memoirs of a Geisha*, giving John DeLuca the freedom to create more demanding choreography. This was particularly true for a sequence featuring Zhang that became a centerpiece of the movie. "Playing Sayuri would be too hard for an actor who isn't a dancer," said Marshall. "A geisha's dance training shows in all her movements, and Ziyi and Michelle picked that up like a sponge."

As for the gorgeous but treacherous Hatsumomo, Marshall knew the pitfalls an actress might face with this character. "It would have been easy to play her as a one-dimensional villain. But Gong Li gives her three-dimensionality with sadness and fragility that make Hatsumomo incredibly compelling."

Five of the film's key roles were cast with some of Japan's top actors. Ken Watanabe, an Oscar® nominee for his portrayal of the warrior 'Katsumoto' in *The Last Samurai*, anchored the cast as The Chairman, the man who claims Sayuri's heart. Watanabe recently starred in the critically acclaimed *Batman Begins* and in the Japanese film *Kita No Zeronen*. His many film and television credits include the popular comedy *Tampopo*.

Koji Yakusho, a leading man in Japan long before Western audiences discovered him in the original *Shall We Dance?*, portrays the man who seeks to become Sayuri's patron. Yakusho has starred in many internationally acclaimed films, such as *The Eel* and *Warm Water Under a Red Bridge*, and has won Japan's top film acting award for an Actor in a Leading Role nine times to date. He next stars in Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu's *Babel*.

Kaori Momoi, another beloved star in Japan, landed the role of Mother. Momoi made her 1971 screen debut in Kon Ichikawa's *Ai Futatabi*. Since then, she has starred in more than 40 films, working with such legendary Japanese directors as Akira Kurosawa and Shohei Imamura.

Youki Kudoh, a star of the American film *Snow Falling on Cedars*, was cast as Pumpkin in *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Nominated for Japan's Best Actress award for the film *War and Youth*, she received the International Actress of the Year Award from the Japan Film Critics for *Picture Bride*. She received a Best Actress nomination from the Independent Spirit Awards for Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train*.

A protégé of Ken Watanabe's, young Suzuka Ohgo, was also awarded a leading role in the film. After making her feature film debut opposite Watanabe in *Kita No Zeronen*, she was cast as Chiyo, the child destined to become Sayuri.

About the Production ...

Principal photography of *Memoirs of a Geisha* began last fall at Sony Pictures' Culver City lot with a traditional Japanese blessing led by Ken Watanabe, and wrapped under a rainy sky in the Shizuoka prefecture of Japan.

The very first scenes were shot inside Nitta *okiya*, the fictional geisha household where much of the story takes place (Nitta is the family name). Young Chiyo (Suzuka Ohgo), frightened and exhausted, has been dropped at the *okiya* doorstep by the icy Mr. Bekku (Thomas Ikeda). As Auntie (Tsai Chin) leads her through the house to be sized up by Mother (Kaori Momoi), Chiyo's new life — far from home and loved ones — begins.

Marshall and his crew created the film's exotic and elaborate world on three soundstages in Los Angeles and also constructed an entire period geisha district, recreating ancient streets and even building a serpentine river on a sprawling ranch in Ventura County, California.

In addition to the ritualized life of the *okiya*, the team depicted lavish parties, spring festival dance concerts, crowded streets scenes, a sumo match, formal teahouse entertaining, an explosive fight between Sayuri and Hatsumomo, the wartime occupation of a village, the post-war transformation of that village and much more.

After moving to Northern California, the company continued filming at the Sacramento Railroad Museum, in the streams of the American River in California Gold Rush country, and on rugged coastal cliffs.

The production continued on to Japan to capture authentic locations, rarely, if ever, seen in Hollywood films. These sites included Kiyomizu-tera, a Buddhist temple on stilts founded in 778 and rebuilt in 1633, and the Buddhist Yoshimine-tera, which dates back to 1029. The still waters at the Shinto Heian Jingu shrine in the heart of

Kyoto provided an eloquent visual equivalent to Sayuri's mood in one of the film's final sequences, while the magical Fushimi Inari, where miles of orange Torii gates climb into the hills of Kyoto, was a fitting backdrop for a transformative scene with young Chiyo. The energy and spirit of this legendary Shinto shrine, where pilgrims pray for relief from their burdens, reflected the child's hope, determination and joy on the day she met the Chairman.

Memoirs of a Geisha completed principal photography in a remote tea and tangerine-growing region near the town of Kawane-cho. The star of the final day's work was a vintage steam engine that crossed an old bridge over the Ohi River. At wrap, the American and Japanese crew gathered in a noodle shop-general store near the river to warm up and toast director Marshall.

Mastering the Geisha's Art ...

Over the course of her life, a geisha spends many hours in classes perfecting the arts that define her as a symbol of Japanese culture. In Sayuri's time, dance training and mastery of the three-stringed *shamisen* began long before a girl became a *maiko*, or apprentice geisha. By the time she was a full geisha, her subtle trademarks – the way she lowers herself to the floor, rises from the table, glides across a room, pours sake – have become second nature to her.

To help his actors with these fundamentals, Marshall brought them to Los Angeles six weeks early for "Geisha boot camp," an intensive period of rehearsals and classes with a team of experts who guided the actors through the world of the geisha.

"It was something very new to me," said Gong Li, a star in China since her 1987 debut in *Red Sorghum*. "We rehearsed every single scene, every word."

The actresses rehearsed in kimonos to adapt to the weight, feel and flow of the elaborate garments. Dance classes helped them perfect geisha body language. “You cannot move like you are wearing jeans,” observed Youki Kudoh, who plays Pumpkin. “You are restricted, so you reconstruct yourself. You learn to be elegant.”

Technical consultant Liza Dalby, the primary consultant to Arthur Golden on his novel, introduced the cast to the nuances of geisha demeanor. An author and cultural anthropologist, Dalby is the only Western woman to have lived and worked as a geisha in Japan. “Some of the things that were very difficult for me to learn then, like walking properly in a kimono, are things that I could help explain to the actresses,” she said.

She also coached them on playing the *shamisen*. “I was impressed by their ability to make their playing look real,” said Dalby, an accomplished player herself. “Michelle Yeoh actually did learn to play – she has an incredible ear.”

Yeoh was motivated by her teacher: “Since Mameha is the epitome of geisha,” she said, “I knew I had to be convincing to play the role. So I spent a lot of time watching Liza, whose geisha demeanor has remained with her.”

Dressing a geisha in formal kimono is labor-intensive. Actor Thomas Ikeda, who plays geisha dresser Mr. Bekku, worked with kimono consultant Yuko Tokunaga and a fit model to learn the draping, drooping, criss-crossing, cupping and other technical fine points of the ritual. Marshall wanted Ikeda to master every step even though only parts of it would be filmed. “Rob told me my character was probably the son of a geisha,” Ikeda confided.

Sayuri's World ...

Bringing *Memoirs of a Geisha's* textured atmosphere to the screen was a major challenge, as well as a rare opportunity to take the audience into a vanishing world.

After realizing the obstacles to filming in an actual *hanamachi*, and after further scouting on several continents, the filmmakers decided to build their own geisha district.

Production designer Myhre devised a detailed floor plan for the village with Marshall. Next came a full set of technical drawings for some 40 buildings and the construction of a quarter-inch model of the *hanamachi*, complete with toy cars and rickshaws and the carved path of a serpentine river. The model provided a frame of reference for many production decisions. “We put a small ‘lipstick’ camera inside the model so we could view on a monitor what it was like to be in there,” said Myhre. “Rob and Dion played with it all the time, and even used it to plan a complicated crane shot.”

The geisha district or *hanamachi* was built at Ventura Farms, an immense horse ranch about an hour outside Los Angeles with mountains in the distance and 360° green valley views. In 14 weeks, a grazing pasture was transformed into five meandering blocks of cobblestone streets and alleyways. Construction coordinator John Hoskins and his crew began by grading a 400' x 400' pad, then cut a river through the center. About 250 feet long, 22 feet across and eight feet deep, the river had a re-circulating system that created the illusion of running water.

Making the *hanamachi* user-friendly was imperative. “We marked it all out on the ground with stakes and strings so we could walk through it,” said Myhre, “then acted out the scenes so that we could design around the action.”

The set was built with cedar, bamboo and clear fir. Black bamboo and sheets of cedar bark, both unavailable in the U.S., were shipped from Japan, along with fences made of woven grass and bamboo. Set decorator Gretchen Rau, a veteran of *The Last Samurai*, bought huge quantities of window coverings, reeds and mats while shopping for the film in Kyoto. To accommodate the shooting schedule's

seasonal shifts, greens foreman Danny Ondrejko created four hand-made cherry trees for each time of year.

Another major seasonal consideration was light. Although the location had many charms, it did not offer the flat winter light of Kyoto — another test of the filmmakers' creative mettle. Altering light by filtering it through a "silk" is a common technique, but covering an enormous set with a retractable silent grid cloth (aka "silk") was a bold undertaking. Key grip Scott Robinson and his crew had to cover nearly two acres with the largest freestanding structure ever built over a set. The fabric itself — 1.75 acres of sailcloth divided into six separate "rags" — moved across Kevlar lines suspended between two trusses. The rags could subdue light by day or keep out the dark at night, which allowed the filmmakers to shoot night for day. Anchored by tanks holding a million gallons of water and held together with 10,000 bolts, the trusses spanned 250 feet and were tall enough to accommodate 60-foot Condor lights.

"A lot of thought went into the logistics and engineering," said Beebe. "We knew that wind would be an issue out there, and noise, with so much flapping material above us. We only got it done because a lot of brave people took a chance. It contributed immensely to the look of the film."

Most buildings at the Ventura Farms set were only exteriors, but several had fully executed interiors on Sony soundstages. These included the Nitta *okiya*, the Yukimoto teahouse, Dr. Crab's clinic, the public baths and Mameha's apartment. The two-story *okiya* was designed to look about 150 years old. Much of Sayuri's story unfolds in its rooms — from her arrival as Chiyo on her first night in the city to the explosive fight between Hatsumomo and Sayuri years later.

Many of the walls of these rooms were formed from paper-covered doors of the period — *shoji* — from Japan. The *ranma*, or intricately carved wooden grills above the *shoji*, were also Japanese antiques, along with most of the furnishings in the

okiya. Myhre's team even found and reproduced vintage Japanese newspapers from the period to plug holes in the *okiya* walls for scenes when the household has fallen on hard times. Chairs were an anomaly in a world where everyone sat on the floor, so Myhre viewed his sets from that vantage point while designing, defining eye level as three feet from the floor.

Beebe enjoyed the opportunity to explore the story's contrast between electricity and oil lamps on this set. "Rob loves a faded, aged aesthetic, an almost tobacco-stained world of layers and textures," he said. "We lit a lot of things in the *okiya* from oil lamps and flame. Those warm, flickering light sources added mystery and depth."

"Eight yards of fabric ..."

Sayuri's life journey was often likened to the flow of a river and her affinity for water was a constant visual motif in the film. "There are water aspects in almost all of her kimonos," said Oscar®-winning costume designer Colleen Atwood. "The best one was at the end, a transparent blue-gray with a waterfall design that flowed from the *obi* to the hem."

Marshall chose to tell Sayuri's story as if we were seeing the film through the prism of her memory, her long-hidden impressions of a bygone world, and wanted the feeling of a fable in the look of the principal characters. "She is sharing her youthful memories, the most dramatic episodes of her life," he said. "We wanted our lead characters to look the way Sayuri saw them – larger than life."

Hatsumomo, played by Gong Li, wore much stronger colors and patterns than a real geisha would. Even her sleeve-length defied regulations. "Hatsumomo is a fashion character," said Atwood, "which to me means a person who doesn't wear fashion, but creates it. She wore kimonos with a huge amount of attitude."

“The 1930s were a high point of the geisha world, so the principal characters had a lot of kimonos,” Atwood continued. “It is a fairly simple garment – just eight yards of fabric – but what creates value are all the layers of technique involved. A really high-end kimono would have hand painting and *shibori*, a very specific dyeing technique, as well as hand-embroidery and a hand-woven, hand-designed *obi*. In Japan, it takes about a year to make one.”

In addition to creating exquisite kimonos for the film’s leading ladies, Atwood outfitted hundreds of other characters including the peasants in a fishing village, the denizens of the thriving *hanamachi*, aristocratic party guests in Western finery, Japanese soldiers and desperate war evacuees and the post-war *hanamachi* population. “It seemed that almost every day we shot a huge scene that was completely different than the day before,” she said.

Atwood’s department made more than 250 hand-finished costumes with a key crew of about 30 people at her Culver City workshop. Kimonos were made for characters of every socio-economic level, and for every season. The women’s department even made geisha underwear and their white cotton *tabi* socks, which fasten on the side and separate the big toe.

The liberties taken in designing for the principal characters did not apply to the hundreds of smaller characters and background players. “It was very important to us to know what was real in the time and place we were examining,” Atwood emphasized. “I went to the archives at the Fashion Institute in Tokyo and saw great journalism from the period, images that were incredibly helpful.”

Kimonos for many background characters were rented from the Yuya Collection in Kyoto, which specializes in Japan’s Taisho (1912-1926) and Showa (1926-1990) periods. Other vendors were far-flung: England, Denmark, New York, Los Angeles. “I even bought beautiful antique kimonos from a Russian collector on eBay,” Atwood said.

The screening techniques of an on-site crew of textile artists headed by Matt Reitsma allowed Atwood to replicate and embellish designs from antique fabrics on new material. This team also dyed, stenciled, hand-painted and embroidered Sayuri's blue-grey waterfall kimono. The fabrics they created included the print used for the robes worn at the hot springs.

The film's leading men wore western suits custom-made by Atwood's men's department — whose creations ranged from military uniforms for the General and his aides to banana fiber skirts for the village fishermen. Key specialty costumer Deborah Ambrosino created the spectacular eight-inch-high lacquered black sandals for Sayuri's dance solo.

Today's geisha represent traditional, rather than modern Japan, but there was a time when they were trend-setters in their country, and elements of their unique style still recur in Western fashion. "It is a very special and beautiful look," said Atwood. "I think the low neckline in back will definitely be noted by the fashion world again soon."

"Every hair in place ..."

A geisha's pale skin, jet black hair and jewel red lips have been part of her signature for centuries, handed down inside the *okiya* from one generation to the next. Japanese-born make-up designer Noriko Watanabe followed the principles of traditional geisha make-up with the film's lead actresses, but she also softened some aspects of the look and exaggerated others to heighten the impact of their beauty. "To be geisha, they had to be chosen," she noted. "To be chosen, they had to be so beautiful and intelligent that they almost seemed untouchable."

Watanabe anticipated the challenges that the geisha's white foundation would present on an American set. "Its texture and consistency are different from

foundations we normally use for film,” she said. “It dries fast and will streak if you don’t work quickly.”

Watanabe spawned a new generation of geisha make-up experts by hosting workshops in Los Angeles before pre-production. “In the course of six weeks, we trained more than 100 people including about 65 high-level union technicians.”

The white foundation, worn by full geisha only for the most formal occasions, and by *maiko* whenever they appear in public, is applied to the face, neck, upper back and hands. The neck’s seductive appeal is heightened by leaving two V-shaped peaks of bare skin at the nape — three for special occasions.

Hair designer Lyndell Quiyou subtly updated classic geisha and *maiko* hair for the film. After steeping herself in historical books, prints and paintings, she spent the pre-production period creating looks with her team for a large cast of principals, dancers and extras. “Rob said, think of geisha on a Paris runway, and that’s what we did,” she said. “We made the shapes and silhouettes more modern and geometric.”

Overall, the look for the principals was a small head, except for Hatsumomo. “I made her wig really, really high,” said Quiyou. “The higher it got, the better it looked, which is closer to traditional style. The extras also had a more traditional look.” Finding the right look for Sayuri’s dance solo was a special challenge. “I had been creating gigantic hairdos with big ornaments until I looked at what she had to do,” Quiyou recalled. “I got a really long wig, parted it down the center, put it in a ponytail, and wrapped it in red. Then I added long pieces to make it very kabuki-looking and let it hang over her face like a curtain – really simple and quite beautiful.”

“The most revered of the geisha’s arts ...”

In the film, the heart and soul that Sayuri pours into her coming-out dance establishes her as the brightest light in the *hanamachi*. Although a real-life apprentice would rarely if ever be featured in a solo, let alone dance with such abandon, Marshall opted for a Kabuki-influenced choreography for Sayuri's dramatic solo.

The importance of dance in the geisha world resonated with Marshall and choreographer John DeLuca. "I wanted this one dance to convey to the audience the passion and turmoil in Sayuri's heart. It was incredibly exciting for us to blend our vision as artists with the beautiful traditions of Japanese dance in telling Sayuri's story."

DeLuca, Marshall's supervising choreographer on *Chicago*, headed the *Memoirs of a Geisha* dance team. Denise Faye, also a *Chicago* veteran, was DeLuca's associate choreographer, and Miyako Tachibana, a teacher at Fujima Kansuma School in Los Angeles, was the Japanese dance consultant. The collaboration produced a unique hybrid, modern and new.

"Japanese dance is very controlled and based on subtle, refined movements," said Tachibana. "Rob and John and Denise absorbed our fundamentals, then added their own experienced theatricality. It is magical."

A picture of eight-inch-high, lacquered platform sandals, which courtesans wore to lead parades in ancient festivals, was a key element for DeLuca in creating Sayuri's dramatic solo. In his scenario, a grieving courtesan, abandoned by her lover, has decided to kill herself — a familiar theme in Japanese dance. "The first part of the dance I taught Ziyi was in the shoes, and she jumped right on them," DeLuca recalled. "She was fearless."

The winter-themed dance is performed on a narrow runway or *hanamichi* (not *hanamachi*), making it more Kabuki-like. “That was Rob’s idea,” said DeLuca. “The narrowness made it even more difficult with the lights and the snow.”

Zhang agreed. “It was definitely a challenge, and I ended up swallowing huge mouthfuls of fake snow. When I first saw the eight-inch platform shoes, I thought they were props. Then John told me I had to dance in them!

“The dance involved a high degree of acting,” she continued. “It was theater within theater. The music was haunting and very much suited the mood of the jilted woman.”

Zhang’s commitment endeared her to Marshall. “I wonder if anything is too difficult for Ziyi,” he mused.

Tachibana felt the same way. “Being graceful in those shoes, making it look effortless, having the kimono flow and the parasol fall into place is a lot to think about. She handled it magnificently.”

DeLuca chose to make a statement with fans in the spring-themed *maiko* dance that precedes Sayuri’s solo. “I decided to mix huge fans with small traditional ones and make the big ones see-through. It was another way of communicating that we are telling Sayuri’s story as a fable, rather than strictly replicating geisha culture of the 1930s.”

“A dance between giants ...”

Nobu, the disfigured businessman played by Koji Yakusho in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, makes this bold declaration in his first conversation with Sayuri: “Three things matter in life: sumo, business and war. Understand one and you know them all.”

The sumo scenes in *Memoirs of a Geisha* were grand spectacles, befitting the reverence Nobu accorded the sport. The film's sumo stadium, with an 800-person capacity, was built on Sony's largest soundstage and filled with extras dressed in period finery. Mainoumi and Dewaarashi, who portray the lead sumo combatants, came to the film with a legacy as sumo superstars in Japan. The scene's referee was another real-life Japanese sumo celebrity, a living treasure among the nation's fans, known in the ring by the ceremonial title Kimura Shonosuke.

Mainoumi, now a popular sumo commentator, was living proof of the sumo principle that a small man can use a large man's weight against him. Because his weight hovered around 220 pounds, he typically faced much larger opponents. Although there are no weight classes in Japanese pro sumo, there is a height requirement and Mainoumi fell short at the start of his career. Rather than give up his dream, he gained the height he needed with a silicone implant in his scalp.

"Pound for pound, Mainoumi may be the greatest sumo wrestler ever," said Andrew Freund, the film's sumo technical advisor. "In every single match, he was fighting someone virtually double his size. It's really an honor to have had him in this movie."

A sumo match usually lasts a matter of seconds and its outcome is determined by psychological as well as physical skill. "You release all of your power or *ki* in the moment of the charge," said Freund. "Anything can happen in that explosive moment."

Of Special Note ...

Creating music to underscore the drama of Sayuri's journey was an enormous enterprise that called for a composer who could convey the story's emotional intimacy, exotic setting and epic sweep. Marshall was thrilled when John Williams, a five-time Oscar® winner, agreed to compose the score.

"I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to compose a musical score for Rob Marshall's film, *Memoirs of a Geisha*," said Williams. "For year's I've admired Arthur Golden's remarkable book and it has been a wish come true to collaborate with my friends Yo-Yo Ma and Itzhak Perlman on this extraordinary film."

Williams' compositions feature both Eastern and Western instrumentation, and masters of the *shamisen*, *koto*, *shakuhachi*, *taiko* drums and other Japanese traditional instruments were among his *Memoirs of a Geisha* musicians. For several days at UCLA's Royce Hall, the ensemble also included Itzhak Perlman, the legendary violinist, and world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma — two concert musicians who have created many memorable moments on film. In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Perlman's violin gives voice to "The Chairman's Waltz," while Ma's cello elegantly sets forth "Sayuri's Theme."

"There were moments of pure magic at every stage of this project," reflected Marshall. "The sense of discovery was exhilarating, from the early days of research, through principal photography, and all during post-production. The scoring sessions were an absolute joy. To collaborate with artists of this caliber was a personal milestone for me, and their contributions added another wonderful layer of texture to the film.

"My hope is that we have done justice to *Memoirs of a Geisha*," Marshall concluded. "Making the film was challenging, thrilling, sometimes frightening and always rewarding. We chose to tell the story as a fable, set in a world as enticing and unattainable as Sayuri herself."

Geisha Glossary ...

Arigato gozaimasu – “Thank you”

Danna – male patron who underwrites a geisha’s expenses

Gei – “art”

Hanamachi— a geisha district within a city

Kaburenjô – the building in a geisha district that houses its school, theater and registry office

Kampai – a Japanese toast

Konnichiwa – “Hello”

Maiko – Kyoto term for apprentice geisha

Miyako – old capital

Obi — decorative sash tied around the kimono

Okâsan – head of the geisha household, addressed as “mother”

Okiya – geisha household

O-nêsan – older geisha sister

Shamisen – three-stringed instrument long associated with the geisha world