

Finding Inspiration with Cynthia Renée Marcusson

Through the Torii Gate

Designer Cynthia Renée Marcusson on cultivating an inspirational symbol of transition into her work

By Deborah A. Yonick

For many years Cynthia Renée Marcusson, the award-winning bespoke designer based in Cary, North Carolina, has been fascinated by the torii gates found in Japan. Commonly located at the entrance to Shinto shrines, the gates “symbolize passage from the world of everyday concerns to the sacred world of universal community,” she explains.

Although Marcusson has never been to Japan, she was immersed in Japanese fine antiques and aesthetics as a custom jewelry designer and gemstone expert consultant for the posh Golden Door Spa for several decades. The grounds at this top-rated luxury spa in San Marcos, California, are based on the peace of Japanese arts.

“Torii gates are there,” says Marcusson. “Passing through

them was an opportunity for me to detach from listening and reacting to the squirrel running my brain, bringing my focus to the peace available in the present moment."

She says that she has always been attracted to the hands that create a work of art—from simple embroidery to sophisticated weaving and furniture making. There is a lot of symbology in Japanese arts and crafts, and Marcusson's bespoke work is all about the empowerment inherent in our own personal symbols.

Transitioning Symbol

Marcusson uses the motif to create Torii Gate pendants in 18k gold or blackened silver on colorful cord necklaces. She finds torii to be the perfect symbol of transition for anyone on the brink of a new direction or phase in life.

"The stories we associate with our jewels alchemize them into our own personal power pieces," she says. "To me, a jewel not having meaning is a missed opportunity to partake of the jewel's power."

Inspired by Japanese torii gates, Marcusson believes them to be the perfect symbol of transition for anyone on the brink of a new direction or phase of life.

She felt the shape and symbolism of the torii gate would be

the perfect underpinning for a custom pendant for a world-class gem and mineral collector who came in with a magnificent 13.11 carat square cushion cut tanzanite. She was in her seventh year of a battle with cancer and wanted a piece she could wear every day that would transition from the most mundane of tasks to special occasions.

"While we both appreciated complex aesthetics, we agreed this project should be guided by the rules of simplicity and space," she says. She saw the gentle, yet complicated curves and clean, straight lines of the torii gate as the perfect form to retain open space throughout the piece.

Wanting a three-note color chord between gem and metal, Marcusson chose rose gold for the frame and white gold for the chain to set the gate apart and allow the frame to be easily seen. She notes that she has synesthesia and is able to hear sounds with colors, which helps her combine the right colors of gems and metals that make a musical chord.

"Trial and error were required to get the right length and curve for the gate frame and fashioning the appropriate basket for the gem to sit," says Marcusson. "The delicate nature of the rose gold gate gave the impression of space and lightness; however, a gem of this size also required stability and strength to sit securely in the basket without overbearing prongs. I chose to set the gem on its axis, perpendicular to the top of the gate instead of in line with it.

This added the visual interest and space without detracting from the stars of the show—the gem and the gate."