

● plumpynuts

Dynamic duo with designs on lifestylers

Design duo Miyuki Omichi [left] and Ayumi Kita are leading their second design lives. They started and ran 'foundation addict' in 2005 for three successful years then left fashion, only to reunite in 2009 and launch plumpynuts, or "real clothes" for "real people". Success has been as rapid as the duo's expansion; they opened SHOW CASE, a lifestyle space in Tokyo in 2009 which exhibits art and aroma pots, along with plumpynuts clothes, and for AW11 they initiated diffusion line Tokyo Reworkers by O.K. or TRW [bottom far right], which consists of one-off pieces reused from plumpynuts archive; expect to see TRW in Hong Kong soon. Miyuki and Ayumi have also collaborated with the cult brand Phenomenon.

What was the theme for your AW11 collection and share with us three

of the inspirations for it?

We deliberately try not to have a theme and just have sources of inspiration. For this collection it was traditional British style, the 1960's and Jane Birkin.

What age is plumpynuts woman?

She is any age. Age is immaterial for wearing our clothes.

What are the best/worst aspects of Tokyo fashion currently?

The good is that people are not running after one trend only. They select one which suits them instead and enjoy dressing freely with it. The bad: we have Tokyo Collection Week but the world's buyers almost never network there. We would like Japan to boost its fashion and art industry at more international level.

How would you contrast the style of Tokyo/Hong Kong women?

Hong Kong women are more distinctive than Japanese women.

Did the earthquake affect your design sensibility?

It doesn't change our attitude to creation or design, but we'd like to create something which acts like a boost for Japan.

Ultimate style icon/artist?

We think the style icon of women exists only in our heads. Our favourite artists are Naoto Kitamura and Chim Pom.



● mintdesigns

New Hope goes straight to the head in Tokyo

Nao Yagi and Hokuto Katsui make playful, whimsical - and at times fantastical - collections recognisable by their striking graphical textile design. Both studied and met overseas. Hokuto went to Parsons in New York and Central St Martins, London; Nao [left] graduated from Kyoto's Doshisha University in Fine Arts, before attending and meeting Hokuto at St Martins. Following stints with Hussein Chalayan and Alexander McQueen, the pair returned to Tokyo and set up mintdesigns a decade ago. In the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake, which disrupted many Tokyo shows for autumn/winter, mintdesigns gave their 'Fashion Surgery' collection a splash more colour and a secondary title: 'A New Hope'.

What is your theme for AW11-12

and share with us three of the inspirations for it?

The theme is 'Fashion Surgery'. We got inspiration from the white surgery room, the blueish light of the surgery room and non-organic patterns, motives. We took an experimental approach to fabrics, combining several into one garment. Broken check is the most prominent, which is made from traditional tartan check that we cut into pieces and reconstructed.

Who wears mintdesigns?

Women with humour and intelligence who enjoy their daily lives. Our collections are appreciated by people who share an affinity for good design in general. Not just fashion, but also products, graphics, interiors, etc.

Can you explain the headwear with LED light?

Three-dimensional objects often

inspire us but it is difficult to show in clothes, so we make head pieces in collaboration with Katsuya Kamo.

Which designer's work impresses you most and why?

Kohei Nawa. He's an artist, but he could be a really interesting designer.

Last thing that inspired you?

Recently we had a solo exhibition at Moca Taipei and we admired the passion of its young staff.



● TOGA

Yasuko Furuta's elegant toughness

Set up in 1997 by Yasuko Furuta, TOGA designs are aggressive in character with innocence and purity, a sort of elegant toughness. The designer graduated from Esmod, Paris in 1994 and made clothing for television commercials on returning to Japan. Seven years after launching TOGA the brand realised its first boutique in Tokyo's Ebisu district, which was relocated to Harajuku in 2007. Today TOGA has more than 60 boutiques around the world. *ISBN* spoke with Yasuko in the midst of design frenzy as she was preparing both her SS12 New York and Paris collections.

What was the theme for your AW11 collection and what were three inspirations for it?

The theme was 'entwine, bind, knot', relating to the processes that happen

on fabrics and textiles during creation. It was also expressing the complexity of entanglement and the seductiveness of bondage.

How would you contrast Hong Kong/Japanese consumers?

My impression of the Hong Kong woman is that she wants to find her own identity and style and that as independent women they want to be stronger. Japanese women don't pursue originality like they did before, but enjoy looking for small differences.

Currently, what's the best and worst aspect of Tokyo's fashion industry?

Due to the unstable situation in Japanese politics and the economy, plus the disaster caused by the earthquake, Japanese people feel comfortable being conservative, and are not psychologically ready yet to accept proposed

innovative concepts and ideas. Despite such restrictions, it is important that people consider the real values in life without just following trends. It's important also to reconsider our relationship with consumer society in hard times, as we don't really care about that when life is superficially fruitful.



● Facetasm

Skates, sadness, Gus Van Sant and Americana

Hironmichi Ochiai graduated from Tokyo's Bunka Fashion College in 1999 and worked for eight years at Guildwork, a textiles firm involved with brands such as Comme des Garçons, Zucca and Undercover, then launched his own brand four years ago. In the wake of this year's earthquake, the 34-year-old was heavily involved in charity efforts and continues to use factories to source textiles and fabrics in the affected region of North Japan. His brand is stocked by edgy upscale retailer I.T in Hong Kong.

What is your theme for AW11-12 and what are its inspirations?
 "I want to hold your hand all the way". It's taken from an American poem and embellished. The collection incorporates American culture, film director Gus Van Sant, skateboards and sad-

ness over the winter season.
Greatest designer influence?
 We are influenced by all designers I think. But, if we have to nominate just one, we need to say Mr Jun Takahashi of Undercover. He has been our idol since we were teenagers.
Biggest change in Tokyo consumer habits since you were young?
 They have more choice and that is fantastic. When I was young, if there was a trend for one thing, everybody would wear it. Now it seems consumers' interests in fashion are wider and we really feel both their individual and active power.
Is 'Made in Japan' the new mantra for this decade?
 We think absolutely that we need to express the value and quality of Japan's craftsmanship to people overseas. And we know many Japa-

nese designers who have this thinking.
Designer's work which impresses you most and why?
 Unused, for men; they are precious friends with whom we talk fashion. Mame, for ladies. They create beautiful, poetic clothes that reach our heart.
Favourite film about fashion?
 Movies that use *the* stylist Michiko Kitamura, and *Twins* by Shinya Tsukumo, which is wonderful.



● matohu

The art - and tradition - of understatement

Hiroyuki Horihata [left] and Makiko Sekiguchi are the dream couple. Neither expected to be fashion designers; he was studying philosophy and she was training to be a lawyer. He saw an exhibit at Kyoto Costume Institute and felt a fashion calling; she wanted to make her own clothes and was likewise driven. They enrolled at Tokyo's prestigious Bunka Fashion College, met, became friends and later married each other. Fresh out of Bunka, Hiroyuki worked with Rei Kawakubo's Comme des Garçons for five years and Sekiguchi at Yohji Yamamoto, sharing the agony and ecstasy of Japan's ultimate fashion icons.
 Matohu is a Japanese concept with two meanings; to wear clothes in such a way as to create an atmosphere of beauty, and to have a sense of restraint. In keeping with that pace, matohu just opened its first store in Omotesando.

What was the theme for your AW11 collection and share with us three of the inspirations for it?
 The collection is called 'The Infinite Beauty of Plainness'. There were things I saw all the time but I lacked the eye to see the beauty of their plainness. Now I try to look at everyday objects with new appreciation. The world is unexpectedly rich in visual terms when you start to look at everyday objects. And plain doesn't always mean subdued or restrained. In fact, with its delicate colours and infinite variations plain has begun to shine quietly in our everyday world.
Define the matohu woman.
 She is a woman, or girl, who loves art, history and culture. She is also independent and enjoys her daily life in her own way, with her own style.
Which designer's work in Tokyo impresses you most and why?

Minä Perhonen. This brand has always made their own fabric and created their own textile patterns; it is a very poetic approach.
Are Tokyo's fashionista turning from Western luxury brands to traditional Japanese designs?
 I don't think so, but certainly some people are starting to have a better opinion of locally produced things and the tradition and quality that involves.



● SOMARTA

Tamae Hirokawa's origin of species

During eight years working with design avatar Issey Miyake, creative Tamae Hirokawa oversaw men's and women's collections, and got to know the entire cycle of the apparel world at the sharp end. By the time she was just 30 she took her prodigious experience the independent route, creating SOMA DESIGN in 2006, and fashion brand SOMARTA one year later. Highly artful and philosophical, her brand accentuates the beauty of the female form, with body-conscious clothes created to stir aesthetic sensibilities rather than selling on pure sexiness. Like Tamae herself, the brand targets successful strong-minded career women. When she's not fashioning clothes, her furniture designs have featured at the Milan Furniture Fair, and she's even created a concept car in collaboration with Toyota.

What's the theme of your AW11-12 collection and where did its inspiration come from?

It came from the colour and shape of transfiguration for plants and creatures. I like anthropology and biology and this influences my designs.

Are Japan's fashion consumers turning away from western luxury products and concentrating more on Japanese quality?

People are rethinking the idea of quality and innovation in Japanese creations and what makes something a really desirable piece of work. We are proud of Japanese creativity.

How has the earthquake impacted your short-term aesthetic?

I will use lots of beautiful colours and vibrant prints for the SS12 shows.

Bunka Fashion College is the Central St Martin's of Japan.

What does it do right and wrong?

It teaches design, technique and overall fashion knowledge very hard and very well. But, some students feel the school doesn't tell them how to proceed to presentation. Not just in terms of catwalk, but how to present clothes generally.



● G.V.G.V.

School's out - and in

Known by her school nickname Mug, this 40-year-old Japanese designer graduated from Tokyo's Kuwasawa Design School and precociously set up her own brand in 1999. It has a reputation for its free-spirited edge, fresh approach, practicality and wearability, mixing femininity and masculinity interchangeably. G.V.G.V. has also injected its creativity into design collaborations with the likes of UNIQLO, for whom Mug created various designs and an iconic t-shirt between 2007-2009. Since last year she has been acting as a buyer for retailer grapevine by k3 in Tokyo.

What's your AW11 theme and what was the inspiration for it?

'Youth Cult'. The girl who was travelling the world in my SS11 collection 'Wanderlust', goes back to British

school. Youth Cult is the sequel. It combines traditional items, beauty and the slight insanity of youth culture; the sense of mixing new with high respect toward tradition is one of my spirits.

Change in Tokyo's fashion consumers over the last decade?

Individual fashion level and awareness has gone up. But I would say individuality has become flat.

How has the earthquake affected your feelings towards fashion?

I felt powerless about fashion after it and tended to think negatively. But now I reconsider what fashion can do and I feel I can capture fashion positively and move forward.

Can this be the decade that 'Made in Japan' comes to the fore?

Some part of 'Made in Japan' is already at world level. More of the visual part rather than just the technological

part may become more prominent.

What did you learn collaborating with UNIQLO?

It is surprising to see how things are produced at such low cost, in a way that's not possible with my own brand. To meet their price point, there were many things I had to compromise. But it was a very fun collaboration.

