

Creative boho blooms in Jingumae

Backstreet Stories

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The area known as Jingumae, literally "shrine front," hugs central Tokyo's Meiji Shrine and is bifurcated by chic Omotesando street, the shrine's main approach. Rolling with well-heeled fashionistas, foreigners and photo hounds chasing the hottest new looks, Omotesando's stores showcase global mega-brands—think Gap, Zara, Benetton, etc.

Southern Jingumae extends this outdoor mall with international restaurants and designer stores down toward the youth Mecca of Shibuya Station. The northern portion of Jingumae, however, hidden behind the also quaint exterior of the Omotesando Hills shopping complex, preserves a low-profile boho vibe where slightly off-the-wall creativity is the order of the day.

The first artist's palette I spot is a tray of eye shadow colors at makeup salon Hello! Watosa. Optimism and outlandish wordplay are hallmarks of the makeup industry, but few do it as well as Watosa. Gazing at their products, I find a Fairy Cooks Compact of face powder, bottles of Harvest Moon Captive Drips foundation in a shade called Skating Pear, and a lip gloss named Prehistoric Traces. It's poetry, really.

Opened a year ago, Hello! Watosa is the flagship store of creative designers Sablo Watanahe's skincare products. A staffer gives my face a quick revision with four gossamer shades of face powder as Product Representative Yumi Kondou explains what Hello! Watosa offers.

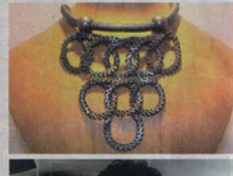
"You can opt for a quick drop-in service, or the full-on VIP makeover," Kondou says. "But I recommend our lessons that teach you how to do it yourself, and demystify the process."

Have I been paying attention to the powdering job, so I'm slightly mystified by my own face when it's done. I'm not ready to use Skating Pear on a daily basis, but the Watosa powders are sheer magic at hiding nature's imperfections.

Pretified, I head uphill to find what appears to be an art museum of wedding rings, where each pair of bands has its own waist-high display pedestal. Studio Sora offers a vast variety of rings made of metal. Betrothed can choose the basic plumber's O-ring in platinum, chic titanium designs, nesting models, or rings in elaborate *mokume-gane*, a wood-grained effect achieved by fusing metals of different hues.

Sora also encourages customers to consider making their own rings. Instructor Akira Morikawa, 29, shows me the second-floor studio where "terms of engagement" require banding mandrels, hammers, and buffers. It takes about two weeks and ¥200,000 to fashion a pair of rings—but the end result? Priceless.

Across the street, flocks of women flutter in the French store, La Drogerie. I enter a world of clattering bottles of beads,



Ready to color your world (clockwise from top): Hello! Watosa's makeup salon; a high-gear Elena Cancer necklace at Monad; jeweler Akira Morikawa ready to ring a bell; beautiful buds at florist Fuga; Luce's Mieke Shibata prepares a stained-glass work; and Yukiko Shirayama with one of her Fairy Bouquet blossoms. KIT NAGAMURA/PHOTOS

feldes fawning over shell, wood and plastic buttons; shop assistants unfurling lavish ribbons and unbundling skeins of wool. It's heaven for handcrafters.

"Here, we help people realize their own creative ideas," says Eri Takezoe, 29, a blond-streaked pixie who revels in displaying the 10,500 items the store sells by measure or weight. "We get mostly women in here, but we also cater to guys who are total bead maniacs," she says happily. "These," she adds, patting a display of fruit-colored gumball beads, "always make me hungry."

It's a jovial place, with patterns for all sorts of projects, but I need to keep moving, so I cast off deftly, headed once again uphill and to the northeast.

I come across what appears to be a little brick home with two signs on it; the upper one reads "Nina Roza Bouquet & Presents" and the lower one "Fairy Bouquet." I am hesitant to barge in as someone inside is hard at work on her wee project. But Yukiko Shirayama, owner of the "Fairy Blooming School," swoops me in with a smile and shows me her special technique for arranging preserved flowers.

Shirayama guns hot glue into a tiny silicon mold, then snips the end of a dried rose bud. "Typically, flowers are preserved half opened," she explains, setting the petals in the still liquefied glue, "but you can open them fully this way." With what looks like two padded

chopsticks, she nimbly pries out each petal until the flower sets at peak bloom. Shirayama teaches her students to make wedding and interior displays that look fresh and in full bloom, but last for years. Bilingual and bubbly, she tries to coax me into giving her patented method a try. But, afraid it would tangle the blooms and glue and produce something more goblin than fairy, I gently bow out.

Across the street, I pop into Monad, a teeny boutique featuring the work of six major jewelers from Spain. Massive and glorious gear-like necklaces by Elena Cancer join Helena Rohner's colorful ovoids and the lucid simplicity of earrings by Alberto Lobo. Thirty-something sisters Miho and Miwa Wetani named their store by rearranging the letters in "nomad" a bit. I buy a gift for a friend that rearranges my wallet a bit, then I make like a nomad and resume my wandering.

From here, the backstreet turns deceptively suburban, with grassed-over vacant lots, single-dwelling homes and low-rise apartment buildings. Several foreign couples whiz by on bicycles, and I finally stop a pair on foot. Londoners Katie and Chris Earp, 30, live in the hood.

"It's quiet here, and because we rent a house, we feel part of the community," Katie says. "When Katie broke her leg skiing," Chris adds, "people dropped by to ask how she was doing. People care about each other in this neighborhood." Both note, not unhappily, that the economic downturn and local protest groups seem to have stalled several large developments slated for Jingumae.

I let the Earps go, and a short ways on, I find a Henry Bessemin store. After gulping in the buttery smell of their luxurious handmade leather goods, I explore a studio across the street. A bulbous 1950s green Chevrolet pick-up parked outside next to a larger life sculpture of a wooden sailor (and chunks of colored glass in the windows) tip me off there's something going on in Studio Piccolo.

What was once a cramped three-room apartment now houses four designers and artists who have set up shop together. When I arrive, Piccolo designers Sosuke Inoue, 35, and Nao Endo, 20, are chatting with interior designer for Plus M, 40-something Micho Suzuki. Meanwhile, Mieke Shibata 30, the owner of Luce glassworks, is piecing together a stained-glass commission for an embassy. "It's hard work," she says, but her smile suggests it's rewarding, too.

Piccolo's walls are stacked to the ceiling with boxes of colored glass chunks imported from Italy or the United States, and a rock tumbler works overtime to take the edges off pieces for mosaic work. I ask Inoue his favorite part of the creative process of glasswork. "When we install something we made," he answers, "the light comes through it, and that is when we know its true beauty."

Though laid-back and generous with their time, I can see straight through the glass art to its sales schedules, and so move on. I pass a small, slightly monochromatic shop named Kamikaze that specializes in murky-green U.S. army togs mixed with neon-pink accents. Around the corner, teeny shop Tempura



Street gems: A 1983 mural (left) by the U.S. pop artist and social activist Keith Haring (1958-90) on the second-floor exterior of a building on Gaen Nishi-dori, where Haring exhibited that year when it was home to Galerie Watari, predecessor of today's ubercool Jingumae museum, Watari-Um. A carving (below) from the Edo Period (1603-1867) at Myoenji Temple, believed to be the site of the original village of Harajuku. KIT NAGAMURA/PHOTOS

Garage displays expensive Osaka brand bags on top of a classic baby-blue Honda car in—you guessed it—a garage.

Across the street, Myoenji Temple (1627) boasts a stone marker claiming the spot as the original location of Harajuku, a village during the Edo Period (1603-1867). The temple's water well, still functional, gives some credence to the story—where there's good water, people gather—but even the priest says there is no way to confirm the Harajuku claim.

Backtracking and wending down a dead-end alley, I find Sin Den, one of Tokyo's first international hair salons, started 15 years ago by two foreign women. A white-line graphic grows in tendrils up the pitch-black exterior of their building, designed by the dynamic architectural duo of Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham. Inside, senior stylist Fazio Alfano, 33, wields custom-made \$1,000 scissors "made by this guy named Shioji, a genius in Wakayama," he says, deftly snipping a pretty blond's bangs.

"Our success here is all about the relationship with the client. We have bankers, models, and mothers, and they develop a special relationship with each," Fazio notes. His client grins up at me, clearly feeling special.

I emerge on Gaen Nishi-dori Avenue, between two Tokyo street stories, florist Fuga and ubercool museum Watari-Um. At Fuga, gnarled olive trees in planters are sold beside masses of blossoms from Holland, Africa, Europe and India. Flower guys buzz around to Latin music, grouping the blossoms into basic shades.

The 15-year-old shop prides itself on being able to fill any order. "We delivered an arrangement recently that was larger than a refrigerator, and required more than 100,000 flowers," says Kaori Ohmi, in charge of press for Fuga.

Reluctant to leave the greenery, I head next door to museum/exhibition gallery/shop, the Watari-Um Museum of Contemporary Art, in its jauntily striped Mario Botta building. The museum's shop, On Sundays, stocks artist-designed T-shirts, foreign stationery, museum gifts and an astonishing 10,000-plus different postcards—among which are works by artists from past exhibitions. I browse images for hours, so when I



gaze across Gaen Nishi-dori, a mural on the second-floor exterior of a building across the road looks like a postcard of a painting by U.S. pop artist and social activist Keith Haring (1958-90). "It's the real thing," says soft-spoken Takato Suzuki, the 38-year-old shopkeeper at On Sundays. "Keith Haring exhibited there back in 1983, where the first Galerie Watari used to be." The work may be faded to fresco-sfot shades, but it's Jingumae's off-the-wall vibe, right there on the wall.

