

## FEATURES



**Clockwise from right:** Stewart decorated the wall above her daughter's crib with hand-sewn plush letters and cheerful paintings; corners of Stewart's apartment are enlivened with carefully arranged books and small stuffed animals; Stewart's dining room set is the embodiment of zakka; handmade plush birds nestle in a Christmas wreath; sprigs of flowers or berries in a simple vase instantly add a zakka touch to a table.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FION STEWART  
PHOTO COURTESY OF JEREMY STEWART

**Inset:** Fion Stewart.



THE ART

OF THE SMALL CORNER



Artist Fion Stewart embodies zakka  
in her art and in her life

BY CATHERINE SHU  
STAFF REPORTER

Over the past decade, zakka has gradually spread from Japan to the rest of the world. For many people, the word conjures up images of sun-dappled rooms filled with natural colors and small, well-chosen objets d'art. In Japanese and Chinese, zakka (雜貨) literally means "many goods." But what exactly is zakka?

"Zakka is hard to translate into English," says Fion Stewart (強雅貞), an artist and the author of *Zakka Talk* and *Jiu Shi Ai Shenghuo* (就是愛生活, "love of life"), books about the zakka lifestyle. "If I had to describe it, I would say it is a way of focusing on everyday objects, like a cup, a dinner plate, a garden or clothing."

Stewart's Taipei apartment is the embodiment of zakka. Baskets, glass bottles from L'Occitane, a vintage scale, a tea cup and a framed photo of her toddler daughter are all carefully arranged on a shelf above Stewart's rustic dining room set, which she found secondhand and refinished with white paint and wood varnish. The corner her daughter's crib sits in is brightened with a string of bright paper lanterns, a clothesline adorned with small stuffed animals and pink mittens, and plush, calico letters that spell out her name, "Mia."

Even food is arranged with a zakka touch. During my visit, Stewart served fresh pineapple in a big glass goblet topped with a single sprig of mint that highlighted the fruit's gleaming golden color.

"Zakka is also an attitude towards life," says Stewart. "It encourages people to really figure out what they enjoy and then find a way to incorporate that into their day-to-day lives."

Stewart first discovered zakka when she visited Japan after graduating from high school. Given the choice between continuing directly on to university or traveling first, Stewart chose the latter. As it happened, she had an aunt who lived in Tokyo, so Stewart went to stay with her. Stewart was immediately taken with the beauty and orderliness of the city's streets and the Japanese vogue for French culture and design, which mirrored her own interests.

"Every family had something that was zakka, even if it was just a small window where they had arranged a lot of flowers and small decorations. It's all about making small corners very adorable and cozy," says Stewart, who illustrates children's books, teaches painting classes at Chinese Culture University (中國文化大學) and is the co-owner of Cozy Corner in Tianmu, one of the first stores in Taiwan to specialize in zakka housewares, clothing and other accoutrements.

For people on a budget who want to incorporate some of the zakka aesthetic into their homes, Stewart encourages them to start by painting a wall or installing a curtain in a soothing color, like the white, linen beige and olive green hues that she prefers. "That really has an impact on a room's atmosphere," she says.

A shelf topped with potted plants can also lend a touch of character to a drab dorm room or rented apartment, while raffia baskets can be used instead of plastic boxes to organize clutter. One or two blossoms in a small vase can instantly brighten a corner or table. Greeting cards or postcards can be turned into miniature works of art with frames.

"I think a lot of people long to have a comfortable space of their own but they can't afford to do a total interior makeover. Zakka is about focusing on the corners and nooks in your home instead," says Stewart.

Many zakka enthusiasts pride themselves on their resourcefulness, hunting down secondhand treasures or making their own clothes and home decor. Stewart bought her daughter's miniature table and chair from a kindergarten that was closing down, and her family's Christmas tree is decorated with ornaments she hand-sewed with bright felt and thread. Other popular crafts include knitting, embroidery and hand-felting soft toys and accessories from dyed wool batting.

"I think most people who enjoy zakka also enjoy making things with their hands and the feeling it gives them. The finished objects don't have to be perfect, but they are full of character," says Stewart.

Other decorating tips from Stewart include arranging children's books on a shelf so that their covers add a burst of color to a room and displaying pretty dishes and cups instead of hiding them in cupboards. For Christmas, she plans to forgo ordinary wrapping paper and instead use glossy white wax paper bound with colorful yarn or twine and embellished with elegant metallic stickers and loops of fabric ribbon to package the gifts she will send to her husband's family in New Zealand.

Form and function are also emphasized in the products Stewart selects for Cozy Corner. Offerings there include a clever little wooden spool that holds a ball of twine and a pair of scissors, supplies tailored to urban gardeners who raise plants on the balconies of their apartments, and comfortable, smock-like dresses made from linen and cotton in soft, neutral hues.

The store also carries stationery designed by Stewart, including Christmas cards with whimsical watercolors of animals and mushrooms, and a gift book, *Slow Life*, filled with her art. Her biggest dream is to launch a lifestyle brand with fabrics, stationery and clothing that feature her paintings.

## Eye on Zakka

Fion Stewart recommends the following for zakka eye candy and shopping.

## MAGAZINES

► *Come Home!* and *Cafe Mama* are both Japanese "mooks" (magazine/book hybrids) that have many eye-catching photos of zakka interiors.

► US magazine *Victoria* approaches zakka with a Victorian twist and also features beautiful photography.

## STORES IN TAIPEI:

## ► COZY CORNER

**Address:** 1F, 6, Ln 82, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 6, Taipei City (台北市中山北路七段82巷6號1F)

**Telephone:** (02) 2874-7850

**On the Net:** www.cozycorner.com.tw

Stewart's shop, which she opened with a friend in Tianmu, features practical objects, like magazine holders and calendars, crafted in a uniquely zakka style from natural materials. Cozy Corner also has a selection of gardening supplies tailored to the urban lifestyle, including attractive planting containers that can be used indoors or on balconies.

## ► ZAKKA ZOO

**Address:** 21, Alley 26, Ln 300, Renai Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市仁愛路四段300巷26弄21號)

**Telephone:** (02) 2700-0802

**On the Net:** blog.yiting.idv.tw

Zakka Zoo specializes in handcrafts made by local artists and is home to two cats (many items feature cat motifs).

## ► HANA

**Address:** 39, Ln 101, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段101巷39號)

**Telephone:** (02) 2711-6112

**On the Net:** www.angelbaby.tw/hana/modules/tinyd0

This cafe near Sogo's Zhongxiao East Road branch serves English-style afternoon tea on pretty porcelain dishware in an adorably zakka setting.

## ► LE BON MARCHÉ 法國好市集

**Address:** 6, Ln 14, Yongkang St, Taipei City (台北市永康街14巷6號)

**Telephone:** (02) 2341-2359

**On the Net:** blog.yam.com/lebonmarche

Le Bon Marche on Yongkang Street carries housewares, kitchen supplies and decorative objects imported from France.

## ► YONGLE SHI CHANG 永樂市場

**Address:** 21, Dihua St Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市迪化街一段21號)

Yongle Shi Chang contains a mother lode of fabric stores, many of which carry Japanese imports with *kawaii* prints. The neighborhood is also home to a host of do-it-yourself shops, making it a must-see for Taipei's DIY enthusiasts.



Stewart's Tianmu shop Cozy Corner sells zakka accoutrements, including supplies for urban gardeners.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FION STEWART