



# STYLE

WEDNESDAY, JULY 21, 2010

13



Romis focuses on dresses and accessories from South Korea and Osaka, Japan.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



Now the owner of two stores and a cafe, Romis Chen got her start in retail by selling handmade dresses from a suitcase in Shida night market.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

*Post and Romis offer a slice of the 'zakka' lifestyle near Shida night market*

BY CATHERINE SHU  
STAFF REPORTER

## Style in Post



### STORE NOTES

**WHAT:** Romis, Post and Tote Cafe (步調)

**WHERE:** Romis: 21, Ln 50, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順50巷21號). Post: 24, Ln 50, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順50巷24號). Tote Cafe: 15-1, Ln 44, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順44巷15-1號)

**OPEN:** Romis: 12:30pm to 11pm. Post: 2pm to 11pm. Tote Cafe: noon to 11pm

**TELEPHONE:** Romis: (02) 2364-6738. Post: (02) 2364-3348. Tote Cafe: (02) 8369-2835

**ON THE NET:** www.romis.com.tw

In addition to clothing, Post sells children's books by indie publisher Abula, accessories and handmade toys.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Now the owner of two boutiques and a cafe near Shida night market, Romis Chen (陳雅萍) fell into the fashion business by serendipity.

Chen was working as a school counselor when her boyfriend's mother started making her vintage-style dresses out of unusual fabrics. "Whenever I went to work, I would wear things that she had sewn for me and my colleagues always complimented me on them and asked where they could buy the clothing," Chen says.

Over summer vacation, Chen designed some dresses, purchased fabric and her boyfriend's mom (now Chen's mother-in-law) stitched up the designs.

"Back then Shida night market was smaller and only really had one street that was busy. I took a suitcase and sold the clothing from the side of the road," Chen says. She ran her stand for two summers before finally getting the opportunity to open a store in 2002. A flower shop manager near the night market rented three pings (1 ping = 3.3m<sup>2</sup>) to Chen, which became the first location of Romis, Chen's eponymous boutique.

When the store became so busy that Chen's mother-in-law couldn't sew fast enough to keep up with demand, Chen started making regular buying trips to Osaka.

Romis now specializes in relaxed, feminine styles imported from South Korea and Japan. Its sister store Post, which opened two years ago, sells T-shirts, children's books, stationery, purses, jewelry and toys by independent designers. Items include handmade fabric bags and dolls by Muleism, lifestyle brand Booday's (聯結) T-shirts and canvas totes and illustrated children's books by independent publisher Abula Press (阿布拉). The two stores are accompanied by a cafe, Tote (步調), located two blocks away, that hosts regular art shows. Post also has an art gallery in its basement.

Chen makes trips every month to South Korea and every four months to Japan. In the first country, she looks for clothing, shoes and accessories. Apparel by indie designers includes skirts and dresses sewn from vintage Japanese kimonos and fabrics printed with cartoon and comic book characters. Romis and Post still sell dresses made by Chen's mother-in-law, including qipaos from funky, non-traditional fabrics. Since opening her first store, Chen says there has been an increase in interest toward vintage women's dresses, which she finds in Osaka. "I brought them back because I liked the style. Now we have students and office workers buying them. Before, customers thought they looked like something their grandma would wear," Chen says.

Post was named after a secondhand bookstore in Japan. Tote's name comes from a Japanese *zakka* brand (*zakka* literally means "merchandise" and connotes a lifestyle with a deliberate approach to decorating and clothing that often uses objects handcrafted from natural materials).

"We sell things that make life more interesting and that are more natural. We don't follow fads," Chen says.

Her favorite magazines promote that aesthetic, which moves away from trends and toward promoting self-expression and comfort with a touch of whimsicality.

Many of Chen's regular reads are stacked in Tote for guests to peruse and include Japanese periodicals such as fashion magazines *Fudge*, *Spur* and *Gisele*, *Moe*, a publication about children's literature that features bright, retro-style illustrations; and *Come Home* and *Tianran Shenghuo* (天然生活), both of which exemplify *zakka*-style home decorating.

Tote's menus are hand-painted and, in addition to fashion and home decor magazines, there are shelves full of manga and comic book series in the cozy cafe, which opened just as serendipitously as Post and Romis. Chen hadn't thought about going into the cafe business until she happened upon the real estate by good luck — just as the opportunity to open Romis had presented itself unexpectedly.

"The space became available and we thought it was adorable," says Chen with a laugh. "After we signed the rental contract, we decided what we would turn it into."