

... The Rise of Techno-Décor



Christopher Smith for The New York Times; inset, Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

RECHARGING

TKNY serves as an informal salon, left. Below, the Chinatown loft of one owner, Joakim Hannerz, with futons, fiberglass room dividers and a table made with particle board and plastic storage bins.



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Continued From Page 1, This Section

Don't call it a store, call it an 'aesthetic collective.'

much as an attitude and lifestyle — a techno-chic version of Andy Warhol's Pop. Think of it as the technology geek's obsession with gadgetry crossed with a post-dot-com-crash emphasis on the practical and playful.

"We are fans of things that help you live better," said Joakim Hannerz, an owner of TKNY and an architect who helped design the store's flexible display cases. "It's about an appreciation for design concepts that are compact yet have a large impact on how we think and live."

Mr. Hannerz grew up in Stockholm surrounded by examples of the Scandinavian tradition of efficient minimalism. But TKNY's small-is-beautiful sentiment comes mostly from Japan, where space is precious and technology prized.

"There are a lot of similarities between life in Tokyo and New York," said Kiho Shin, a technology consultant, who owns TKNY with his wife, Yoshimi Matsuo, a design critic, and Mr. Hannerz. "We always wondered why so many of the products we have in Japan aren't available here."

Workaday Japanese appliances that TKNY may try to make available here include tiny air-conditioners and vacuum cleaners that are practically silent.

TKNY started two years ago as a Web site where early adopters in Tokyo and New York could swap ideas about the latest trends and tools in technology and design.

"Since cities are so strange and dense and anonymous, you are driven to surround yourself with things that have personality," said Mr. Udagawa's partner, Sigi Moeslinger. "Things become like pets."

When a storefront previously used for storage became available on the block where Ms. Matsuo and Mr. Shin live, they drew \$250,000 from their savings and created a place where people can touch and see innovative products up close.

TKNY opened in May with the first in a series of product exhibitions chosen by a rotating panel of graphic designers, computer programmers and Web masters selected from the owners' circle of friends in New York and Tokyo. Their choices are added to the store's inventory.



And customers have responded: the most popular items include the Honda Step Compo, a folding electrically powered bicycle, and the Bitman, a combination alarm clock, personal message board and toy, chosen by Leo Farnekes, an owner of Remote Lounge, at 327 Bowery, the most teched-out bar in Manhattan.

It was devised for people who are re-inventing the tribal rites of the pickup bar, preferring to find one another by telephone, wall-to-wall surveillance cameras and more than 100 monitors.

Ms. Matsuo herself selected the pillowlike Stereotype light, designed by Toshihiko Sakai, a contemporary take on traditional Japanese lamps, with candy-colored heat-re-

sistant plastic instead of paper.

At TKNY, customers gaze at product information on slim monitors affixed to the display cases; additional monitors introduce future products: one device by VKB Inc., an Israeli company, projects a bright red image of a keyboard onto any flat surface and translates finger movements into text, and the much-anticipated Segway Human Transporter, a two-wheeled scooter designed by Dean Kamen can travel at up to 12 miles an hour.

The partners also use the space to test their own designs, including NetMeetStreet, a thin sheet of fiber-optic plastic that turns their storefront window into a constantly changing electronic billboard of Web addresses and other cryptic bulletins.

They discourage customers from calling their venture a store. They prefer "ideas laboratory," "showcase for urban lifestyle technology" or "aesthetic collective."

In their effort to expand beyond conventional retail, they display animation and film and occasionally act as a talent clearinghouse for advertising concerns looking for animators, illustrators, graphic designers and filmmakers.

Next month TKNY will begin serving *Onigiri rice snacks, sake, beer and vitamin drinks* on adjustable tables of honeycombed plastic suspended from columns. Their ambition is to make TKNY a gathering place where New York's design-minded technoculture can eat, shop and surf the Web. "We wanted a place that's inviting and inclusive," Mr. Hannerz said. "It's the same way technology should be."

Mr. Shin and Ms. Matsuo's one-bedroom apartment four doors from the store is a lesson in compact/impact. Tiny Bose speakers attached to the wall are nearly invisible, and the couple watch movies from a projector hooked to a DVD player. "TV's are so bulky," Mr. Shin said, "and projections don't take any space."

Though small, their space is efficiently arranged. It doubles as the couple's office,

WHERE GEEKS

MEET At TKNY, display boxes and flat screens that promote products, above; Kiho Shin and Yoshimi Matsuo with an Ikea unit at home, left; at the Remote Lounge, below, Leo Farnekes and a console with phone and closed-circuit TV.



Roger Davies for The New York Times, above and center right



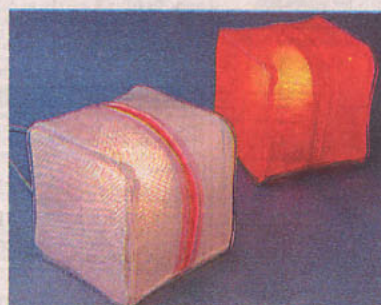
Gadgets and Gizmos

IN Japan the race is always on for electronic gadgets, appliances and telecommunication tools that are smaller or faster or more nimbly able to multitask. TKNY, as a New York source for the latest in Tokyo, carries several products for early adopters and gadget lovers.

For private audiences in unlikely places, the \$55 battery-operated Olympia Soundbug, above, uses material developed by the United States military to turn any smooth surface into a speaker. The bug is smaller than a computer mouse, plugs into any headphone jack and sticks to surfaces, turning them into sounding boards by vibrating (www.soundbug-us.com).

For cellphone addicts who are always running out of juice, the pocket-size \$10 Key Charger stores backup power in a nine-volt battery. For space-starved homebodies, the \$152 Muji CD-1 player, below left, hangs on a wall. Turn it on by pulling a cord, like a fan, and watch CD's spin in full sight.

Stereotype, a diminutive six-inch cube, below right, is a contemporary take on Japanese lamps, with orange or white plastic replacing the traditional paper (\$72).



Plant lovers who are rarely at home can rely on self-watering flowerpots that come with moisture sensors and reservoirs: fill the reservoir every few weeks and it will release water as needed (it is available at www.naturalspring.com/irandplanmai.html).

What next? Sometime soon, a palm-size audio-video player from Sharp, the AV1, which plays MP3 audio and comes with a three-inch color monitor able to display a full-length DVD, like an iPod only more so (\$450).

TKNY, at 21 Avenue B (Second Street), keeps night owl hours — noon until midnight — and is open Tuesday through Sunday. Products can be ordered at www.tkny.com. Its Compact/Impact magazine is free.

CATHY LANG HO