



A string of postcards at Cute Stuff. Photos: Tom Mangione

► The miniature world of *zakka* slips in to Shanghai

The cult of the cute

By Tom Mangione

The Japanese word *zakka* literally means “many things.” True to its name, this style of home décor features lots and lots of things. A *zakka* shop will feature a hodgepodge of coffee mugs, trinkets, postcards and faux-antiques. Prices for these items range from as little as 8 yuan (\$1.20) to over 3,000 yuan. Light pastels shade most of the designs. Flowers frame various odds and ends with an enthusiastic rococo flourish. French slogans are plastered over many of the items and depictions of the Eiffel Tower are rampant. Little bits of Americana or Britannia peak out here and there as well, most with references to New York or London.

While *zakka* is defined by these small items, there’s an overall feeling that’s irreducible in these items. It’s a warm, inviting and distinctly feminine ambiance that will have some shoppers feeling they’ve found home and others feeling they’ve wandered into a girlfriend’s closet. In Japan, this style has been around for over a decade, but here in Shanghai, this cult of the cute is flourishing. The Global Times donned its spectacles and descended into three of these microcosms of the miniature.

Towering knickknackery

Jing’an Villas, the complex that houses Cute Stuff (No.168, Lane 1025 Nanjing Road West, near Maoming Road North, 1894-024-4538) is a lesson in *zakka*. Full of small cafés and shops selling tea, Chinese brand footwear and designer clothing, Jing’an Villas is a perfect setting for a *zakka* store. Walking inside the split level Cute Stuff, one of the first things you might notice is the Eiffel Tower candleholder (58 yuan) by the staircase just next to an

Eiffel Tower bookend (135 yuan). It should be noted this particular shop was the most Eiffel Tower obsessed of those we visited. We won’t describe all of this famous structure’s incarnations – we’ll let you find them on your own!

While continuing to scan the collection, you’ll come across the shop’s most popular item – a tiny, transparent glass pot for raising plants one stem at a time (8 yuan). Across the way from the petite planter you’ll find tin tea-cups branded “Aromatic Coffee” and “La Boutique de Fleurs” for 18 and 20 yuan respectively. On the shelves above you’ll see smaller shelves full of



At Cute Stuff, nothing can hold a candle to the Eiffel Tower.



Tea Style Living Space.



Leather-band notebooks at Cute Stuff.



Change purses at Recital of Nature.

unique knickknacks. Among them: porcelain toadstools, doll-sized wooden stools and antique clocks. Walking up to the top of the split level, you’ll find a large collection of handmade, leather bound journals from 45 to 100 yuan. Above these you can find postcards featuring views of Paris and Tokyo (20 yuan) or mini-postcards of flowers in bloom or teddy bears in cute positions (20 yuan). Turn around and you’ll see handmade rainbow herbal soaps (35 yuan each).

A new hook

The new *zakka*-styled Tea Style Living Space (Unit 1, No.74, Lane 30 Chongqing Road South, near Nan-chang Road, 6052-4556) is an outlet of the Kangding Road furniture retailer that is poised to differentiate itself among Shanghai’s *zakka* zealots with its collection of hooks.

One rack item distinguishes itself with pirate memorabilia, including a series of three coat hooks hanging down from a banner that simply says “Pirate,” out of which sprouts three pirate flags (88 yuan). Gaudy crucifix hooks (75 yuan each) are sure to delight the devout Catholic or anyone undergoing a vampire infestation. A selection of three large hooks features renderings of antique Parisian fashions in black and white on porcelain (85 yuan each). Three hooks dangle from the word “Espresso” (110 yuan), giving the act of coat hanging an extra kick.

As well as hooks, there are other off-the-wall products to be had. A massive stand-alone, Mediterranean-style fountain sports a lion’s head spouting water from a wall defined by a brightly colored mosaic (3,800 yuan). Just next to it you’ll find a tin featuring Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s immortal children’s character, Le Petit Prince (30 yuan). We should, of course, mention the wire sculpture of the Eiffel Tower (98 yuan) livening up a pedestal complete with a cylindrical box that says “Bait.”

In concert with nature

Steps away from Exit 1 of Line 1’s Hengshan Road metro station, and you will find the Recital of Nature (762 Yongjia Road, near Hengshan Road, 1891-7066-293). It’s a tiny shop that envelopes you in kitsch more than the other shops. The entire outside world is obfuscated in a patina of cute.

As we made our way through, we found a similar collection of small planters (8 yuan) and Eiffel Tower memorabilia. However, there were also some intriguing fashion accessories. Slippers in stripes, plaid and loud monochromes feature soles of faux suede to grip the floor oh-so-softly (from 25 to 35 yuan). A collection of change and pencil purses in stripes and polka dots go from 12 to 15 yuan.

Outside the wearable items, we were intrigued by a collection of sewing scissors (25 yuan each) on display in a vitrine. Their ornate handles leading from the small, pincer-like blades make these cutting implements worthy *objets de décor*. Speaking of French, the French non sequiturs on coffee cups are also worth a look (12 yuan). One features a picture of a key and the words: “Clé” and “un vieux marin” – “key” and “an old sailor.”

