



Exterior pattern design for entrance wall of interior design store Actus.

Branding and new design concept for Fast Wellness and the Flexa stretch centers.



Japanese design is always distinctive. Mixing traditional art forms like origami and calligraphy with cutting-edge technology, it also excels at adopting trends from around the world and making them its own. *Inspire* talked to graphic designer Akiko Kanna about trends in Japanese contemporary design and cultural differences compared with Europe.

TEXT: SAM EICHBLATT

DESIGNING FOR THE Japanese spirit

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AKIKO KANNA MOVED to Britain to study graphic design at London's prestigious Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. After graduating, she designed for the British youth culture magazine *Dazed and Confused* before joining legendary studio North. She returned to Tokyo in 2006 to set up her own graphic design studio.

You studied in London and now work in Tokyo. How have these two very different cities influenced your style?

"Tokyo is full of style. It's a good place to experiment, but it also means it doesn't have a specific style of its own. Everything comes and goes very quickly, and everything mixes. There's no boundary between graphic design, editorial and illustration.

"I established my approach and style while I lived in the United Kingdom, studying and working at London design studios, so nothing scares me about that situation. I already have some good basics, and I can just enjoy the cultural differences."

Historically, Japan has a striking visual aesthetic.



How has this affected contemporary graphic design?

"There's no simple answer to this question. Japanese culture has such a rich history, with a wide variety of expression, which can be very minimal and at the same time very dynamic. One thing I remember when

I moved to Japan was that Japanese people are very brave about using colour. Tokyo is full of colour, and it's exciting to see a mix of so many colours together."

Packaging is a big part of Japan's culture. How do you approach it in your work?

"We have so much choice in paper and materials, which is a great start for any project. Research is also easy here – I just go to the food section of any department store or big shopping mall and always find something new for future reference. And printers here are very skilful – I always get their input before I make a final decision on a design."

What trends do you predict in the Japanese design world in the next few years?

"Less copying of European styles, finding a more Japanese spirit in our work and style of expression." ■