

jeansnow.net - A Guide to Design and Pop Culture in Tokyo  
**Art & Design Media City Life Tokyo Boy**

Jean Snow lives and breathes design and pop culture in Tokyo -- sustained by an unhealthy addiction to magazines and frequent visits to his favorites cafes. He has reported on these obsessions for the following online/offline publications: [Time](#), [Inside](#) (Australian Design Review), [Gizmodo](#), [Gridskipper](#), [Tokyo Q](#), [Superfuture](#), [OK Fred](#), [Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel](#), [I.D.](#) (International Design), [Metropolis](#), and [The Japan Times](#). He is also the editor of [MoCo Tokyo](#), covering contemporary design in the city, and manages the gallery space at [Cafe Pause](#).

## PauseTalk

[PauseTalk](#) is a regular series of events that take place at [Cafe Pause](#) on the first Monday of every month, with a start time of **19:30**. The idea is to create a forum where Tokyo-based creatives can get together and discuss their own projects, as well as cultural currents of the city. If you're interested in joining us, attendance is open to one and all. The next edition happens **August 21** (the third Monday), to coincide with an exhibition at the cafe by artist Hiroaki Koshiba.



[Snapazoo](#)s of all color variations (including the Swedish Style limited-edition blue and yellow version) are available for order from me. You can also purchase them at [Cafe Pause](#) in Ikebukuro.

The [July edition](#) (free registration required) of my "On Design" column for [The Japan Times](#) (appears on the



fourth Tuesday of every month) features a finger-mounted optical mouse, the Garden Lawn Mower, the Tsubomi outdoor shed, and the SUTTO STOOL from Truck Furniture.



I'm the editor of [MoCo](#)

## 2004.11.08 Everio

[Everio](#)

I want me one of [these](#).

We don't feature JVC often, mainly because its products tend to be a bit, well, dull, but the company's marketing machine intrigued us when it went [gaga](#) this summer, running a tease campaign urging the press to guess what the new Everio was. The fact that it turned out to be a solid-state video camera was a welcome surprise. The ¥110,000 lens 'corder includes a 4Gb Microdrive and a 10x optical zoom, as well as slots for other memory cards, so you won't have to ditch all your existing media. It even comes in two different designs, giving the choice of a traditional side grip (GZ-MC200) or a new-fangled vertical alignment (GZ-MC100). A 2-megapixel sensor and MPEG-2 video recording complete a nice little package. ([Metropolis](#))

I'm definitely due for a new gadget...

## 2004.10.31 Metropolis 553



This week's issue of city guide [METROPOLIS](#) has quite a few interesting articles in it, which I'll rundown in one post instead of multiple entries. After a week, look in their sidebar archives for issue 553.

The [cover feature](#) is a short story — "Watercolors," taken from his DARK WATER collection — by RINGU author Suzuki Koji. Most of his novels are being published in English by [Vertical](#).

If you're looking for English books in Tokyo (your cheapest option is still to order from [Amazon Japan](#)), you can check out the recently opened Maruzen store in the Oazo shopping complex.

**More than 130 years after the first Maruzen opened in Nihonbashi, the shop**



Tokyo, a directory of contemporary design in Tokyo, of which the entries also get cross-posted on [MoCo Loco](#). Here are links to a few recent posts: [Parabola Light](#), [ABITAX Phone Strap](#), [AtoZ Cafe](#), [Nextmaruni](#)

I also contribute Tokyo/Japan-related posts to [Gridskipper](#), the urban travel guide. You can read all my entries [here](#) (or subscribe to a [feed](#)).



[Radio OK Fred](#) is a twice-monthly (temporarily on hiatus, but coming back soon) radio program hosted by Ay2, Yoshi, and me. You can download the shows [here](#), or subscribe to the [podcast feed](#).

I have also recently started a new podcast series called [Tokyo Boy](#), which are recordings done while out and about in the city, recorded on my iPod with the iTalk recorder. You can download the first three episodes [here](#), or subscribe to the [feed](#).

that has saved many an expat in Tokyo will shut down and undergo a huge renovation. Although the new Nihonbashi Maruzen will not re-open until 2007, the venerable bookseller has moved into the Oazo shopping and dining complex next to Tokyo station with no less than 200,000 foreign books, the largest selection of its kind in Japan.

In addition to four bilingual book advisors, the new Maruzen has a touch-screen computer system that allows you to search in English for your favorite classic. When we tested it, for instance, Maruzen didn't have the 2004 BBC Books edition of Agatha Christie's *Caribbean Mystery*, but the system did print out an order form to take to the counter. If a book is in stock, the computer can print a map of where it is in the store. Maruzen has an extensive selection of the latest English books, including fiction, academic titles and books on Japan. They also have a limited collection of German and French fiction and nonfiction, and some French audio books.

I'd like to have a look at their French book selection. Ordering French books from Canada or France is still just too expensive (the shipping costs equal the price of the books).

Then there's [this mention](#) of the "Emerging Generation" architectural exhibition taking place at [GA Gallery](#) (until November 3), that I'd really like to check out.

[GA](#), or [Global Architecture](#), is the preeminent name for architecture aficionados throughout Japan. Predominantly known for its various magazines and journals, the GA organization also operates a gallery space near Yoyogi station. The refined, modern but simple building houses two floors of exhibition space and one of the most extensive architecture bookstores in Tokyo.

"Emerging Generation," the latest of this exhibition space's informative and extensive investigations into the contemporary architecture scene, is exactly what the title describes. Nine emerging forty-something architects from around the world are represented in a series of designs, conceptual drawings, and computer-generated prints of 3D models all modestly displayed on color-coded posters that hang around the smooth concrete interior of the gallery.

The next show, "GA Japan 2004" (until December 26), looks like another add-on to my must-see list.

And then there's Hillary Raphael's new novel, *I (HEART) LORD BUDDHA*, published by [Creation Books](#), which I think could make for a fun read.

Tokyo has been the grist for many a first novel, but few have been as leftfield as Hillary Raphael's. The author of last year's *butoh* photography book *Outcast Samurai Dancer*, Raphael has woven her experiences as a Tokyo hostess and runway model together with real-life events such as the *Aum Shinrikyo* subway gassing, and used her own febrile imagination to create a rollicking novel of cyber-age esthetics. Set in late-'90s Tokyo, *I Lord Buddha* recounts the history of the Neo-Geisha Organization, a sex-and-death cult with an anti-consumerist, pro-hedonist ideology. The cult is led by leggy Westerner Hiyoko, and her followers are the young women "whose curiosity and perfect bodies have taken them thousands of miles from home to work in Tokyo's neon-lit network of hostess bars."

Another must-see exhibition is Maywa Denki's "The Nonsense Machines" happening at the [NTT ICC](#), until December 26.

Blurring the line between art and industry, Masamichi and Nobumichi Tosa are better known by their pseudonym Maywa Denki, or Maywa Electric. In their 11 years of existence they have beguiled the world with whimsical interactive machines that double as musical instruments, calling their concerts "product demonstrations" and dressing in the faceless uniforms of Japan's industrial workers. "The Nonsense Machines" is a retrospective that brings together their collected inventions, and also features a new *Edelweiss* series, a consideration in interactive mechanical forms of various aspects of female identity. A free concert is scheduled for December 6 in the adjacent Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall.

I hope I can make it to that free show.

## 21\_21

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And looking for some wacky otaku-flavoured Japanese cinema? KOI NO MON would seem to fit the bill.

Recently, there has been a rash of Japanese films based on manga, but *Koi no Mon* goes one step further. Not only does it stem from the adult comic of Jun Hanyunuu, but the piece centers around a bizarre, down-and-out manga-ka (manga artist) named Mon (Ryuhei Matsuda), who draws his cartoons on little stones, and a female counterpart, Koino (Wakana Sakai), whose passion is cosu-pure ("costume play"). Thus we get the title, which also means "gate of love." It should come as no surprise then that the tone of the piece is "cartoonish" in a surreal, frenetic and often silly way. A lot of the action takes place in the protagonists' imagination, leading to some interesting computer graphics and visuals. The offbeat love story between the two is only mildly engaging but you have to like any film in which the female lead squeals "tanoshi neeee" and the male lead promptly pukes his guts out.

TOKYO Q also has this review:

Theater actor and director Suzuki Matsuo makes his feature film debut with this wacky tale of lovesick manga artists in Tokyo. For a first film, it's an assured performance: a riot of sight gags, colorful characters, quick-cutting, rock-tempo silliness. Mon (Ryuhei Matsuda) is a scuzzy, furry "manga artisan," a hopeless failure who draws comics on stones. He meets and falls in love with cute Koino (Wakana Sakai), an OL with a "cos-play" fetish and a secret manga artist to boot. Koino and Mon's love affair is complicated by the involvement of an older man, manga coffee shop owner (Matsuo), with claims on Koino's art and heart. While exploring a similar world to the low-budget film "Ai suru Yochu" (which also featured Matsuo as an older lover), this is altogether more satisfying. A complete guide to the workings of the obsessive otaku mind. A few cult directors show up in fun cameos: Takashi Miike as a brothel keeper and Shinya Tsukamoto as a soon-dead customer at the manga coffeeshop. Tokyo geek love.

I'll wait until I can get my hands on a version with English subs.

Lastly, I haven't really found anything interesting in the recent bar reviews they've featured, but [this one](#) (follow the link for the full review), for Aoyama's Ratia, looks like it might right up my alley.

Ratia is exactly the kind of place that comes to mind when people ask us about cool Tokyo lounges. Dimly lit, multi-level, and filled with enticing nooks, this bar is a sure bet for couples or groups looking to chill out with an inventive cocktail and some good food.

Located a short walk from the sparkling Prada Building, Ratia sits on a quiet side street surrounded by stylish design studios, restaurants and shops. The exterior holds its own against these oshare outposts; even from the outside looking in, the bar emanates an inviting aura. A porch area runs up to large front windows that give a glimpse of a small bar area that's somewhat mysteriously suffused with a green glow. Once inside, the narrow space has a row of small white tables lining one wall, while farther back is a semi-private seating area.

It seems that I've been recently criticized for my superficial thirst for stylish environments. This is not something that I feel the need to defend: I think my site is pretty much a shrine to all that is pretty and stylish in this city, and I make no excuse for it. That's what I like, and that's where I want to hang out.

2004.09.03

## Vertical Sales

Vertical, the American publisher that releases English translations of Japanese fiction (as well as a few manga books, like Tezuka Osamu's classic BUDDHA), now sells its books online from their [site](#).



reads).

2003.05.28

## Urban Renewal

To continue on the same topic (I'm posting a new entry because old entries tend to get lost in the churn, as do the comments), a couple of articles came to my attention today. First, I was late picking up METROPOLIS this week, but finally got around to it and found a [cover story](#) featuring the father of Roppong Hills (and many other development projects, including the Dojunkai apartment renewal), Minoru Mori. His reasoning behind the need for this vertical extension:

“Commuting shouldn't consume our days. We need high-rise city centers where all facets of life are within easy walking distance.”

Also, today's TOKYO WALKER features a cover story on “New Tokyo Spots.” The article then goes on to list all of the recent places we've been discussing of late, but also talks about new areas I didn't know about, like Toshimaen, which is a big green space that would include various spa/hot spring facilities. So it seems that Tokyo is not totally ignoring the need for green spaces. Even for the Ando designed Dojunkai apartment space, “the zelkova tree-lined boulevard will remain an integral part.”

I'll also point to a very interesting link that was suggested by Joao in the comments below, the [Bionic Tower](#).

2003.04.11

## Taipei House



This picture was taken not far from my apartment. The vertical green sign on the left indicates the address of the block. The grey sign in the middle has the name of the building behind the wall, Taipei House.

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