

WORDS TO LIVE BY

Web designer Peter Brune

By JUDIT KAWAGUCHI

Peter Brune, 45, is a Web designer and photographer who has been a Japanese resident for 10 years. Born and raised in East Berlin, Brune was a world traveler even before he set foot outside the walls of his home: Absorbed in books and glued to the television and radio, he was constantly crossing borders and exploring faraway corners of the earth, inspired by the stories that flowed freely between both sides of the Iron Curtain. His virtual trips turned real when, in 1987, he flew out of his cocoon of East Berlin and transformed into a globetrotting photojournalist. In 1997, 10 years and 60 countries later, he settled in his favorite spot on earth — Japan. Here, Brune established the piichi design office and turned the computer screen into his canvases. With his sophisticated palette, Peter creates works of arts, easily recognizable by their kakkoi (cool) look and user-friendliness. Luckily, the piichi Web site aesthetic is spreading, replacing banner-infested messy sites with stylish, uncluttered pages, one after the other.

Good manners are the most important thing in the world. That's what's so great about Japan! The Japanese say little but mean a lot. They never want to bother anyone and always put others first.

To see the real picture, always look for the details. When you encounter Tokyo, you think it is chaotic — endless concrete mushrooms on top of each other. But once you see one tiny mushroom locally, it is so lovely. You look at a small house with a grandma and a cat and some little flowers;

it is idyllic, peaceful and that's Tokyo for me. I see the macroview as a photographer, but I rest my eyes on the microcosmos.



Web designer Peter Brune JUDIT KAWAGUCHI PHOTO

Optimize yourself, your life and your actions. Whatever I am, it's on the sites I design. "*Yatte-miru*" is the keyword: Give it a try! My job is to encode one's essence.

To think positively, we need lovely stories and happy endings. Every morning I watch NHK TV's "Ohayo Nippon" ("Good Morning, Japan") or NHK's national news program. They show human-interest stories, like some cute *ojiichan* (grandpa) growing pumpkins. Everyone's working and feeling good. It's all about world peace. Not only is the content happy but the aesthetic is also very similar to what I used to see in my childhood days.

A Web site is like a *meishi* (business card): You spend money making it, yet nobody pays you for it.

Getting sick, to the point of almost dying, is sometimes necessary to save us from ourselves. Before I fell sick, I couldn't say no to anything. I was like a typical Japanese person, always thinking of others and accepting any amount of work, even with impossible deadlines. I was taking painkillers for my stomach for years, until one day I almost bled to death from holes in my belly! Almost dying made me realize that I was killing myself. Now I'm much better with my time-management.

The days when Web sites made a profit are over. Web sites should not contain ads, as they're not tools for moneymaking but spaces for the free flow of information. "Free" is the keyword.

East Germany was an island nation, just like Japan. Inside it we were safe; if we accepted not to talk about politics. We all got free milk and a free education, same as in Japan.

If you move to a new country, it's your responsibility to overcome the language barrier. In 1997, when I was 33, I studied Japanese for two years because I wanted to live here.

In Japan, short answers go a long way. Here minimalism in communication matters: "Yes, yes," it's enough to repeat that one word.

The emancipation of women freed them to work even more than their mothers used to : Not only do they have to labor at home but outside, too. In the past, German women's role was limited to *kinder* (kids), *kirche* (church) and *küche* (kitchen). Socialism changed all that by adding *arbeit* (work) to it. My mom was brainwashed by the state propagandist message that women didn't need a husband and children didn't need a father. That meant I was alone all the time, as my mom worked 12 hours a day at her job. I was free but she was working like a slave.

Living alone doesn't mean I feel alone . I chat. I e-mail, I Skype. I have friends all over the world via the Net.

If you live in Japan long enough, it's easy to "turn Japanese." I behave like a Japanese, even when I speak other languages. "Excuse me, may I disturb you?" I ask in German. It's weird, as Germans would never ask that. I feel Japanese. I'm surprised when I see my face in the mirror. It's good; that's integration.

Not being stupid is a present from God. I have that, thanks to God. Everything was so easy for me.

Once you find a spot that's really comfortable, why change places? Nothing can make me move from Japan, not even the frequent earthquakes. A bit of a shake here and there is fun. When the earth shakes, shake with it. It's so moving.

Japanese business style is classy and fun. With clients, we don't talk much about work. With one, the first time we met, we just chatted; the second time, we drank beer, ate sausages, and said, "Let's do it!" We had no contract and the price was a ballpark estimate from me. Japanese are all about trust and quality.

For most Japanese, the concept of overtime is abnormal. Think of a grandma and grandpa a long time ago, working all day and never complaining. Japanese are still like that and this is why we have superior products and services here. The majority of Japanese businesses are small family operations, with *shokunin* (craftspeople), who work in their own world, and not for profit, but for quality. They are very satisfied as they take pride in making super-good quality products.

One can feel at home in a very foreign place. I don't feel like a foreigner in Japan. Everything is *natsukashii* (brings back good memories) because what I see in Japan is something already lost in East Germany. I feel reborn here in Japan.

Judit Kawaguchi loves to listen. She is a volunteer counselor and a TV reporter on NHK's "Out & About." Learn more at:
<http://juditfan.blog58.fc2.com/>

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