

reed pages™



Kim, Tonia

PHOTOS: JOE WIGDAHL

Work is life and life is work. Few represent that mantra better than Tonia Kim. As founder and designer of the jewelry line Toki Collection, Kim spends countless hours in her studio nimbly hammering—life experiences and inspiration into her designs. Kim defines success as something akin to finding a stone setting's perfect proportions; it is finding the proper balance between her business, artistic integrity, family and friends that is her true “work” in life. *Reed Pages* takes a peek into her studio as she describes her life through the crafting tools, photos and artifacts she draws on for inspiration.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST CREATIVE MOMENT AS A CHILD? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU CHANNEL YOUR CREATIVITY GROWING UP?

When I was five, I received a set of crayons, a sketchbook and some other drawing tools from a close artist friend of my mom's, Choi Wook-Kyung. She was this amazing oil painter and art professor from Korea. Even though she is no longer alive, she is not a person one easily forgets.

Call it intuition or being plain psychic, but she told my mom that I was destined to use my hands as an artist. Of course, I never put much stock into what she said until I actually did pursue a creative field as a professional endeavor. Until that decision, being an artist had never crossed my mind growing up! In fact, I was pretty hell-bent on becoming a doctor.

I should've taken a clue when I started paying more attention to my art classes than science. Growing up, I would draw any chance I could get. I even won the turkey drawing contest for Thanksgiving every year until the sixth grade at the local supermarket, bringing home a ham for my family! A ham for drawing a turkey!

I also drew all of my friends' and random classmate's sketchbook assignments for money in high school. From there, somehow my creative energy began being manifested into sculpting three-dimensional items like jewelry.

AND YOUR CREATIVE ENERGY HASN'T JUST BEEN USED IN MAKING JEWELRY; YOU'VE ALSO HAD EXPERIENCE WORKING IN FASHION RETAIL, PHOTOGRAPHY, FILM, EVENT PRODUCTION... COLLECTIVELY, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM THESE VENTURES?

Creativity comes first and fuels the fire, but you need to walk that fine balance between being creative and business minded.

IF YOU HAD TO BOIL ALL OF THAT IN ONE WORD, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Multitask.



SO WHAT IS TOKI COLLECTION?

The word “Toki” means rabbit in Korean. It is also a play on words with my name. It's a jewelry line for individuals that appreciate minute details and enjoy the story behind the process. It's an interpretation of my obsession with fairy tales and medieval history, but I'd also like to think that there is something for everyone. I'm just as psyched to randomly see it on an effortlessly stylish girl in the city as I would on a grandmother who just happens to love oxidized silver and rustic pieces.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST INSPIRED?

That is a loaded question, so here we go. I feel most inspired when I'm traveling and away from my daily surroundings. As much as I love my studio space, it's great to get away and bring back what you've discovered. And that's when the interpretation, evolution of ideas and creation of my line takes place...but all of this, on top, needs to be accompanied with music. If there is a great track playing in the background, it definitely pushes things along. I am a fan of all kinds of music—sorry, no country—but when I'm really getting into the design process, I love the complexity of

classical music...or a good movie soundtrack like *Karate Kid I*, that also does the trick. I am a product of the 80s, what can I say!

Oh, and I can't forget—my dog, Oliver, inspires me so much as well! Inspiration, a lot of time requires me to have a clear mind and no one clears it better than him. Sitting in a park or taking him for a long walk does wonders on a stressful day.

WHAT EXCITES YOU ON A DAILY BASIS?

The little victories in life. The possibility of coming up with a new design, even if it's just one. Oh, and that first cup of tea in the morning. It's amazing how much I really look forward to that cup. Can't help it, I'm a total creature of habit.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST AFRAID OF?

Not trying and then looking back to say, “I wish I would've done that.” I think it's important to try to live with no regrets. It's easy to get paralyzed by the fear of failure, but the biggest failure in life is not doing it at all. It's cliché, but it's very true. And on a personal level? I am, and always will be, afraid of clowns, dolls and horror movies.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?

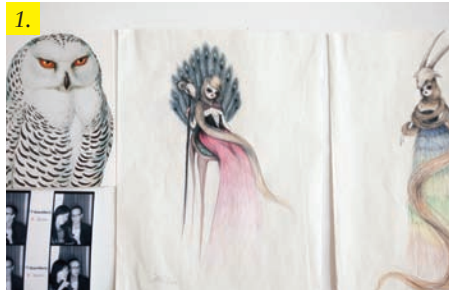
I'm doing it: Continuing to motivate myself to better my business, still loving what I do and, above all, not forgetting to pay attention to my family and friends the whole time is success to me.

As much as I would love to have my dream retailers and editors come knocking at my door, ultimately, I can't control that. If that is how success is measured, I'd be an anxious mess. I think in the beginning, actually, when I started designing jewelry, that's how I felt. But when I started to shift the focus to refining my aesthetic and designs, that's when I was the most comfortable and satisfied.

WHAT IS NEXT FOR YOU? WHAT DO YOU SEE FOR YOURSELF IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

Thankfully, Toki is expanding to more stores, both stateside and abroad. There is definitely another creative venture in the works that I hope will really come together with the help of a community of designers. So, stay tuned for more!

<http://www.tokicollection.com>



1. I'm a *bit* of an owl freak. I don't know when I transitioned into that family member or friend that only gets owl gifts. I have owl coin purses, owl prints and I swear I only get owl cards. To the right are illustrations by Miss Van, whom I came across in *Juxtapoz* magazine years ago. There is a quiet strength about them.

2. Surrounding my walls with photographs of the people I love the most is important to me. Since I spend most of my days in the studio, it's nice to bring a little bit of home to the workspace. Below that is a postcard illustration by Amy Ross.

3. This is my jewelry workbench that was made from scratch by a carpenter that I know. The whole desk is made solely from a trunk of wood that was going to be thrown away. He was able to whittle it all down to make this beautiful piece. To the left of my desk is my Foredom flex shaft that does everything: Drilling, polishing, sanding and grinding. I like to have stations for different stages of my work and so this is where I finish most of my pieces. Aside from this desk, I have separate areas for designing, soldering and oxidizing.

4. This is a bulletin board where I tack up inspiring images, finished pieces and pretty much anything that needs to be tacked up. I recently cleared it out in order to start afresh. The board usually starts to make less and less sense after awhile and the different themes start to compete with each other, but each time I begin, there is a common thread with every inspiration board...it's that there is always a bird or a rabbit! It never fails.

5. As much as I predominantly work with precious metals, every season I try to implement a different material I've never worked with. The discovery process and researching new textiles is a part of my job that I look forward to.

6. The necklace is made of oxidized silver chains and Swarovski crystal rhinestones. I never thought I'd use rhinestones but I started using them a couple of years ago and was pleasantly surprised with the results and that it didn't look like a bad diamante pageant-worthy necklace from the 80s! This necklace is displayed on fake antlers and a cross section of a tree trunk I convinced a shop owner to sell to me.



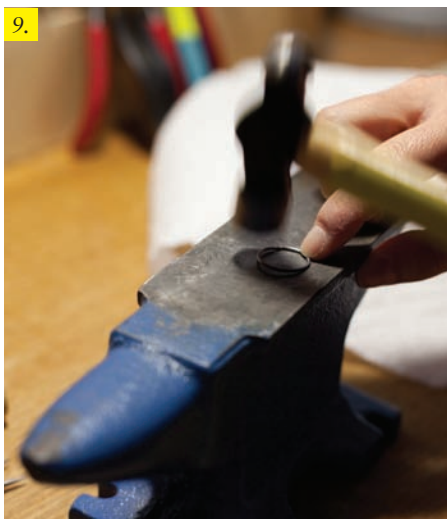


7. I've been experimenting with a lot of different colored rhinestones. These pieces are displayed on a necklace bust that I made with muslin cloth and some beautiful peacock feathers. (Of course, I made sure they were ethically retrieved—they naturally fell off the peacock.)

There isn't much of a choice but to get creative with jewelry displays. They're all ugly and look like they came straight from a jewelry store in the mall. So, while I risked my fingers getting glued together with some high powered glue, I couldn't have been happier with the plumage—inspired necklace bust I ended up with.



8. This wooden box is sitting on my jewelry bench and holds various pliers, clippers, hammers, rulers, scissors, glue, files and dental tools! I scored some dental tools from my dentist who told me to take whatever overstock tools I wanted.



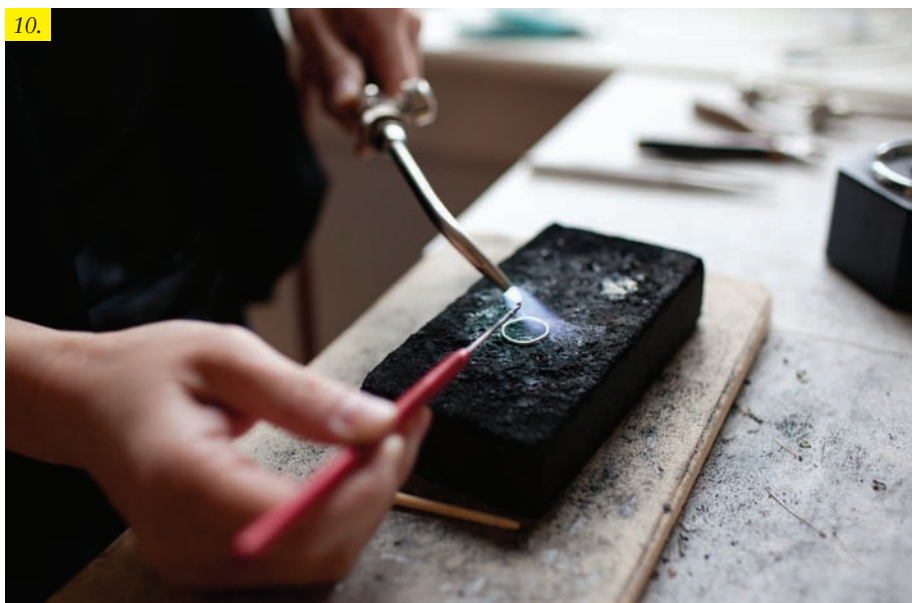
9. This is the little blue anvil that could. It's small but I don't need anything huge. There isn't much of a surface area to work on, but then again, look at the size of the piece I'm hammering. Tiny pieces of work, however, also mean a better chance of that hammer taking a nice whack at my fingers.



(a) This piece is a bunch of delicate silver chains that have been macraméd and then oxidized to different shades. Every time, the colors turn out differently. I'd like to think that's what makes each of my pieces special. Each person will have a slight variation of the other. Oxidation is also probably the favorite technique I use. It's challenging because it's unpredictable.

(b) I individually made each silver cluster and then oxidized them, as well as hand forged the irregular 10k gold circles. I like to design pieces that are good for layering with other necklaces. It's probably why I frequently design simple styles. I end up putting a bunch of them together to create a bigger effect.

(c) When I can, I like to mix it up and incorporate a variety of materials. In this case, I used a Swarovski rhinestone chain, oxidized silver and Irish linen. This is probably as bling as my line will get.



10. This is my soldering station where I have my acetylene torch. I formed a hoop out of recycled sterling silver round wire and then soldered it. The red pen-like thing is a titanium pick that picks up the solder.



11. Here, I'm annealing a piece of wire to make the metal softer without melting it. The pebble-like pieces are pumice. Depending on how thick the wire is or if I don't get the exact shape I want while forming, I may have to repeat the annealing process again to re-soften the metal. Watching the metal heat up is really a graceful transition in colors, but you can't let it get too red! You'll be left with a heap of molten metal! 🪄

