



Glass act

Far from her Japanese roots, glass artist Eiko Kawaguchi creates beautiful beads inspired by her new homeland

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THIS PAGE: A collection of glass bead choker necklaces on leather cords.

OPPOSITE: Each petal that makes up Eiko's flower earrings is made separately and then fused onto the central piece of glass in the heat of the flame.





AFTER SEVEN YEARS IN NEW ZEALAND, glass artist Eiko Kawaguchi is getting accustomed to the vivid colours of our landscape. Her adopted country is a constant source of inspiration, revealed in the brilliant reds, greens and blues of her flame-work beads.

The bead choker she's wearing – black glass discs edged with red and green – would be regarded as very jazzy back home, and a sample box of glass rings glows like a rainbow. "Since I've moved here I can see more colour because there are no high buildings, you can see the trees and the sky. I don't think I would ever have thought to mix colours the way I do now."

Eiko, 36, came to New Zealand in 2001 with her Australian husband Michael Wilson, a talented glass-blower. Michael landed a project in Christchurch and the couple later moved to a large section in Waikuku, north of Kaiapoi, where they plan to build a glass-blowing studio. It will be called Bundilla Glass after the area in Sydney where Michael grew up.

Their old house is a work in progress and Eiko's love of pink is evident in the stylishly renovated kitchen and



living area. Examples of the couple's work are on display throughout. A blue bowl on top of a cabinet was spun in a centrifuge and Eiko shows me some fine wineglasses with spiral stems which are Michael's work.

Now, as well as doing flame work, Eiko is studying art history at Canterbury University. Her life is a far cry from the days when she worked as a travel agent in Kanagawa, about 100 kilometres from Tokyo. After living such a citified existence in Japan, the rawness of New Zealand was a bit of a shock. "I hated worms and insects and flies. I'd never really touched the ground much, I never had to. But Michael's a wild man, he doesn't care about getting dirty and he's changed me a lot in that way."

Eiko's love affair with glass began on a trip to Australia, when she was taken by hand-blown glass in a Sydney market. Back home she enrolled in a glass-blowing course, travelling an hour and a half each way by train to attend classes at weekends. On a year-long working holiday to Australia she met Michael at a glass-blowing conference. →



ABOVE: The colours in Eiko's jewellery are drawn from nature.

INSET: Even after the beads have been shaped, they must be dipped in and out of the flame to stop them from cooling suddenly before they go into the kiln.

LEFT: Husband Michael's glasswork, such as these wineglasses, fill their Waikuku home.

SHE REACHES UNDER THE BENCH AND PULLS OUT A BOX FILLED WITH GLASS RODS IN AT LEAST 20 DIFFERENT COLOURS, SOME CLEAR, OTHERS TRANSLUCENT

Until their new Waikuku studio is built, Eiko creates her exquisite glass beads in a small cubbyhole beside the back door. She reaches under the bench and pulls out a box filled with glass rods in at least 20 different colours, some clear, others translucent. Oxygen from a large cylinder is mixed with LPG to fire a gas torch with a flame that reaches 2000°C.

To demonstrate, Eiko slowly heats a glass rod, dipping it in and out of the flame. She must gauge by eye how hot the glass becomes and keep it below the point where components of glass would begin to boil – around 1200°C. She then winds the melting glass around a metal skewer, shaping the bead with a graphite paddle. Once finished, the beads go into a small kiln to cool slowly; this process takes about five hours. If left exposed in the open air, the temperature shock would cause the hot beads to crack.

Eiko opens the kiln to reveal three delicate glass flowers she made the previous day. They're destined to become earrings or possibly brooches.

When Eiko was invited to enter her work in a local exhibition with a Waikuku theme, she experimented with sand from Waikuku Beach. Adding grains of sand to molten glass gives her beads an extra sparkle.

One of her favourite pieces was made using this technique. Eiko says Waikuku has strong Maori connections and the area was known for its flax mills (an old brick mill nearby was once reputedly the largest hay-baling twine factory of its kind in the world). So that prompted her to string her 'sand beads' onto plaited flax. "It took me forever to make." This precious piece is definitely not for sale. "I'm keeping it, I can't let it go." ■ Visit www.bundillaglass.co.nz