

# JAPAN TIMES PERSONALITY PROFILE

## Jeri Foley

By [VIVIENNE KENRICK](#)

Ten years ago, the "Tokyo Journal" published its first annual list of 50 foreigners "who live here long-term, have been measurably successful in their work, and have made a difference to the Japanese and foreign community."

Appearing on that first list was the name Jeri Foley, an independent young woman who works quietly and steadily, doing what she enjoys most while effectively "making a difference." She is an interior designer whose ideas are geared toward helping those who most need help.

Before she was born, a relative of hers lived in Japan. Jeri said, "She gave my family souvenirs of kimono and Japanese dolls, that were displayed around our house in California. I grew up loving those Japanese colors and designs. I always knew I would come to Japan."

She attended Washington University in St. Louis, and took advantage of the year-abroad program offered by Waseda University in Tokyo. After returning to complete her studies at Washington University, she went for a while to Paris. That was another city attractive to her for its world-famed style and flair. "Then I came back (to Tokyo) to take a language course and to attend Sophia University," Jeri said. She didn't intend to stay. "But I gave a talk to a group of professionals and that opened up interesting opportunities in design work," she said.

Nonetheless, she found her early years financially hard-going. Believing that she had something to offer, she persisted and in 1984 established her company -- Images.

From her knowledge of what other countries were doing, and with her instinct and training in colors, furnishings and facilities, Jeri decided that insufficient attention was being paid to Japan's aging society.

In hospitals, she noticed many existing designs that were not necessarily the best for the patients. She presented designs and colors that would lighten moods and relieve anxieties, and so benefit elderly and infirm people.

She realized that for many patients the colors they used to recognize had changed in their eyes. Signs had lost their meanings, and the old positioning of lighting had led to loss of effectiveness.

New hazards had opened up in areas to be walked, in halls and stairways. Many patients had difficulty finding their way around. Jeri considered how to indicate "wayfinding" for them. She focused on the aged, the confused, the senile, and their new requirements. The question she always asked herself was "does this design work well for the people who need it?"

For several years when she thought it beneficial, Jeri led groups of doctors, architects and designers to the U.S. for them to see modern examples of helpful hospital design. The Foundation for Hospital Art was established in the U.S. in the 1980s.

Jeri found the outlook of this charity very advanced, and became its Japan adviser. "Supporters of the foundation paint on the walls of hospitals around the world," she said.

"Blank walls are transformed into beautiful art spaces. Involving staff and patients as the painting goes on makes for closer relationships too. Here in Japan, examples can be seen in the Red Cross Hospital in Hiroo, and in the National Cancer Center in Saitama Prefecture."

Nowadays, Jeri speaks Japanese fluently. To further understanding of what she considers desirable, she lectures frequently in Japanese, teaches a design presentation course, and writes prolifically in Japanese for magazines.

Her projects, probably totaling more than 100 by now, include both interior modifications and complete designs from the beginning of a new building. Some of her projects include the American Airlines lounge at Narita, an 11-story hospital near Nagoya, various JR Tokai projects, private residences and department store public space as well as shops.