

A woman with short, wavy blonde hair and blue eyes is holding a bright red egg over her right eye. She is wearing a white t-shirt, a light-colored scarf, and a vibrant red jacket with a colorful floral pattern. She has large, ornate earrings and a bracelet on her left wrist.

a twist on the conventional

# The red egg

By Lynne Brandon ~ Photos by Sara Brennan-Harrell



◀ Shanghai Loft wing buffet in turquoise

of-a-kind antiques in 1997, but in 2000 industry reporters snapped to attention when *red egg* reproductions took on color. The concept was so original that no one knew what to call it.

Gregg had created a niche without a name.

Some called it Asian Cottage but Gregg prefers the name Shanghai Loft.

### Rocky Road is not just for ice cream

These days Gregg is smiling a lot over the success of her small company, but the road has often been rocky since she and Gary Thompson decided to take the entrepreneur plunge. A desire to travel and a love of Asian antiques drew the two toward Hong Kong for a test run. Gregg recalls the ferry ride to Macau and walking up and down a street full of antiques. “We took tons of photographs and asked a lot of questions,” relates Gregg. “We went back to California and asked ourselves if we could import Chinese antiques. We did some research and checked out the San Francisco boutiques and decided we could.”

The two maxed out their credit cards, scraped together their savings and went back to Asia – China, Japan, Korea and Malaysia. China was the final destination and where business got done. It was a true leap of faith, says Gregg. “We handed a guy \$20,000 and hoped

*A taxi in Manhattan comes to a stop and a window rolls down. A voice yells, “There’s *red egg*!” Carol Gregg smiled for she was, indeed, the owner of *red egg*, a collection of colorful, home accent furniture with an Asian flair. “They might not know my name, but they know *red egg*,” says Gregg, a walking billboard in her trademark kimonos.*

The self-described entrepreneur had a penchant for small business at an early age and grew up working in the family hardware store in southern Illinois. College took her to Chico, California for the clothing and textile design program at California State and early career footsteps landed her as an instructor in textile design, merchandising and later as a design trainer for manufacturing giants Milliken, Burlington and others. Gregg also trained design instructors in Japan and Australia.

*red egg* was not always known for its bold use of bright colors on historically dark, Asian furniture. The original product was unveiled as one-



▼ Indochine cane collection



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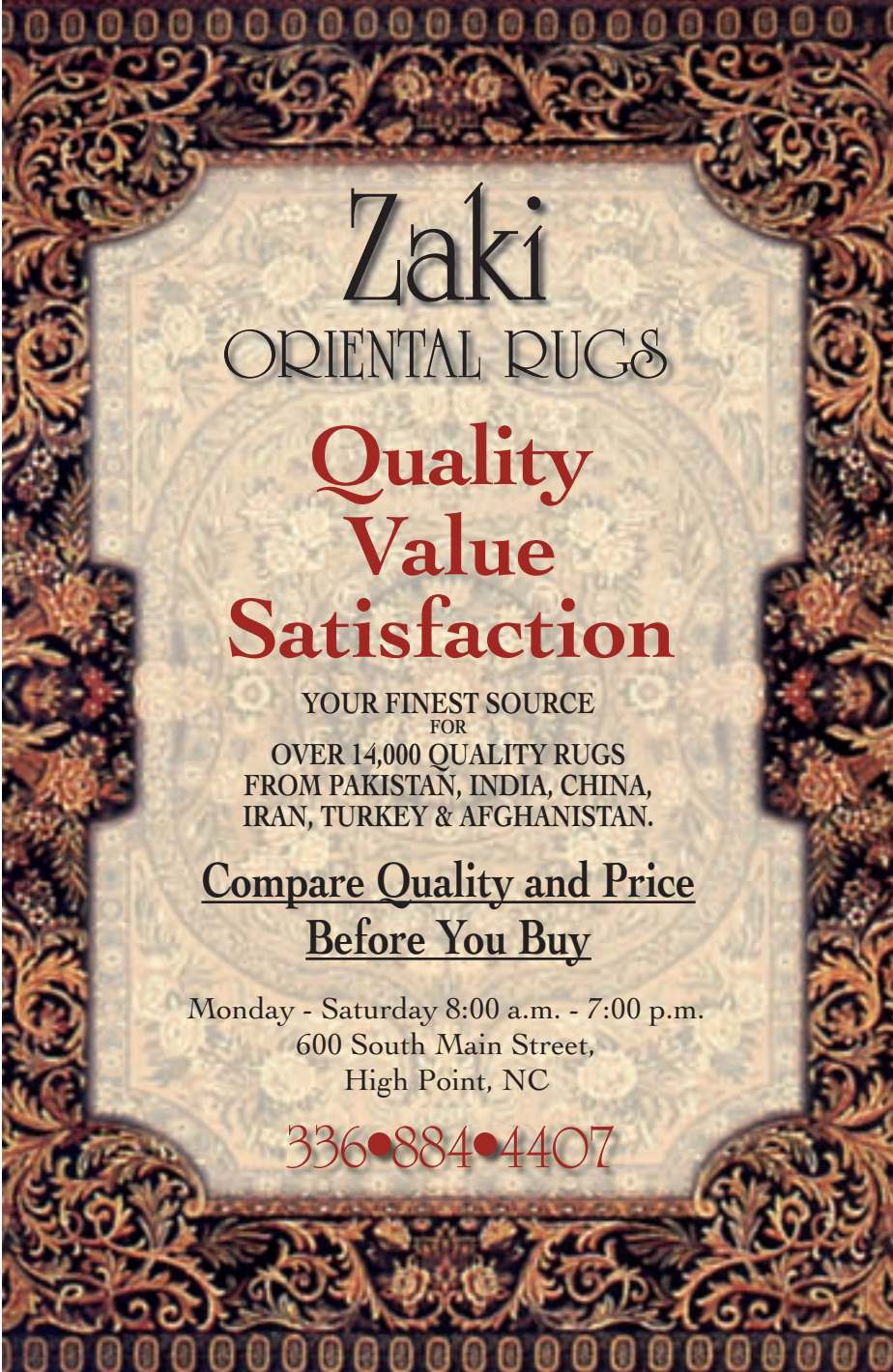
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we had a container of product when we got home.”

They did, and *red egg*’s first show in San Francisco sold out. The original pieces resonated with buyers, and success was on the horizon. Or so the partners thought.

In 1999, tragedy struck with the sudden death of Gary Thompson. Carol’s partner and soon-to-be husband was gone and her dreams with him. She wanted to quit, but a strong support system rallied around her and would not let her give up. Challenge promotes change, and the business took a different direction and turned toward reproductions.

Gregg remembers it now as a surreal time. “I was numb and poured myself into work. I was running on a different kind of energy.” It was during this time that color showed up in *red egg*’s products as Gregg started experimenting with variations of design.

The business continued to grow and Gregg took a giant step in 2004 and moved from California to High Point to be near the manufacturing and furniture design capital.



◀ Always in costume: *red egg* kimonos will be available in the fall of 2006

▼ Coral Shangai loft daybed

### It's all in the packaging

Gregg says that it was her customers who came up with the unique tag line, “always fresh.” Time after time people would look at the pieces and remark at how “fresh” they looked. *red egg* also takes its name from the Chinese and means fertility, growth and good luck.

Gregg believes firmly in making a visual statement and has done so from day one. She tells the story of when she was teaching design students in a community college. To make a point, she showed up wearing ripped jeans and an old tee shirt and tennis shoes. Gregg sat down among the students and listened to their comments as they wondered where the professor was. Gregg finally stood up and announced that she was the instructor. She then walked away to change into a business suit and returned, her point made in a way the students would not forget. To this day, Gregg dresses in costume to draw attention to her product.

### Fashion Forward Furniture

*red egg* evolved with Gregg's new life, and the concept of recreation instead of reproduction surfaced as the new face for the venture. The change produced pieces inspired from an original that was functional and scaled for the Western market. This change, along with the eye-popping color palettes, stopped people in their tracks. Turquoise, sunflower, coral and other colors got customers to climb on board.





A-line cupboard in ►  
canary green



Today, the wholesale business sells to Neiman Marcus, Macy's, Bloomingdales and boutique stores in New York, Florida, Washington and other urban areas. More experienced now, Gregg works only with a factory in Indonesia and in the Philippines, both owned by women who she says truly understand her niche. Gregg is also stepping into new territory with her first domestic product, custom-designed floor cloths.

The road has been treacherous at times, but Gregg has learned how to harness a life challenge into a new level of creativity. In reflecting back, Gregg says people believing in *red egg* made the difference.

Oh, and having someone believe in the woman behind *red egg* helps too. A new relationship is in the works and life is looking good. ■

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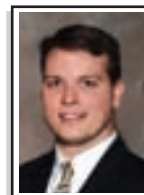
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