

# JAPAN'S

# JENNY

## *Takara's Trend Setting Fashion Doll*

Photos & Text by Kimberly Lindbergs

For almost twenty years, *Jenny* has been one of Japan's most popular fashion dolls. Takara has consistently been on the cutting edge of fashion doll production and their *Jenny* doll line has influenced just about every company making fashion dolls in Asia including Volks, Sekiguchi, Petworks and Jun Planning. Unfortunately, many American doll collectors are unfamiliar with the trend setting *Jenny* fashion doll line. Perhaps this article will help introduce *Jenny* and her friends to Japanese fashion doll enthusiasts.

Recently Takara has been exploring the American doll market and seems to be considering releasing *Jenny* dolls in the U.S. A few *Jenny* dolls were available for sale on Amazon.com last year and according to the company's U.S. website, Takara hopes to make *Jenny* dolls available to American consumers in the future. In the meantime, *Jenny* dolls are only available in Asia and from a few select retailers in the U.S.

*Jenny* began her life as a Japanese *Barbie* doll. Mattel asked Takara to design and produce a *Barbie* fashion doll for the Japanese market in 1982 when sales of American *Barbie* dolls were low there. The Takara toy company was well known among Japanese doll buyers for their popular *Licca* doll (1967) as well as their other Japanese fashion dolls such as *High Fashion Lina* (1968) and *Pico* (1974).

Japan has a fondness for "Kawaii culture," otherwise known as "cute culture." Because of their preference for all things cute, Japanese doll buyers often prefer to purchase and collect dolls with cute features such as big anime-style eyes and sweet smiles. The new *Takara Barbie* with her larger eyes, cute appearance and more contemporary fashions quickly became a huge success in Japan.

After a dispute over licensing with Mattel in 1985, Takara was forced to



stop producing the Japanese Barbie, but they retained the rights for their popular doll design. Takara changed their Barbie's name to Jenny and an entirely new doll was born. Soon after Jenny made her debut in Japan and her boxes proclaimed she was "Another Yourself." This gave the new Jenny dolls a personal connection to potential buyers who could use Jenny to reflect their fashion filled dreams. The new Jenny was not only a lovely new doll; she was also "Another Yourself."

In the last twenty years Takara has produced a dazzling and wide-ranging selection of Jenny dolls, including over 50 different Jenny friend and boyfriends. The Jenny friend dolls can be distinguished by their different eye prints and head molds. You can buy Jenny and friend dolls with just about every different hair color and style imaginable as well as various eye colors, body types and skin tones. Takara has even produced celebrity Jenny friend dolls based on popular Japanese celebrities such as the androgynous rock musician *Yoshiki*, the cute actress turned pop star *Hinano Yoshikawa* and the popular musical duo *Puffy*.

Takara has consistently been on the cutting edge of fashion doll design. Every year they produce a wide selection of Jenny dolls and fashions that are very modern and trendy. Their clothing designs for Jenny are often years ahead of their American counterparts such as Barbie and *Bratz*. Jenny's fresh and youthful style most often represents what's seen on the streets in Tokyo as well as London and New York. International designers as diverse as Pierre Cardin, Yves St. Laurent, Jill Stuart, Nice Claup and Fiorucci have been inspired to design special dolls and fashions for Takara's Jenny doll line. Many popular designers from Japan including



Jenny takes to the sky in these retro flight attendant ensembles. The red bag on the right says, "Air Jenny".



Jenny has stylish outfits, with great accessories, like this designer tote and her little dog.

Hiromichi Nakano, Hanae Mori, Pink House, Arakawa Shinichiro, Daisy Lovers and Victorian Maiden have also created special Jenny dolls and fashions as well.

Jenny collectors have a huge selection of dolls to choose from and it's hard to imagine them ever becoming bored with their hobby. Takara's regular line of *Fashion Collection Jenny* dolls consists of a variety of styles, but you can also purchase special limited Jenny & friend dolls including *Calendar Girls*, *Jenny Club* dolls, *Licca Club 67* dolls, *Totoco* dolls, *Licca Castle* dolls and *Excelina* dolls. The limited dolls are more expensive than the dolls in the regular Jenny line and harder to find as well. The *Kimono Jenny* line is also very popular, and every year Takara releases new dolls wearing beautiful and authentic new kimono designs that appeal to Japanese as well as international collectors.

Many collectors choose to collect only Jenny dolls and others prefer to collect popular Jenny friends such as *Flora*, *Marine*, *Ellie*, *Kisara*, *Sayaka* or *Shion*. Every year there are a variety of different designs produced for almost every Jenny friend, so collectors always have new dolls to look forward to.

Some collectors also enjoy collecting the hard to find boyfriend dolls such as *Jeff*, *Raph*, *Mike*, *Tom*, *Charles* and *Tomoki*. Jenny boyfriend dolls are available with as many different hairstyles, eye colors and skin tones as their female counterparts. Japanese male doll designs are often much more diverse and androgynous than



American male dolls and the Takara boyfriends are no exception. It's not uncommon to come across Jenny boyfriend dolls with earrings, very long hair and even fantasy hair colors such as purple and pink. Takara has disappointed Jenny enthusiasts with their lack of clothing designs for their male dolls but recently they've tried to remedy that by releasing some very nice boyfriend fashion sets. Hopefully they'll produce more in the future.

Besides Jenny dolls and fashions, Takara has also released furniture and accessories for their Jenny doll line including some play sets like the Fashion Station shops, which were based on cute fashion boutiques.

For awhile Jenny even had her own magazine simply called "Jenny" which contained news and information about the doll line as well as lots of patterns for Jenny collectors who like to sew. The magazine is no longer being published but Jenny dolls are often featured in Japanese doll magazines such as *Dolly Bird* and *Dolly Dolly*. Tezukuritown is also still producing their popular "My Favorite Doll Book Series" featuring many Jenny clothing patterns as well as information on new Jenny items and doll customizing tips.

As Japanese fashion dolls become more and more popular in the western world, Jenny's popularity will no doubt increase. She's one of the most affordable fashion dolls being produced in Japan, which makes her very desirable to doll enthusiasts who can't afford to collect the more expensive dolls being produced by companies like Volks and Petworks. The large selection of fashions and dolls in Takara's Jenny line also makes them a constant source of fun for easily bored collectors who enjoy variety as well as cutting edge doll design. ❖

## USEFUL LINKS

### Official Takara Sites:

<http://www.takaratoys.co.jp>  
<http://www.takara-usa.com>

### Jenny Doll Retailer Sites:

<http://www.rnndolls.com>  
<http://www.dolls-japan.com>  
<http://www.manika.com>  
<http://www.jenny-land.com>  
<http://www.dolls.jp>

### Jenny Doll Collector Sites:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/biscuitsclub/>  
<http://www.shersdolls.com>  
<http://www.barbigirl.com>  
<http://www.revolutionarygirl.com/>  
<http://www.animedolls.com>  
<http://www.bobagirl.com>  
<http://www.bonekaku.homestead.com/>  
[http://www.geocities.com/jennyfd\\_2000/](http://www.geocities.com/jennyfd_2000/)  
[http://www.geocities.com/skeekie\\_pop/](http://www.geocities.com/skeekie_pop/)  
<http://www.geocities.com/schulech/index.htm>  
<http://www.lenity.net/ningyo/>  
<http://www.chaoticworks.com/japan/>  
<http://www.jennys-room.com>  
<http://www.peppermintkisskiss.com>



