It was said that absolutely nothing went to waste in old Edo (1603-1868). Today too, Tokyoites are very conscious about separating their trash. Except the day after a storm in Tokyo when the disposal of a battered umbrella can be quite tricky. The ubiquitous transparent vinyl umbrellas made of steel and plastic seen everywhere in Tokyo are convenient and cheap, hence usually quite flimsy. And separating an umbrella into burnable and recyclable materials takes a little bit of time. However, there is an umbrella with a different construction and concept. At first glance, it looks similar to the familiar vinyl umbrella. But this one is completely made of reusable plastic. It’s the first of its kind, which considers its environmental impact. Safe, with no sharp or pinching parts, and clever—it holds open with the reverse tension of the struts—this umbrella makes rainy days fun. It was designed by Fumie Shibata.

The Forecast for Tomorrow

A Roppongi based designer predicts high humidity and a chance of showers across the space-time continuum. And she’s sultry, warm and sunny as well.

“It was a dream, like wanting to be an actress”

Shibata attended Musashino Art University in the 1980s and learned about product design. “I thought that through design we could make the world a better place,” she says. After graduation, she worked at a leading home appliance manufacturer. “Becoming a product designer was not really my goal,” she laughs. “It was just a dream, an impossible dream, like wanting to be an actress.” But in just a few years she was awarded the coveted Good Design Award. Shibata attended and learned about product design. “I thought that through design we could make the world a better place,” she says. After graduation, she worked at a leading home appliance manufacturer. “Becoming a product designer was not really my goal,” she laughs. “It was just a dream, an impossible dream, like wanting to become an actress.” But in just a few years she was awarded the coveted Good Design Award. Shibata attended and learned about product design. “I thought that through design we could make the world a better place,” she says. After graduation, she worked at a leading home appliance manufacturer. “Becoming a product designer was not really my goal,” she laughs. “It was just a dream, an impossible dream, like wanting to become an actress.” But in just a few years she was awarded the coveted Good Design Award.

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Shibata’s aim is to make standard items that go beyond space-time. “There are many general items that may be avant-garde when they are released, but they will not become standard or universal unless they make an impact that changes the era. With a general item’s wide acceptance, its avant-garde strength will change to universality,” Shibata speaks passionately yet moderately about her ideas, her designs and her products. But at the same time she wants them to be ours. Shibata, who speaks of herself as just another human being searching in her heart for universality, is lovely. Sultry, very like Tokyo—just like her designs.