

'Shinjuku' or broke

From 'kawaii' to avant-garde, Ximending's Shinjuku Plaza offers independently run stores for every style and budget

BY CATHERINE SHU
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For years, Shinjuku Plaza (西門新宿) in Ximending was a non-descript building whose drab outward appearance belied the shopping paradise inside. The mall is now in the midst of a facelift and sports a sleek new black facade and interior, but Shinjuku Plaza's ethos has stayed the same — its five stories are filled with tiny, distinctive shops, many of which are lovingly run by independent designers and stylists. Shinjuku Plaza's namesake is a district in Tokyo that is known for its shopping and nightlife, and many of its stores pay tribute to Japanese youth culture, with imported clothing and accessories and collectibles like Blythe dolls. The plaza is especially popular with shoppers ranging from their teens to 30s, and much of the merchandise is priced with a younger person's budget in mind.

Shinjuku Plaza (西門新宿)

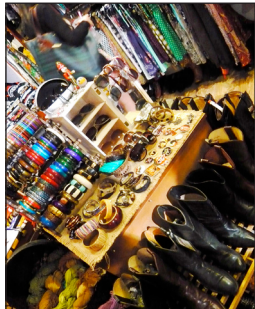
Address: 72-1, Xining 5 Rd, Taipei City (臺北市西寧南路72-1號)
Hours: Most stores close at 10pm and opening hours vary widely. Since many of Shinjuku Plaza's shops have tiny staffs, it's a good idea to give stores a call and make sure they are open before heading out

I Love SF (舊金衫)

I Love SF's warm hardwood floors and shelves make an impeccable background for its selection of vintage clothing, leather jackets, boots and purses. As the name implies (舊金衫, which means "old gold clothing," is a play on the Chinese for San Francisco), I Love SF focuses on American styles, with buyers regularly sending vintage dresses, college T-shirts, jackets and shoes back from the US. Shoppers who want something a bit more modern can buy dresses made from vintage fabric; the store's ruched elastic tops are wearable as a strapless sundress or a flowing skirt. Much of I Love SF's apparel is unisex, including the large selection of vintage leather jackets in earthy tones, which have the warm patina and soft texture that leather only acquires with use.

Prices are very reasonable, especially if you've actually gone vintage shopping in San Francisco and been hit with sticker shock: a T-shirt will set you back NT\$380 to NT\$880, most dresses range from NT\$980 to NT\$1,780, and most leather jackets are priced from NT\$3,000 to NT\$4,000. Vintage shoes range from NT\$980 for a pair of flats with leather detailing to NT\$2,580 for a pair of brown leather buckled ankle boots. Hours are from 2pm to 10pm; credit cards are accepted.

Location: No. 10, 3F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2388-5333



I Love SF has an impressive selection of vintage leather goods.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

SM

For lovers of Japanese style who want something a little bit less *kawaii*, SM, which is located across the way from Blink!, offers jeans, sundresses and racks filled with women's and men's tops in bold colors and graphic prints from Japan and Hong Kong, as well as shop owner Ruby Su's (蘇俞駿) own designs. Shoppers who want their jeans hemmed or their shirts taken in a bit don't have to hunt for a tailor: Su does free alterations on clothing bought from his shop, most of which can be completed while you wait. SM's clothing collection ranges in price from NT\$700 to NT\$2,000; flattering flared jeans with stitch detailing are about NT\$2,000, while graceful, drape-y women's tops are NT\$1,300 to NT\$1,500. Store hours are from 3:30pm to 10pm; credit cards are accepted.



Ruby Su tidies up a rack of bright blouses and dresses.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 2, 5F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2370-4166

EVEN Select Shop

EVEN's spare white shelves showcase a well-edited selection of Japanese designer shoes like pieces of sculpture in a gallery. The store is the exclusive Taiwan dealer of shoes from Unibilical and Belly Button, designers with an avant-garde bent. Multi-colored suede loafers from Unibilical are NT\$6,800 per pair, while hiking boots in bright, primary solids are NT\$10,750 for men's sizes and NT\$10,380 for women's. Store hours are from 1:30pm to 10pm; credit cards are accepted.



Japanese designer shoes are displayed like objets d'art at EVEN.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 26, 3F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2375-7105

'0416

This cozy shop is one of several in Shinjuku run by designers to showcase their work. '0416 features T-shirts and stationary with illustrations by graphic designer 0416 (小宏), whose clients have included Shiseido, Yahoo, Nissan and Campo Life Art Carnival (CAMPO生活藝術狂歡節).

The art in the Shinjuku Plaza store is more whimsical than 0416's corporate work. Most illustrations are in marker on mostly white backgrounds; characters include a young girl in a yellow rain slicker rejoicing underneath a rainbow and a man in tighty-whities playing at being Superman with a logo tee and flowered cape. Unisex T-shirts come in a range of sizes and cost from NT\$680 to NT\$980. Stationary is also available: white spiral-bound notebooks are NT\$250 each. Hours are from 2pm to 10pm; credit cards are accepted.



'0416 sells stationary and T-shirts featuring the artwork of (guest who) artist 0416.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 16, 2F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2389-6170

Summertime (夏天來了)

Fans of Blythe, the big-headed doll with a cult following in Asia (and, indeed, all over the world) will feel their own heads explode with excitement when they head into Summertime. The small corner store is a treasure box stuffed with handmade doll dresses and shoes, accessories, customizing supplies, furniture and other assorted Blythe paraphernalia. Shop owner Li Wen-liang (李文亮), who is known to other Blythe fans as Summertime (夏天), and his friend had talked about opening a shop together since high school but had no idea what they would sell. Li finally got his inspiration when he saw a Blythe window display in a department store and fell in love with her wide-eyed visage. After doing some research and finding that there was indeed a niche for a store in the Taiwanese Blythe market, Li set up shop in Shinjuku Plaza.

Blythe the clothes and shoes, which are mostly handmade by local designers, range from NT\$180 to NT\$400. Qipaos and kimonos made from lush brocades are NT\$750 to NT\$820. Blythe doll adoption fees range from NT\$2,000 to NT\$3,000 (with the exception of limited edition and rarer dolls, which are more expensive). Summertime also has a selection of other *kawaii* things made by local designers, including handcrafted teddy bears (NT\$550) and bear-shaped wallets (NT\$350) and keychains in the shape of soft-serve ice cream cones (NT\$50). Sassy stickers by Taipei Bremen (NT\$40 for an individual decal) will satisfy those who like their cute tempered with a bit of evil. Hours are from 3pm to 9:30pm on weekdays and 2pm to 9:30pm on weekends and holidays; cash only.



Summertime offers clothes for Blythes and other well-dressed dolls.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 1, 5F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2389-7796

Tiao Fang Tattoos (彫方刺青)

Shinjuku Plaza is home to several tattoo parlors, including Tiao Fang Tattoos. Owner Fang Chun-sheng (方淳生) has worked as a tattoo artist in Ximending for 10 years and will custom design a tattoo for you; otherwise, there are binders filled with different designs for inspiration. Fang says his younger customers tend to prefer American or European styles, while older tattoo enthusiasts go for more traditional Asian designs. Tattooing time and cost depend on the size and complexity of your design; prices start from NT\$1,000 for a very basic tattoo. Hours are 1pm to 10pm; credit cards are accepted.



The exterior of Tiao Fang Tattoos showcases the parlor's work.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 45, 4F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2370-4650

Blink! (金光閃閃大小姐洋行)

Blink! is just one example of the many stores in Shinjuku Plaza that pay homage to Japanese fashion subcultures. In this case the shop is inspired by the *kawaii* styles of Takeshita Street in Harajuku and advocates the fashion philosophy of remixing (混搭), which encourages people to act as their own stylists.

Fans of the Japanese magazine *Vivi*, whose hyper-feminine aesthetic emphasizes gamine-like layered looks, will feel perfectly at home at Blink! — the shop is painted in several hues of pink, and vintage My Little Pony toys figure prominently in the decor. Cute-as-a-button shop owner Olive Wang (王心美) works with buyers in Japan who send back a colorful selection of T-shirt dresses with oversized stripes, polka-dotted pink blouses, madras drop-waist jumpers, purses with cartoon characters or giant metallic bows, and fanciful shoes (most apparel is NT\$2,000 or less). A colorful selection of tights and socks (NT\$390 for hosiery from Japan; patterned tights by American brand Celeste Stein are NT\$780) are available to complete your look. Blink! is open from 3pm to 9pm; credit cards are accepted.



Blink! is truly pretty in pink.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 6, 5F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2389-0308

Right On (小古著衣部)

Shinjuku Plaza offers several stores dedicated to men's clothing for guys who don't feel like sharing their shopping spotlight with the ladies. Right On features a large selection of jeans in a variety of cuts and washes, most of which are imported from South Korea, as well as T-shirts and polo shirts. The casual, hip style of the clothing appeals to a younger crew; shop owner Ryan Lin (林士程) says most of his customers are between the ages of 15 to 30. Jeans are priced upwards from NT\$1,380, winter jackets range from NT\$1,000 to NT\$4,000, and shirts are NT\$1,000 and less. Shop hours are from 2pm to 10pm; credit cards are accepted.



Right On offers jeans and shirts for guys with a casual but hip sense of style.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 16, 5F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2389-8701

Bella Nails (Bella日式藝術指甲)

If you want to leave Shinjuku Plaza with some brand-new body art but want something a little less permanent than a tattoo, check out Bella Nails. Nail artist and owner Bella Chiang, who studied nail art in Taiwan, Japan and the US, can use acrylic powder in a rainbow of colors, rhinestones, decals, small charms and plain ol' nail varnish to create three-dimensional flowers, bows, lace patterns and cartoon characters on your digits. Manicures start from NT\$300 and can go upwards of NT\$2,000 depending on the complexity of your design and the materials used; Bella says designs usually average around NT\$1,500. Pedicures and foot treatments are also available for NT\$700 and up. Hours are from 1pm to 10pm and credit cards are okay with a minimum purchase of NT\$1,000. Make sure to call in advance for an appointment.



Bling up your hands with nail art at Bella Nails.
PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Location: No. 33B, 5F, Shinjuku Plaza
Telephone: (02) 2388-0240