



Still the King

Unusual flavors like beef and sesame oil chicken are a source of pride at Snow King, which has been serving fresh homemade ice cream in Ximending since 1947

BY **DAVID CHEN**
STAFF REPORTER

Sesame oil chicken, beef, pig knuckle — not exactly the flavors to expect at an ice cream shop, let alone one that's been in business since 1947.

Yet these are a few of the long-standing choices on the menu at Snow King (雪王), located near Zhongshan Hall (中山堂) in Ximending (西門町). The shop serves more than 70 flavors of fresh homemade ice cream (priced between NT\$60 and NT\$120 per scoop), which range from the classic to the bizarre.

At Snow King you get “the tastes that Taiwanese know,” says 28-year-old Kao Ching-feng (高慶豐), who recently took over as the third-generation owner of the shop. “Local flavors” and “old-fashioned style” keep customers and tourists coming for repeat visits, he says.

The regulars come for the house specialties, red bean and watermelon, while the tourists, mainly from Japan and Hong Kong, often go for the exotic flavors, according to Kao. He says the Japanese prefer lychee and peach; Hong Kongers like curry and wasabi.

The unusual flavors are a source of pride for Snow King. All of the shop's recipes, now a family secret, were conceived by Kao's grandfather, Kao Jih-hsing (高日星), who founded the business on savings from selling ice cream on the streets of Taipei.

“He liked to challenge himself,” says Kao Ching-feng of his grandfather, who would spend years tweaking a flavor to his satisfaction. One of the elder Kao's more notable challenges: accommodating his older, diabetic customers. He came up with a selection of non-sugared, savory ice creams, which include tofu (NT\$70) and *rousong* (dried meat flakes, 肉鬆), which remains a popular choice among customers, says Kao Ching-feng.

The elder Kao, 82, retired from running the shop 10 years ago and only visits occasionally, but his influence remains strong.

Kao Ching-feng and his family continue to make all of Snow King's ice cream with fresh, local produce. The wasabi is grown on Alishan (阿里山), the kaoliang liquor comes from Kinmen (金門), and savory flavors like the sesame oil chicken are cooked on the spot. Korean ginseng is the one exception to the shop's exclusively Taiwanese ingredients.

In contrast to its daring menu, the store's appearance is modest, with its open storefront marked only by a large freezer with the Chinese characters for “Snow King” (雪王) painted on the front. The shop looks slightly unkempt under the glare of fluorescent lighting, but it's clean and quiet, save for the television at low volume in the back kitchen, the occasional clang of pots and pans, and the hum of a mixing machine.

The elder Kao also left his mark in the shop's interior, which has changed little from 27 years ago, when they moved from their original location on Hankou Street (漢口街). Customers sit at sturdy, solid wood countertops and matching stools, which the elder Kao had made to order. The simple furniture takes customers back to the old days, says Kao Ching-feng.

One other thing hasn't changed: making the ice cream remains a labor-intensive job. Kao Ching-feng says that particularly time-consuming flavors are Buddha's head fruit, which has to be peeled bit by bit, and pig knuckle, which requires lengthy cooking times.

With the long hours and never-ending schedule — Snow King is open 365 days a year — Kao Ching-feng admits that running the shop gives him less freedom than his previous job in insurance, and cuts into his favorite past times, mountaineering and biking.

But he thinks about his grandfather. “[He] was very steadfast ... he told me, ‘you must work hard to make more money,’” he said. “He gave me my values.”



SNOW KING: A QUICK REVIEW

On my first visit to Snow King, I had the beer ice cream (NT\$100). It tasted strange and familiar all at once: there was the sour, malty flavor of its main ingredient, Taiwan Beer, but delivered in cold creamy morsels. The aftertaste of the beer grew stronger with each bite. Halfway through, I started to feel queasy (was it the alcohol or the taste?) and switched to a scoop of watermelon (NT\$70), which was much more refreshing, and tasted, well, more like ice cream.

On a second visit the sesame oil chicken ice cream (NT\$100) didn't win me over despite its homemade quality, but I was impressed with how it tasted like the real dish. The Taiwanese basil ice cream (NT\$90) was surprisingly good: its sharp, pungent taste blends nicely with the richness of the ice cream.

If you're interested in trying many flavors at once, bring a group of friends. Each flavor of ice cream is sold only by the scoop. However, while it's fairly common to see groups order as many strange items as they can and share them, shop proprietor Kao Ching-feng says that, ideally, each ice cream should be savored individually for its pure taste.

ADDRESS: 65, Wuchang St Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市武昌街一段65號)

TELEPHONE: (02) 2331-8415

OPENING HOURS: Daily from noon to 10pm

PRICES: NT\$60 to NT\$120 per scoop

HOW TO GET THERE: Snow King is near the corner of Wuchang Street (武昌街) and Yanping South Road (延平南路). If traveling by MRT, get off at Ximen MRT Station (西門捷運站), Exit 5, walk north, and turn right on Wuchang Street. The shop is close to a Family Mart convenience store

Above: Basil is one of the many unusual flavors of ice cream available at Snow King.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN

Top left: Snow King's homemade ice cream comes in 70 different flavors, from mango and lychee to beef and sesame chicken.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN

Top right: Proprietor Kao Ching-feng, whose grandfather founded Snow King in 1947.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN

Center left: A scoop of Snow King's beer-flavored ice cream.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN

Center right: Snow King's open storefront is marked by a large freezer bearing the characters for “Snow King.”

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