

A glass cabinet at Fifty Dollars filled with Tatung Baby coin banks, a familiar sight for anyone who grew up in Taiwan during the 1970s. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



A toy bus on display outside Fifty Dollars. PHOTO: RON BROWNLOW, TAIPEI TIMES



Fifty Dollars' windup toys include animals, cars, Ferris wheels and robots. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



**FIFTY DOLLARS (伍拾錢懷舊老舖)**

**ADDRESS:** 13-1, Jianshanpu Rd, Yingge, Taipei County (台北縣鶯歌鎮尖山埔路13號). The store is located on Yingge Old Street (鶯歌老街), a pedestrian thoroughfare  
**TELEPHONE:** 0912-507-044  
**OPEN:** Monday to Friday 10am to 6pm; Saturday and Sunday 9am to 7pm  
**ON THE NET:** www.wretch.cc/blog/fiftytw  
**DETAILS:** Credit cards not accepted



# All wound up

*Yingge's Fifty Dollars is a time machine back to retro Taiwan and a feast for vintage toy collectors*

BY CATHERINE SHU  
STAFF REPORTER

**W**hen Hsieh Chen-chi (謝鎮吉), fresh from his stint in the military, needed to figure out what to do with the rest of his life, he followed another army — an army of tin robots. Hsieh's interest in vintage windup toys took off when he stumbled upon photographs of the figures on the Internet while doing research for art school, where he studied graphic design. "I thought they looked very interesting and funny," says Hsieh. "A lot of them have this really silly expression on their faces."

As his collection grew to more than 100 pieces, Hsieh started to sell his spare toys on auction site Ruten (www.ruten.com.tw). After nine months as an art editor for a television station, the 26-year-old opened Fifty Dollars (伍拾錢懷舊老舖) in January on Yingge Old Street (鶯歌老街), close to his childhood home and near a ceramics factory run by his family.

Stepping into Fifty Dollars — Hsieh says the name came to him randomly — is like taking a time machine back to the Taiwan of 30 to 50 years ago. Old newsstand signs and advertisements line the walls of the store; rotary telephones, vintage typewriters and record covers stand among windup toys and classic mint-green Tatung electric fans. The shop's collection of vintage soft drink bottles — many with decades-old soda still inside — is particularly impressive. Hsieh says he seeks out many of his wares in Taichung flea markets because the pickings are becoming increasingly slim in Taipei as more and more people become attuned to the charm of vintage items.

"It's hard to describe what I like about them. I just feel that vintage design has more flavor. Even the signs outside lottery stands were much nicer. Now they are just generic looking," says Hsieh. "Design back then was more unique. It was simple and maybe a little naive, but it was memorable."

Fifty Dollars also offers a taste of the past — literally. Plastic tubs are filled to the brim with old-fashioned candies and snacks. "I asked my parents what they remembered from their childhood and I also included some of the things I remember from when I was a little boy," says Hsieh. Bestselling treats include peppermint taffy and chewy candy made to look like instant noodles.

Customers range from small children shopping with their parents to people in their 40s and 50s who are surprised to see remnants of their youth recaptured in the middle of Yingge Old Street, which is better known for peddling ceramic wares to tourists.

"They're really excited when they see what we have here, like the candy they ate when they were little or toys they had," says Hsieh. He plays classic pop tunes from singers such as Yao Su-rong (姚蘇蓉) and Ching Shan (青山) through loudspeakers in front of his shop. "That draws a lot of older people in. Sometimes they'll even stop in front of the store and start singing along."

Hsieh's favorite vintage toys from his personal collection keep him company in a glass case behind the cash register. These include an 18cm-tall windup bear with a tin body, pink plastic head and flash camera, and a row of Tatung Baby (大同寶寶, the electronic company's wide-eyed mascot) coin banks from the 1970s.

Some of the toys Hsieh sells are secondhand; the rest are ordered from factories that specialize in recreating vintage-style toys for collectors. Most of the original toys were made between the 1950s and 1970s. Some are windup while others are battery-operated, such as a robot with a head that spins around while cannons emerge from a compartment in its chest. Although he sees an equal number of male and female customers, Hsieh notices a difference in their shopping habits.

"Women like pieces that are more like sculpture, like the windup Ferris wheels and pink or red animals. Guys are more into ships and the robots. They love the big robots," he says.

Prices range from NT\$80 for a small windup frog to NT\$2,200 for a vintage turquoise-blue robot that lights up and makes firecracker noises. "Deadstock," or never sold, vintage plastic fashion dolls from the 1950s and 1960s are just NT\$50 each. Lovers of vintage graphics will get a kick out of playing cards (NT\$50), notebooks (NT\$90) or postcards (NT\$20), all of which are printed with advertisements or maps from 1960s and 1970s Taiwan.

Hsieh Chen-chi asked his parents for recommendations when deciding which old-fashioned candies to carry in his store. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



Fifty Dollars' windup tin toys are either genuine vintage items or made by factories that specialize in reproductions for collectors. Most are priced at less than NT\$2,000. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES