

TRAVEL

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Living history

Taiwan Storyland rewinds history with an elaborately detailed recreation of a 1960s neighborhood

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Located across the street from Taipei Train Station, KMall is an unremarkable shopping center. But underneath the usual assortment of gadget stores, boutiques and restaurants lies a time portal that takes visitors back 40 years in Taiwan's history. A neighborhood has been recreated block-by-block in the mall's 1,500-ping basement, right down to potholes in the roads and sparrows roosting on an electric wire. In Taiwan Storyland (台灣故事館), it is perpetually dusk on an evening in 1965.

Founded in November 2005 by Franky Wu (吳傳治), an entrepreneur and memorabilia collector, Taiwan Storyland bills itself as a "historical experience," where visitors can get a more intimate feel for the past than they would in a traditional museum. Taiwan Storyland is meant to represent an imaginary neighborhood located in what is now Taipei's Zhongzheng District (中正區). Streets are lined with shop windows, all filled with genuine articles gathered by Wu over the course of 20 years. A corner store sells old-fashioned candy and toys, restaurants serve noodles and shaved ice, and a movie theater screens classic films twice a day.

"If you want to see art, you go to the National Palace Museum," says deputy general manager Alford Tseng (曾千育). "But if you want to see how everyday people lived, you come here." Tseng estimates that Taiwan Storyland receives an average of 25,000 visitors per month and that 75 percent of guests are Taiwanese, with the remainder mostly from Hong Kong, Macau and Japan.

"Visitors from Hong Kong are curious because it seems very foreign to them. On the other hand, Japanese guests



Taiwan Storyland recreates a 1960s Taipei neighborhood down to the smallest detail.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

think it's different and familiar at the same time," says Tseng, referring to the Japanese occupation of Taiwan. The colonial period's influence on Taiwanese architecture is evident in many of the buildings recreated in Taiwan Storyland.

Founder Wu sold Taiwan Storyland to its current managers in 2007 (he still owns many of the items inside), but continues to operate Banana New Paradise (香蕉新樂園), a theme restaurant

in Taichung that also pays homage to 1960s Taiwan in exacting detail.

Wu's passion for vintage memorabilia started when he was a schoolboy. His family could not afford reference books for his high school art classes, so he visited a secondhand bookstore.

"While I was flipping through old books and periodicals, I kept finding things that people had left between the pages. There were old advertisements,

photos, programs. I became very curious about those things," says Wu.

As an adult, Wu visited buildings that were about to be demolished in his native Taichung and purchased their contents. Eventually, he began to focus on collecting items from the 1960s, when he was a small child.

Wu set Taiwan Storyland in 1965 because the year is not only his birth year, but also, from his perspective, a

pivotal point in Taiwan's social history.

"I grew up in a village in Taichung where Taiwanese people, Hakka people, Shanghaiese people and other people from China all lived together. There wasn't a sense of separation or even a political divide among us. We spoke different dialects, but we had no problem communicating," says Wu. "At that time, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government's goal was to defeat the Communist Party, but as villagers, our goal was to get along."

Taiwan Storyland is fueled by nostalgia, but its view of history isn't completely rose tinted. A large wooden sign near the classroom admonishes students to speak Mandarin instead of Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese) or Hakka (說國語不要說方言), a government policy at the time. Other KMT propaganda and slogans are pasted or painted onto walls, fences and even barrels in front of the puppet theater.

"When younger people see those signs, I think their reaction is 'wow, were things really that over the top?'" says Wu. "They've studied Taiwanese history in their classes, but seeing those signs up close really gives them a sense of what our lives were like."

Taiwan Storyland

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For information about Franky Wu's Taichung restaurant Banana New Paradise, visit www.vernaldeu.com.tw

Step Back in Time



Taiwan Storyland's exuberantly campy outdoor entrance features a cornucopia of sculptures that represent fruits vital to Taiwan's economy in the 1960s.



The area around Taiwan Storyland's ticket counter is modeled after a railroad station, with benches underneath a banyan tree. Immediately to the right of the gates leading into the main space is an exhibition hall; 1960s children's bicycles are currently on display. The space is lined with old glass bottles, an homage to Taiwanese singer Julie Su's (蘇芮) classic 1983 song *Any Empty Wine Bottles for Sale?* (酒干倘賣無) about a man who collected glass bottles for a living.



A puppet theater under the shade of a banyan tree acts as a gathering place for families in the evening. Words urging people to remember China even as they enjoyed themselves (娛樂不忘救國) are painted on the barrels in front of the stage.



Black Cat Bar (黑貓酒吧) is a watering hole geared toward US military personnel. "Black cat" is vintage slang for a beautiful woman. Across the way is Le-Wu-Tai movie theater (樂舞台大戲院). A cart outside the theater advertises ice cream with a hand-painted Mickey Mouse. A restaurant next to the movie theater serves Taiwanese food. Parked nearby is a three-wheeled Mazda K360, which was used for deliveries. Taiwan Storyland has several vehicles on display, including a Mitsubishi Colt 1000 sports car parked outside the First Department Store (第一百貨), the exhibition's gift shop. The neighborhood's police station and adjacent department of health and sanitation are across the street.



The house of the *lizhang* (里長), or borough warden, is across the way from Vernal Dew Grocery (春露商店). The well-appointed front room shows how a prosperous family of the era lived, while a bell hanging outside the door was used to summon residents for important announcements.



A poster-lined alleyway leads to Formosa Ice House (寶島冰果室). A few steps away are shop windows filled with handmade shoes and children's clothing from Tainan Spinning Company (台南紡織). The right-hand bottom corner of the shoe window features canvas sneakers made by China Strong (中國強). The factory manufactured shoes for American brands, including Converse. When the KMT government prohibited the sale of Converse All-Stars in Taiwan because the trademark too closely resembled the Chinese Communist Party's emblem, China Strong created its own version of the brand. A nearby cart served as a moving billboard and is pasted with fliers and posters.



Tin signs with the Chinese characters for liquor, rice and cigarettes hang in front of Vernal Dew Grocery (春露商店), where visitors can purchase candy and toys. "These items were controlled by the government, so these signs let people know this store was authorized to carry these things," says tour guide Abby Yan (顏怡珊).



The street leading away from the puppet theater is home to several establishments, including a clothing store, teashop, bakery and classroom. In the window of the Western-style pharmacy, visitors can spot green packets displaying pictures of a shrimp and turtle. In Hoklo, "shrimp turtle" (蝦龜) is a homophone for "asthma." "The literacy rate was lower in those days, so the pictogram helped people find the medicine they needed," says Yan. Near the pharmacy is a large cart selling pickles, which families bought in the morning to flavor their breakfasts of rice porridge.



A large poster for health product Green Oil (綠油精) appears unremarkable to present-day viewers, but caused a stir in the 1960s thanks to the model's bare shoulders. Posters outside the department of health and sanitation are less sultry — they illustrate the health effects of poor sanitation in extremely graphic detail. Just down the way lies a glimpse into the backyard of a Japanese-style home. Underwear made from flour sacks by a thrifty housewife is hung out to dry on a clothesline.



Businesses on the last street before the exit include a traditional Chinese pharmacy, where the odor of dried herbs wafts out from the large wooden cabinet; a dentist's office with an imposingly large drill; a photography studio (cameras for rent are displayed in its window); and a beauty salon.