



VVG SOMETHING (好樣本事)

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## A feast of books

The VVG team is known for its restaurants in the East District, but it hopes its new bookstore will feed the mind, too

BY CATHERINE SHU  
 STAFF REPORTER



VVG Something sells books from around the world and encourages customers to relax with a cup of coffee in a comfy atmosphere filled with vintage furniture.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAO, VVG SOMETHING

**A**mong Taipei's foodies, the initials VVG already connote good eats in lovingly decorated restaurants, from the Old World ambiance of VVG Table (好樣餐桌) to the rococo fantasy land of VVG BonBon (好樣棒棒).

But VVG's (好樣) newly opened bookstore, VVG Something (好樣本事), hopes to nourish the mind as well as the body.

"I love reading and I thought, why not create a place where customers feel welcome to sit down, relax and enjoy themselves? We're not a regular bookstore. Customers can flip through books at their own pace and order a drink from [VVG Bistro (好樣餐廳)] across the street," says Grace Wang (汪麗琴), one of VVG's partners.

When you peek between its bright red sliding doors, VVG Something hardly resembles an ordinary bookstore. In lieu of shelves, vintage furniture, including a file cabinet from a Japanese middle school and shelves made with recycled wood from England, display volumes like objets d'art. A long wooden table with books carefully arranged in tidy rows on top takes up most of the 30-ping (99m<sup>2</sup>) space. But the atmosphere is far from rarefied. Comfy armchairs and well-lit nooks invite visitors to stay a little while.

Many members of the VVG group were interior or graphic designers before becoming restaurateurs and VVG Something reflects the same eclectic aesthetic as their restaurants and VVG BB&B, the group's bed-and-breakfast. Curiosities like shovel handles are precisely arranged underneath a vintage spotlight. The store's concrete walls were knocked down to expose the brick underneath. Oak floorboards are sanded, not varnished, and knotholes are left exposed.

"All the [VVG partners] have their own aesthetic and our businesses each have their own style. But I think this bookstore represents what is truest to our own tastes. All our shareholders contributed different ideas," says Mao (毛家駿), art director of the VVG group and manager of VVG Something.

VVG Something's books focus mainly on lifestyle, design, art and (of course) food and are hand-selected by VVG buyers, who travel abroad once every two to three months. Every month, the store will highlight a different theme; the current theme is Japanese books on topics ranging from handmade stationery to the patisseries of Paris. To accompany the books, VVG Something's team brought back everyday objects from Japan, including hand-painted glassware, wooden figures and even Toto brand toilet paper in whimsical paper wrapping.

Mao says VVG's buying team seeks volumes with appealing photos, distinct layout and simple prose (an important point because many of VVG's books are in languages other than Chinese). They also look for periodicals by independent publishers, such as *Billet Magazine*, a Japanese lifestyle quarterly with a cult following.

*A Spasso per l'Italia*, a book about Italian cuisine, also represents what VVG Something looks for. "The photography in here wouldn't count as technical masterpieces, but it has its own charm," Mao says, flipping to simple, naturally-lit close-ups of pasta dishes on vintage dishware. Another of his favorite books highlights graphic design on everyday items from the Czech Republic, including humble plastic shopping bags.

"We'd really like to go on a buying trip there. Books from countries like the Czech Republic are rare in Taiwan, but we think readers here would really like them," says Mao.

The store's English name signifies the diversity of the items in the store. VVG Something also carries J.C. Spec wooden eyeglass frames, 1:12 scale reproductions of modernist chairs by reac Japan and glass apple bakers from Vermont. The store recently hosted a talk by Taiwanese designer Wu Tunglung (吳東龍) on this year's Tokyo Designers Week, and Mao foresees a roster of more speeches, roundtable discussions and food tastings.

VVG Something's Chinese name (好樣本事) is also a play on words. Separately, *ben* (本) and *shi* (事) mean "book" and "happening," respectively. Together, they form the word for "source material."

"It means the beginning of a story," says Mao. "We want our books and the events we host here to be a source of inspiration, and for our customers to see this space as a launching point for new ideas."



## [ THE WEEKENDER ] Murder in nine acts

'Time Hotel,' Taipei Crossover Dance Company's latest production, deserves an encore performance

BY DIANE BAKER  
 STAFF REPORTER

**T**aipei Crossover Dance Company (台北越界舞團) delivered as close to a "film noir" piece as a dance company can with *Time Hotel* (越界15—時光旅社) this weekend.

The Taipei National University of the Arts Dance Theater was sold out Friday night as the company opened its 15th anniversary program, and the audience was not disappointed. While there was more theater than dance in *Time Hotel*, it was beautifully staged and fascinating to watch. Director Michael Li (黎煥雄) created a moody nine-scene murder mystery, peopled by a voyeur, an amnesiac, a mysterious woman, a detective, the hotel manager and three suspects.

The bulk of the piece took place in a cavernous hotel lobby, a vast expanse suggested very simply by Liu Dar-lum (劉達倫) through the use of huge squared columns that were raised and lowered as needed, a two-part staircase, an elaborate wooden doorway, a single armchair and a bench. The rest of the set was created with a scrim and beautiful lighting by Kao Yi-hua (高一華). Liu and Kao made one of the most effective sets I have seen for dance or theater in some time.

It was wonderful to see company founders Cheng Shu-gi (鄭淑姬), Wu Su-chun (吳素君) and Yeh Tai-chu (葉台竹) on stage, though Yeh, as the detective, had little more to do than skulk. Cheng and Wu showed they can still seduce an audience, whether, as in Cheng's case, it was simply running her fingers through her hair, looking as beautiful as a mermaid in her coral and sea-blue silk jacket, or Wu vamping as the mystery woman, especially in a duet with Zhang Xiao-xiong (張曉雄).

Company director Ho Hsiao-mei (何曉玫) saved the best choreography for the four younger dancers, Wu Chien-wei (吳建緯), Chu Huang-yi (朱晃毅), Yang Hsiao-hsuan (楊孝萱) and Chan Shu-han (詹舒涵), especially the pas de quatre toward the end of the show. It was great to see the long-legged Yang again after her time in Australia; she's a gorgeous dancer.

I found myself hoping that the younger quartet remain as committed to performing when they are the age of their older colleagues and, perhaps more importantly, they have a platform to express that creativity. I also hope the company is able to restage the piece someday, even if they have to recast some of the parts — it's too good to fade into oblivion.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAIPEI CROSSOVER DANCE COMPANY

### MEN IN TUTUS

The atmosphere at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall on Saturday afternoon was as light-hearted and sunny as the weather as Les Ballets Grandiva reached the halfway point of their Taipei debut run. The vast theater was three-quarters full, a testament to the power of artistic director Brian Norris' public relations blitz last month, with an audience that ranged from elementary-age children to grandparents.

Norris gave a brief introduction before each of the five pieces on the program, though without a translator, one had to question just how much was understood by the bulk of the audience. But there was no language problem once the dancing started.

The show opened with the troupe's version of Jules Perrot's 1845 *Pas de Quatre*, which gave the "ballerinas" ample opportunity to upstage one another. Victor Trevino's staging of George Balanchine's *Tarantella* tries to instill some comedy, but Balanchine's choreography is too fast to really allow for much.

Bothale Dikobe was outstanding as Liberty Bell in Robert La Fosse's restaging of Balanchine's *Stars and Stripes Forever Pas de Deux*, crisply nailing the point work and high kicks of the piece. He is an amazing dancer I hope to see again — in any role.

The finale was the second act of *Swan Lake*, with a very princely prince in Sebastian Rinaldi, a great Von Rothbart in Ari Mayzik and small but scary flock of swans. While the men's arms were more muscular than the usual swan corps and there were more visible tattoos than one normally sees, the flock stole the show.

Overall the show was not as polished a performance as those done by the Grandivas' older rival, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, but the audience didn't seem to mind.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LES BALLETS GRANDIVA

