

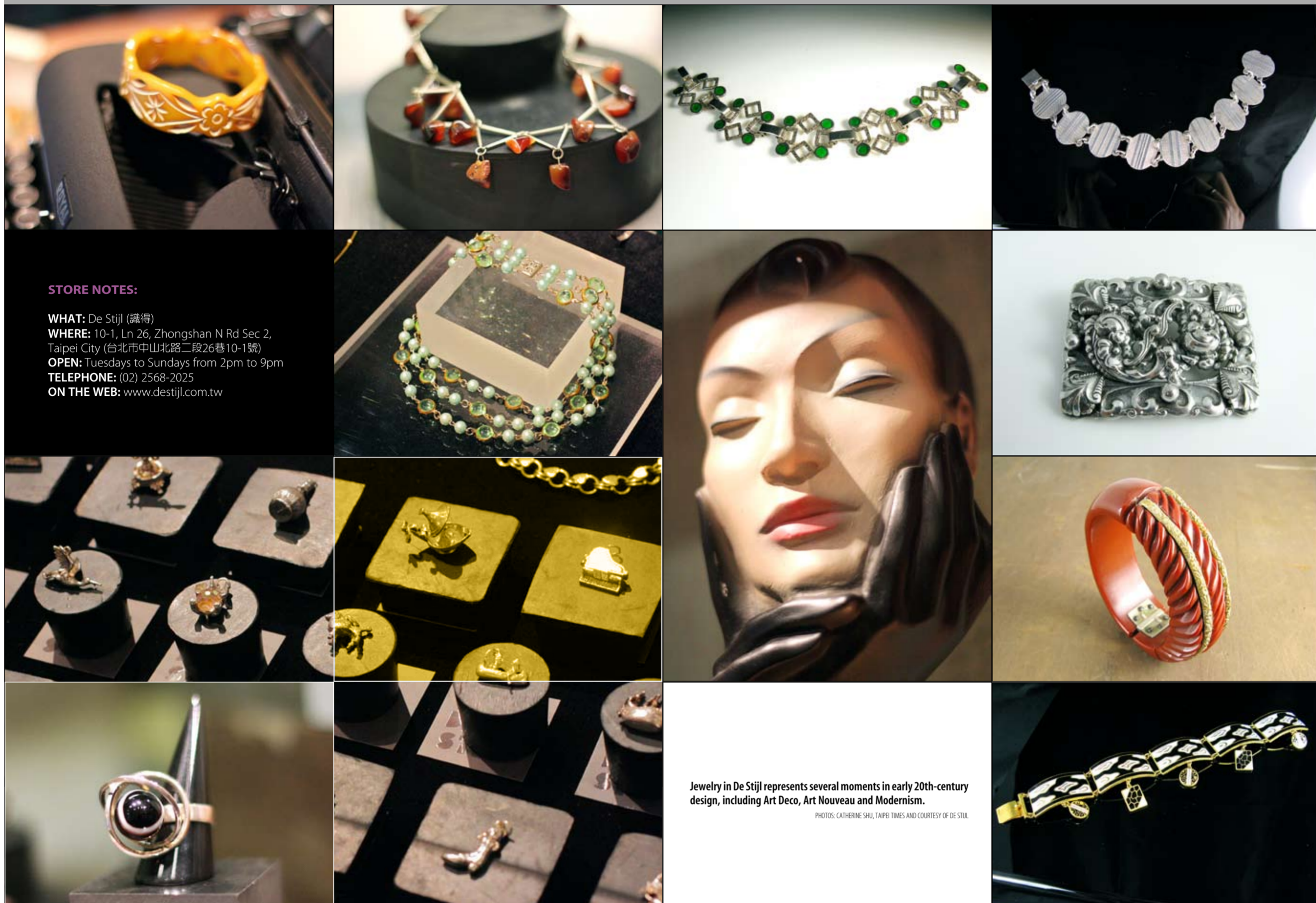
# STYLE

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## Where history glitters

BY CATHERINE SHU  
STAFF REPORTER



### STORE NOTES:

**WHAT:** De Stijl (識得)  
**WHERE:** 10-1, Ln 26, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市中山北路二段26巷10-1號)  
**OPEN:** Tuesdays to Sundays from 2pm to 9pm  
**TELEPHONE:** (02) 2568-2025  
**ON THE WEB:** www.destijl.com.tw

Jewelry in De Stijl represents several moments in early 20th-century design, including Art Deco, Art Nouveau and Modernism.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES AND COURTESY OF DE-STIJL

*De Stijl specializes in vintage jewelry from Europe and the US — but its unique storefront shows off 50 years of Taiwan's architectural history*

**De Stijl** (識得) is one of the first — if not *the* first — stores in Taiwan to specialize in early 20th-century European and American jewelry. But its storefront near Zhongshan MRT Station (中山捷運站) is layered, literally, with the last 50 years of this country's architectural history.

Owner Eli Hsieh (謝慶良) originally wanted to give the high-ceilinged space a loftlike atmosphere. But instead of the bare concrete he expected to find, he discovered hidden pockets of Taiwan's past as he stripped wooden boards off the walls and ceilings.

Chunky cherry red and mustard yellow Bakelite bangles from the 1950s are displayed in front of tiles left over from when the building housed a hotel and bar. Abstract modernist pendants with large stones and delicate filigree necklaces from the Art Nouveau period lie under a plaster ceiling with sculpted moldings, an architectural detail popular in Taiwan during the middle of the past century. A concrete column is embellished with hand-painted, featherlike motifs, while an arch of pine-green brick just inside the entrance outlines the original front of the building.

"Everything was a surprise. We felt like we'd hit the jackpot," says Hsieh. "Our store decor really combines the old and the new."

That description also applies to the jewelry in De Stijl, which specializes in pieces from the Art Deco, Art Nouveau and Modernist periods. Unusual items include a silver World War II-era souvenir bracelet from Papua New Guinea (NT\$8,500) and an enameled Art Deco pendant with colorful, stylized clowns (NT\$16,500). Silver charms from the 1930s to 1970s, many with moving parts, are the store's best sellers and range in price from NT\$900 to about NT\$3,000 each. The store's own line, P+De Stijl, is made using parts salvaged from vintage jewelry.

"There wasn't a market here for this kind of jewelry before we opened the store, so we had no idea how we'd be received or how we should present ourselves to customers who weren't familiar with different periods in Western art and design," says Hsieh.

"We want consumers to understand that our jewelry is something that you can't find in the mass market," he adds.

Some pieces in De Stijl are there not because they sell well, but because the store hopes to educate customers. Bakelite jewelry, for example, is highly collectible abroad, but many Taiwanese shoppers are hesitant to pay NT\$2,500 for what they see as a simple plastic bangle.

"In Taiwan, Bakelite was used mainly for home appliances like phones and sewing machines," says Joy Wu (吳忠怡), a store manager and Hsieh's girlfriend. "Taiwanese people don't associate it with jewelry. But we keep it here because we hope people will learn more about it and appreciate its value."

Hsieh started collecting vintage accessories while in high school, starting with jewelry he found in antique shops on

Yongkang Street (永康街). He spent so much time there that dealers eventually trusted him to mind their stores.

His interest shifted from traditional Chinese jewelry to Western styles in university. "I finally got exposed to all the different periods in artwork and design from abroad. It really opened my eyes," says Hsieh. He went to art school for two years in London, spending his spare time exploring the city's antique stores, flea markets and car boot sales.

Hsieh works with antique sellers in the US, England and Germany to find jewelry for De Stijl. Before buying an item, Hsieh considers its workmanship, rarity and authenticity. Signs of the latter include materials and crafting techniques unique to certain periods, as well as hallmarks stamped into silver or gold items. Hsieh says he focuses more on the aesthetics of each piece than brand names or famous designers (though several, including James Avery, David Andersen and Lea Stein, have been or are currently represented in the store) and worries less about running into knock-offs because many of the pieces in De Stijl are not in high enough demand among collectors (like Tiffany pieces, for example) to support a reproduction market.

De Stijl takes its store name from a period in Dutch design known for its abstraction and use of primary colors; one of its most famous members was the artist Piet Mondrian. The first half of the 20th century was perhaps the most dynamic era for design, says Hsieh: "From the early 1920s onwards, designers were very progressive. Every few years or so there would be a shift in aesthetics. It just kept going."

Hsieh says that many customers are just as intrigued by De Stijl's unusual decor as they are by the vintage jewelry — if not more so ("A lot of people come in just to look at the space," he says, laughing).

After discovering the original structure's idiosyncrasies, Hsieh and Wu decided to enhance the space with wooden cabinets designed to echo Art Deco furniture. They also covered several walls and counters with a patchwork of recycled wood from demolished houses (some still pasted over with old wallpaper or newspapers). Alcoves are filled with items ranging from a vintage Christian Dior plaster head found in an antique store to early 20th-century typewriters gifted by a neighboring shopkeeper.

Hsieh hopes customers will experience a similar sense of serendipity when they walk into his store.

"A lot of them buy jewelry just because it's pretty, but knowing it has a story behind it is a bonus," says Hsieh. "Not only do you have something new to wear, but you've also bought a piece of history."

The interior of De Stijl preserves original architectural details with a few new touches.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

