

STYLE

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Secondhand chain Cassie's Studio started seven years ago as a clothing swap party that went on and on and on ...

BY CATHERINE SHU
STAFF REPORTER

Cassie's Studio (凱曦工作室), a chain of secondhand clothing stores, started as a swap party seven years ago that just went on and on. Owner Cassie Huang (黃凱曦) piled clothes and accessories she didn't want anymore in her home office and invited friends over to trade items.

"When I first started, it was just a combination of stuff I wanted to unload and things my friends would bring over and trade. Then my friends started bringing their friends and it took off," says Huang.

Racks of clothing quickly took over her Jingmei apartment and Huang's husband begged her to move operations elsewhere. Over the past five years, Cassie's Studio has expanded to three stores, two in Taipei and one in Yilan. The newest location opened near the Shida night market last fall.

"We had to expand because we had so many things, there just wasn't room for it in one store," says Huang. But she has also promoted her business aggressively, appearing on radio and TV talk shows. Photos clipped from publications like the *Apple Daily* are displayed prominently in her Lishui Street (麗水街) store.

The chain still operates much the same way it did when it was (literally) a homegrown business. Most of the secondhand items in the store — which, in addition to clothing and accessories, include a motley selection of items ranging from porcelain figures and teacups to unopened bottles of vitamins — are brought in by customers and exchanged for store credit. Cassie's Studio only pays cash for name brand items, including designer handbags, accompanied by an original store receipt or other proof of authenticity. Items must be clean and ready to sell, but aside from that, the store does not discriminate based on style.

Browsing the vast amount of merchandise in Cassie's Studio's different locations can be an overwhelming experience. Clothing is organized by color, and items like jeans and formalwear are grouped separately, but otherwise the racks are a riot of textures, patterns and silhouettes. Items range from knock-off Gucci satchels (authentic items, including Fendi and Coach handbags, are kept behind the front counter) to a sleek Elie Tahari jacket and vintage beaver fur overcoat. The latter is the store's most expensive item at NT\$50,000, but the majority of items in Cassie's Studio range from NT\$200 for T-shirts and blouses to NT\$2,000 for suit jackets. Jeans go for NT\$480 to NT\$680, while a brown corduroy Moschino suit with rose embroidery sells for NT\$3,780.

Huang herself embodies thriftiness. She brings her own homemade fruit juice to work in a thermos. When a customer brought in a hat with a damaged crown, Huang couldn't bear to toss it and now wears it when biking in the rain.

"I wouldn't try to sell or donate a hat with a hole in it, but throwing it away would have been wasteful. It's perfectly serviceable and nice looking," she says.

The Lishui Street location caters to families, with a corner dedicated to children's wear, a topic that Huang, the mother of a young daughter, seems particularly passionate about.

"Children grow out of their clothing so fast that sometimes parents purposely buy their clothes a little too big. Their sleeves are too long, they trip over their jeans and they just look like ragamuffins," she says, shaking her head in disapproval. "I think parents should do their kids a favor and buy secondhand clothes that actually fit them. It's inexpensive."

Huang's biking (she now lives close to the Lishui Street store), abhorrence of waste and love of secondhand goods is right in line with the current emphasis on "green" living. But Huang rejects calling her stores *huanbao* (環保), or environmentally friendly. She prefers "LOHAS," the acronym for "lifestyles of health and sustainability."

"LOHAS implies a way of life," says Huang. "I wanted to create a space where people could make friends and swap their old things out for new — to them — items."

"It's not just about saving money or the planet," she adds. "It's about having fun. When you buy something at a department store, you spend a lot of money, but you don't have that element of surprise."

Cassie Huang, below, the founder of Cassie's Studio, originally kept her unwanted clothing in her home office for friends to pick from and trade. They brought their friends, and her business took off from there. Cassie's Studio stocks a motley selection of secondhand clothing and other items. Merchandise ranges from knock-off handbags to genuine designer apparel and vintage fur coats.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

STORE NOTES:

WHAT: Cassie's Studio (凱曦工作室)

WHERE: B1, 7-1 Lishui St, Taipei City (台北市麗水街7-1號B1), tel: (02) 2357-0431; B1, 34, Ln 40, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順街40巷34號B1), tel: (02) 2369-6900; 21 Sinmin Rd, Yilan City (宜蘭市新民路21號), tel: 0928-072-739

OPEN: Taipei locations open from noon to 10pm. Call ahead to confirm the Yilan location's hours

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