



PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS SCHALIX



SHOPPING IN

TAIPEI

FROM KNIFE MESSAGES TO BEETHOVEN-PLAYING RUBBISH TRUCKS, TAIWAN'S CAPITAL IS ASIA'S QUIRKIEST CITY, BUT IT IS ALSO SYNONYMOUS WITH INNOVATION, BUZZING WITH RAILWAY BUILDINGS TURNED CONCEPT STORES AND 3D-PRINTING CAFES. BY CHRIS SCHALKX



BESPOKE SHOES

The Taiwanese have a keen eye for the little luxuries in life, and a perfectly fitting pair of custom-made shoes is definitely one of them. Founded by graphic designer Jingkai Chen, **Chenjingkai Office** lets you design your own, one-off pair of brogues, loafers or derbies. Mix and match from different rubber soles, slabs of leather and shoelaces. After careful measuring and fitting, the shoes are made by hand in the adjoining atelier and shipped a month later. For those who don't have the time, or patience, there are usually also minimalist white leather sneakers that can be bought on the spot. [instagram/chenjingkaioffice](https://www.instagram.com/chenjingkaioffice)

FURNITURE

Dotted with charming restaurants, cutting-edge coffee shops and independent stores, the tree-lined lanes around Fujin Street hold some of Taipei's most interesting gems. Opened by two advertising executives, longstanding local favourite **Funfuntown** is filled with vintage furniture, well-made home goods and playful accessories. Wares are sourced from the Netherlands to Sweden and Japan – seek out the lovely lacquered plates by MizuMizu, a pottery in Japan's Gifu Prefecture – but there's plenty of room for Taiwanese talent, too, such as AM Ideas' bow-ties made from woven grass. funfuntown.com

FASHION

The lifestyle branch of Eslite, the country's leading bookshop, is home to more than a dozen made-in-Taiwan boutiques and stores. On the ground floor, **Axes** functions as a showcase for about 30 designers working in fashion, jewellery and footwear – look out for sculptural shoes by Abcense and the boldly coloured leather bags by Taiwanese-Spanish label Llagut. Afterwards, head up to Eslite's second floor for a deep-dive into the homegrown creative scene. Between the bubble-tea stands and shops selling small-batch teas, grains and dried fruits – all wrapped in brilliant packaging – are interactive glass-blowing and wood-crafting workshops presenting

contemporary interpretations of age-old skills. [facebook.com/axes.eslite](https://www.facebook.com/axes.eslite)

NATURAL SOAP

The soap bars bearing the distinctive **Dachuns** smiling-moon logo are part of Taiwan's collective nostalgia. Produced by the same family since 1950, they are made from natural ingredients such as rice-bran oil and bamboo charcoal and are loved for their high quality. The flagship in the historic Dadaocheng district opened in 2017 after a brand refresh that rejuvenated the package design but retained the old-time feel; it also doubles as a mini museum, with photographs and vintage designs documenting the label's history. dachuns.com

KITCHEN KIT

Dadaocheng mainstay **Yong Xing** started out as a farming-tool company 100 years ago. Now that agriculture in the country has changed, the factory has spun off into kitchenware and is known for its affordable yet durable cooking utensils. Displays of cast-iron pans and ceramic teapots spill onto the pavement, as well as gift-friendly items: bamboo steamer baskets, wooden bowls and chopping boards. Many products are still manufactured in the small workspace behind the shop and staff are happy to show customers around. +886 02 2553 6545

KNICK-KNACKS

Concept store **Everyday Ware & Co**, in the buzzing Zhongshan district, is a blink-and-you'll-miss-it affair. To enter, ring the bell of a nondescript apartment building. On the second floor is a cosy space where shelves are stocked with whimsical collectables and homeware, including vintage army paraphernalia, Mexican blankets, apothecary bottles, and cult cosmetics by Maison Louis Marie and Grown Alchemist. everydayware.co

FOODIE PIT-STOP

Occupying a former military building in the shadow of the Taipei 101 skyscraper, **Good Cho's** brings a welcome change from the ritzy shopping malls in the surrounding

Xinyi district. This shop and brunch spot sells beautifully presented, locally made confectionery and coffee, fruits and jam. The café is hugely popular for its homemade bagels, which come in unusual flavours – choose from sweet potato, oolong and pomelo with pineapple. goodchos.com.tw

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Homeware and accessories shop **Kamaro'an** was set up by a trio of cultural researchers who went deep into the Taiwanese heartland to study indigenous crafts. Working with artisans from local tribes, they make tote bags, leather pouches and sculptural lights using sustainably sourced materials and ancient weaving techniques. The showroom, at the back of the Huashan 1914 Creative Park events and exhibition venue – which is worth a visit in its own right – gives an insight into their collaborative process. kamaroan.com

CERAMICS

Xiao Qi means 'small things' in Chinese, and that's exactly what you'll find in this Japanese-inspired concept store. Alongside the shop's own line of cutesy, illustrated glasses, mugs and cups are bright ceramics, fine glasswork and dishes – many imported directly from Japan. One block away, Xiao Qi also runs a bottle shop which sells more than 50 varieties of Japanese *umeshu* plum wine. thexiaoqi.com

TEA

The founders of teeny-tiny **Wolf Tea** are on a mission to demystify the world of Taiwanese leaves, providing fuss-free brewing instructions and expert-led tasting sessions of black and oolong blends that they source from plantations around the island. The high mountain oolong from Alishan is their speciality, a hit for its fresh, floral smell and sweet aftertaste. Most teas can be bought as either loose leaf or tea bags, and the colourful tins make great gifts. wolftea.com

HOMEWARE

Drawing inspiration from everyday household items, the product designers behind

Opposite, clockwise from top left: castor-oil shampoo bars at Dachuns; the window of Funfuntown furniture shop; interior detail at Everydayware & Co; Chenjingkai Office shoes; fashion at Axes; Everydayware & Co; tea tasting at Wolf Tea; Kamaro'an furniture; artwork by Taiwanese illustrator Lee Kan Kyo at Pon Ding. Previous pages, clockwise from top left: Yue Yue bookshop; staff at Chenjingkai Office; Staff Only Club; Funfuntown; Everydayware & Co clothing; the garden at Kimpton Da'an hotel; the counter at Everydayware & Co



Tzulai reinterpret classic forms and patterns to create objects fit for 21st-century urbanites. These include smart chopstick canisters, blue-and-white ceramics emblazoned with traditional brickwork patterns and wire baskets in the shape of Taiwanese window grills. Recently, the focus has shifted to sustainable design, resulting in collections of tableware made from bamboo fibre and coffee grounds. There are Tzulai outposts all around the country, but the small shop adjoining the studio in the trendy Da'an district offers the widest choice. tzulai.com

BOOKS

Zhongshan hotspot **Pon Ding** is a collaborative project by three creatives, including Indonesian furniture designer Kenyon Yeh (whose works are for sale and distributed throughout the shop), aiming to provide a platform for emerging artists from around the world. Spread over three levels, it comprises a café, bookshop and exhibition space. In addition to an

exquisitely curated collection of local and international indie publications and art books, there's a solid selection of one-of-a-kind postcards, screen prints and home accessories. pondingstore.com

WHERE TO STAY

With numerous stores, fashion boutiques and top-notch restaurants just around the corner, the **Kimpton Da'an** is a great address for exploring the city. Designed by Shanghai-based architects Neri & Hu, the hotel delivers contemporary cool with a touch of Taiwanese tradition in a multitude of colours (fresh teals and crimson reds) and materials (chrome, stainless steel and blonde wood veneer). On the 12th floor, The Tavernist restaurant is a destination in its own right. Here, Noma alumni James Sharman dishes up an eclectic menu inspired by his travels around the globe, with riffs on Taiwanese fried chicken, Vietnamese-style seafood dishes and dangerously addictive taro fries with chicken-fat mayonnaise. ihg.com/kimptonhotels

LOCAL KNOW-HOW PEI-LING GUO

AUTHOR OF GOOD EYE CITY GUIDE TAIPEI

'Taipei has only had its own Michelin guide since 2018, but the top tables are notoriously hard to book. Instead, I take visiting friends to Ji Jia Zhuang – the Three Taste Chicken is amazing, and the free egg pudding is a must.'



'The city is packed with hip districts full of converted old buildings. Songsan Cultural and Creative Park, on the site of a former tobacco company, is a good place to start. While you're there, check out the beautiful Yue Yue bookstore.'

'Loads of new cocktail spots have opened up in the past few years. Those in the know hang out at the über-cool Staff Only Club, a sleek bar on the outskirts of town.'

Good Eye Taipei is available on goodeye.guide

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From left, Funfuntown entrance; the second-floor workspace and café at Pon Ding