

/shop•house/: 100 OLD SHOPS AND TOWNHOMES, 100 WAYS TO SEE TAIWAN

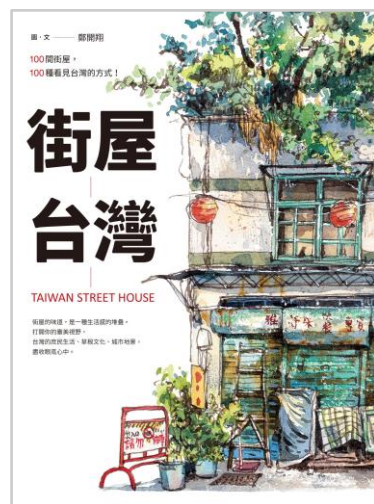
街屋台灣：100 間街屋，100 種看見台灣的方式！

Author and watercolorist Cheng Kai-Hsiang travels around Taiwan, painting over one hundred old street-facing shops and townhomes and learning their stories.

The Taiwanese townhome, like the *machiya* that once defined traditional downtown quarters in Japan, is a street-facing edifice that puts passersby and inhabitants in immediate proximity to one another. Once a popular venue for shops, some have also been transformed into modern homes. Enamored of their style and atmosphere, painter Cheng Kai-Hsiang tells their stories in ink and image.

With his quick-setup painting kit at his side, Cheng travels the whole of Taiwan to lay eyes on townhomes in many different cities. His brush captures the many eccentricities and delightful details of their architecture, including their signs, wares, and windows. Each of the one hundred paintings in the final book is accompanied by a detailed record of where the building is, when it was painted, and what else might be known about it.

Cheng's meticulous record-keeping and eye for captivating detail make this beautiful book of interest to both the casual tourist and the historian. He presents the Taiwanese townhome so vividly that readers can almost feel the air and hear the downtown sounds around them as they look through the grand windows of these icons of grassroots Taiwanese culture.



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Cheng Kai-Hsiang 鄭開翔

Cheng Kai-Hsiang is a painter of the urban instant. The first-ever professional artist to depict Taiwanese townhome culture in ink and image, his brush captures urban architecture as moments in human time. He has traveled and painted throughout Taiwan, as well as in Osaka, Xiamen, and Singapore.

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By Cheng Kai-Hsiang

Translated by Mary King Bradley

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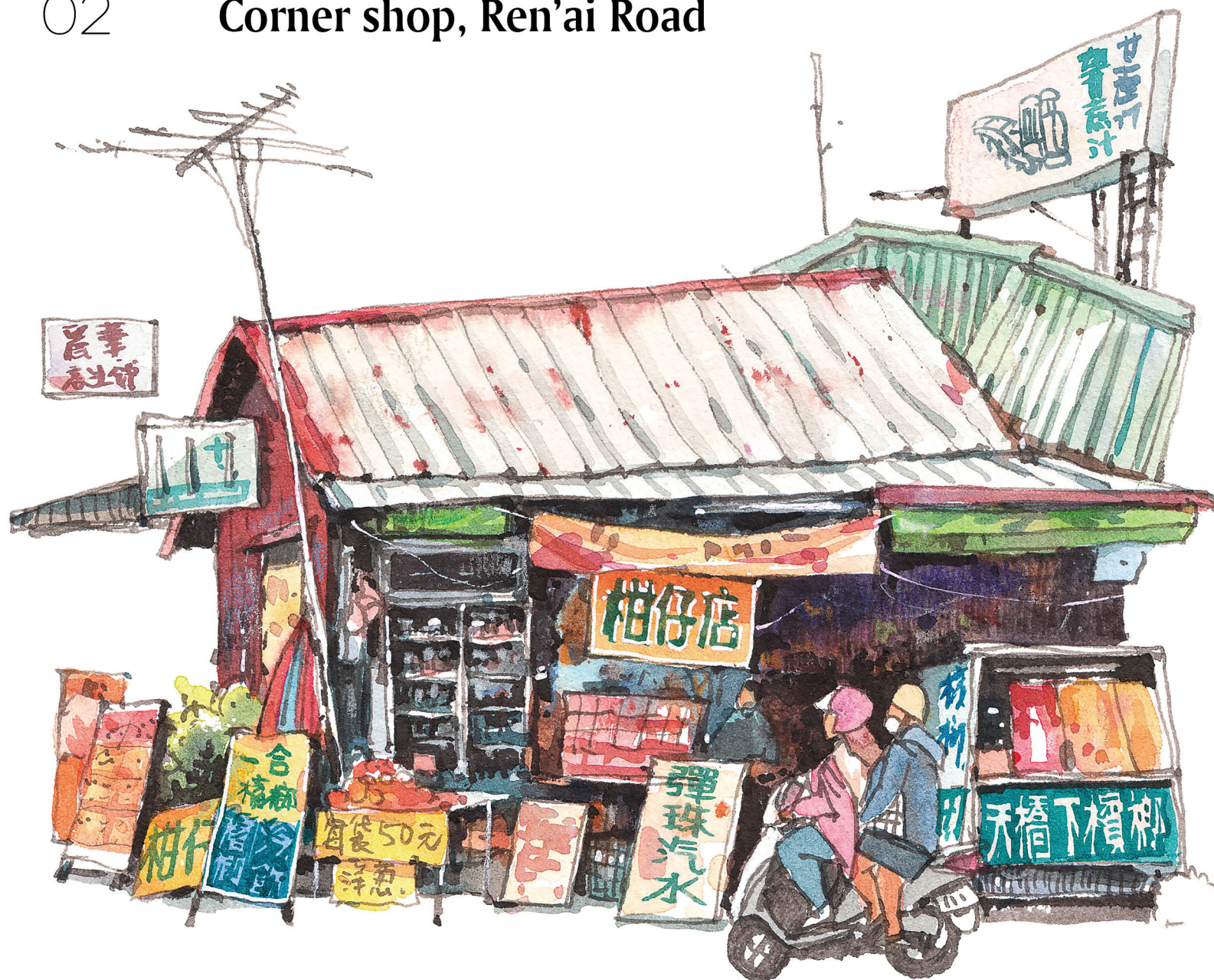
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02

Corner shop, Ren'ai Road



Category

Shop

Location

Ren'ai Road, Pingtung

Date painted

Aug. 24, 2017

This corner shop is straightforward about what it is, with a big sign that says kan-tzu tien (corner shop) hanging at the door. It also has plenty of the southerner's free and easy manner. Out front are boards of various colors that announce the items for sale: marble sodas, betel nuts, sweet potatoes, onions. The boards may not look like much, but they make plain the hardworking thriftiness of the shop's old-school proprietor. In the past, there was little concept of graphic design. Computers were not widespread, nor could one find professionals to do the designing. The ability to letter a poster by hand as this shop owner did is impressive.

This corner shop is also unusual for selling "baby" silkworms. I remember a natural science class in elementary school for which we were asked to raise silkworms and record our observations. Each student had to buy a silkworm and raise it at home. I never got to see my silkworm grow, though; some ants carried it off. For many, the corner shop is a childhood memory. Everybody saved up a bit of pocket money, then arranged to meet a few close friends there after school to have fun and buy DragonBall flashcards or other inexpensive toys. Those with lighter pockets could buy an ice pop for one Taiwanese dollar (the equivalent of a few pennies) to be sucked on to their hearts' content.

Happiness seemed easy to come by in those days. Now convenience stores are everywhere you look, and while life is much more convenient, the unaffected happiness and warmth of the past seems to have faded away.

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Hengchun Yuan Chi, Taiping Old Street

Category

Shop

Location

Douliu, Yunlin County
Taiping Road

Date painted

Sep. 3, 2017

Douliu's Taiping Old Street was established during Japanese imperialist rule during the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa eras. The street has more than eighty two-story buildings, each presenting a façade adorned with delicate baroque carvings. For me, however, the most interesting thing about this old street is how closely linked it is with contemporary life. Each proprietor on the street is engaged in a different trade, and local residents move back and forth between the buildings. This is not just some by-design, pseudo-classical tourist spot.

The old Hengchun Yuan Chi shophouse retains the façade's original decorative embellishments. These include the relief sculptures on the crenelated parapet wall, the white horizontal frieze, the mellow color and luster of its red brick, and the previous store's name on the façade.

At some point, an old street craze began to surge across Taiwan. Many towns and cities have such a street, which attracts an endless stream of tourists. Giving these buildings from an earlier time new life is not necessarily a bad thing, yet I feel that so many of these old streets are commercially similar, cookie-cutter tourist destinations, a duplication of one "old street concept" applied in different cities. The result is a lack of any distinguishing characteristics, which gradually causes people to lose interest.

The "rebirth" of an old street ought to preserve its original culture and style of living rather than erase it completely, leaving only the building. We can rejoice that Taiping Old Street remains quite lively, retaining both the buildings' previous appearance as well as a strong sense of life being lived. Close observation of the street's architecture, delicious food, and urban vitality is a rewarding experience.

Currently a clothing store,
the original "Hengchun
Yuan Chi" name is still on
the building's façade.



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Chin Cheng Bakery

Category

Shop

Location

Taoyuan district,
Taoyuan
Corner of Zhongshan
and Zhongzheng
Roads

Date painted

Feb. 13, 2018

Situated at the intersection of Zhongzheng and Zhongshan Roads in Taoyuan and boasting over 200 years of history is the Ching Fu Temple, but what attracted my attention was the multistory sign of a majestic, long-standing shophouse on the opposite corner. Written on the sign in large letters is “Chin Cheng Wedding Cookies and Cakes.” The upper part of the sign is a semicircular white board with the outline of a city gate tower – a reference to the store’s name, which means “Golden City.” The red outline of the tower complements the sign’s yellow letters. The first-floor awning likewise alternates red and yellow, while the building’s walls are a lighter red. The colors seem to blend, making the entire building appear a uniform orange and quite visually appealing.

The bakery, Taoyuan’s first, was established in 1940. On January 16, 2017, the business closed after nearly 77 years. For Taoyuan’s old-timers, it is an unforgettable food memory.

During several rambles through the city, I discovered many places on Zhongzheng Road that appeared to be among the first of the city’s blocks to be developed. Often, I could see the trajectory of this early development and the overarching plan of the road’s shophouse style. Media statistics reveal that Taiwan has 197 Zhongzheng Roads, most of which are urban thoroughfares. The roads of this name often have a large temple that serves as a religious epicenter for locals. In turn, the temples are often located close to a market that acts as a social hub. The temple satisfies people’s souls at the psychological level; the market feeds their bellies and takes care of their physical well-being. The next time you go to a city and don’t know where to start roaming, I suggest you first find Zhongzheng Road and then explore the surrounding side streets. You can’t go wrong!



A city gate tower, a reference to the bakery's name, appears on the upper semicircle of the building's sign.

