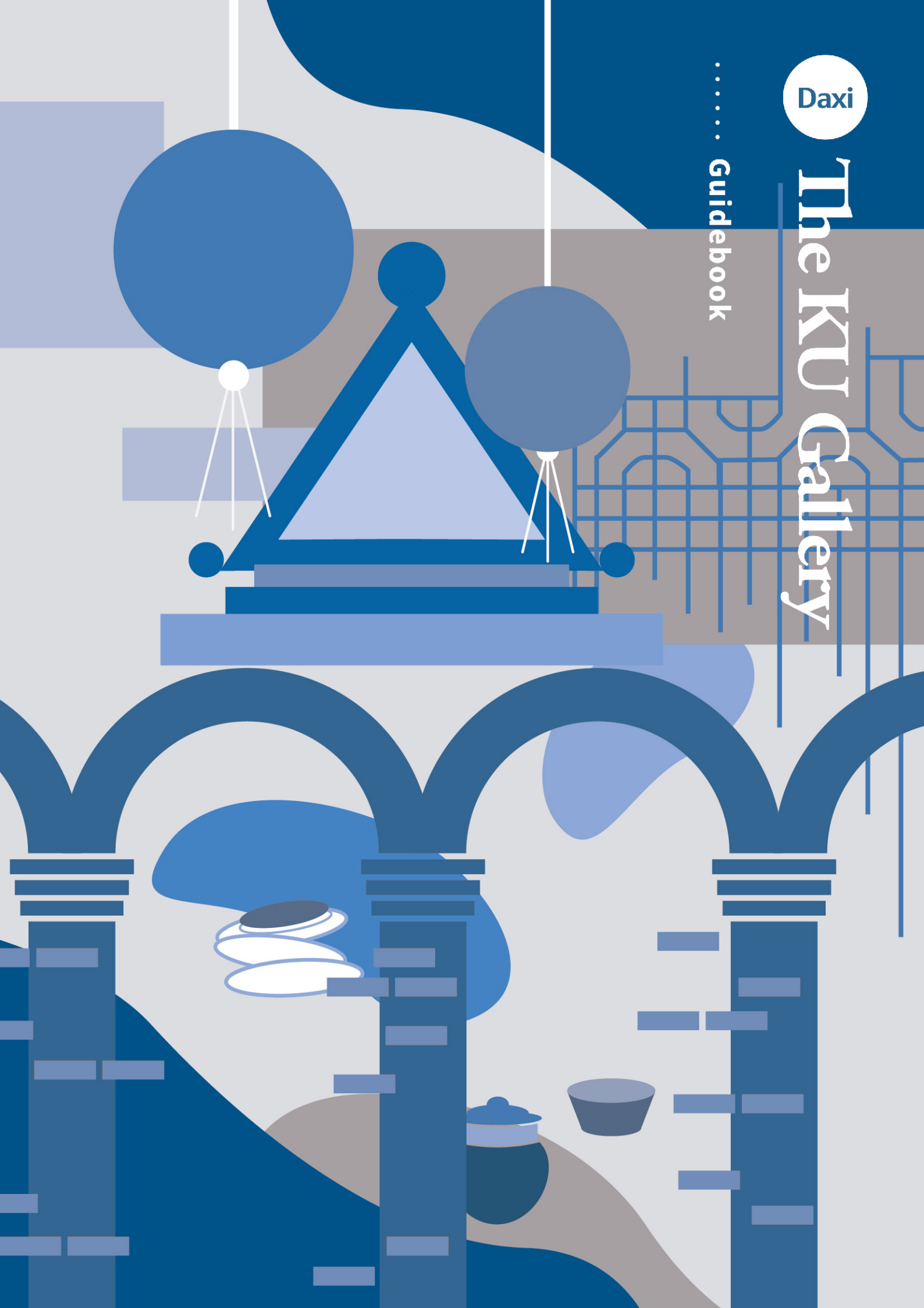


Daxi

The KU Gallery

..... Guidebook





The KU Gallery

0
1

Follow timeless artisan mastery

Search for lost time

Enjoy this moment

Pai Lou

Modern baroque-styled façades Reminders of prosperous years of the land-and-river hub of *Dakekan*

The development of *Pai Lou* (façade) in the Daxi Old Street allegedly started in the late 19th century. During the Japanese ruling period, the colonial government established the “City Renovation” plan, which indirectly led to the overall withdrawal of local traditional craftsmen from this wave of modern construction projects. On the other hand, it also kicked start the westernization of townhouses on the Daxi Old Street.

During the period of Meiji Restoration (1860’s-90’s), Japanese society opened up to the outer world and absorbed tremendous amount of cultural influences from West Europe. The diversity of building styles and design concepts in this period also impacted new townhouses on the Daxi Old Street. Houses of the traditional southern Fujian style started to add on Romanesque arcades, gables, parapets and splendidly decorated façades. They are the jewels of Taiwan’s baroque-styled townhouses. In order to prevent copycats and design theft, commissioned master craftsmen even covered up the entire façade with large swathes of canvas during the construction period.

The KU Gallery on Heping Road is one of the early townhouses on the Daxi Old Street, and still retains the original main structure. After acquired by the Ku Family, the original banners of “*Chuan Chan*” and “*KANG*” on the façade have remained intact. “*KANG*” is Romanization of the Chinese character “江”.

The modern neighborhood made up with lines of splendid *Pai Lou* (façade) rubbing shoulders to each other reflects the commercial vibrancy of Daxi in its heydays. They also witness Taiwan’s history of social development from late Qing dynasty, the Japanese colonial rule to the republic. Spatially, the layout of the KU Gallery appears in the style of “*Two Kan, Three Lou* and *Two Gou-Sui*”, meaning two storefronts with three enclosures behind. In between enclosures there are courtyards and connecting corridors.



© Jhu Yi Wun / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Jhu Yi Wun / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

First Jin

Old pictures, old stories

From the Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop to the KU Gallery

Located in No. 48 and 48-1 of Heping Road, the KU Gallery still retains the “Two *Kan*, Three *Lou* and Two *Gou-Sui*” layout, a characteristic of Taiwanese townhouses. As one of the early townhouses on the Daxi Old Street, the original structure of the KU Gallery remains intact after several restorations.



The predecessor of the KU Gallery is the Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop, which was established by Ku Jin-Yen, a.k.a A-Yen-Ge. Ku Jin-Yen was a Hakka originally from Hsinpu region of Hsinchu. Starting as a

street vendor following touring opera troupes around, Ku Jin-Yen began transporting lumber, rice and salt after Lin Ben Yuan Company spurred agricultural development with new irrigation channels. Afterwards, expecting commercial potentials of Daxi, Ku Jin-Yen moved into No. 58 of Heping Road in 1894 and established the Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop.

Around 1930, Ku rented the townhouses of No. 48 and 48-1 from the Kang's and started a grocery business there. Subsequently in 1943, he bought both houses from the Kang's for business and living spaces. The Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop carried all sorts of groceries, cigarettes, wines and pastries; booming business even attracted buyers far from Guanxi and Sanxia. During local festivals or weddings, particularly in the Birthday Celebration of *Guansheng Dijun* on June 24th, Ghost Festival in July and Mid-Autumn Festival in August of the lunar calendar, local residents often ordered seasonal pastries from the Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop.

The billboards of Tsai Plum Cake and MSG that were used to be on the storefront sidebar of the Company in the 1930's are still well preserved today. In those days, on the floor were ordinary wines while pricy ones would be placed behind the window. Stepping inside the store, before your eyes were retail rice wine jars with quality Gekkeikan Sake jars behind. On the left were imported eye drops. The Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop had regular business with established Dadaocheng grocery wholesalers in Taipei. Parcels and mails did not even need an address, simply writing Daxi Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop was enough.

Suzhou Codes

A disappearing commercial culture of account books

As if some type of mythical symbols, Suzhou Codes (also called Taiwan Codes) was originated in Suzhou and had been a popular system of notation in China. In Chinese historical manuscripts, Suzhou Codes had been widely used in noting land, money, weight and length.

Suzhou Codes represents traditional Chinese writing and commercial cultures. However, after the coming of the western commercial system, Suzhou Codes were gradually replaced by Arabic numbers. Today in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, Suzhou Codes can still be seen in some traditional Chinese pharmacies, grocery stores and tea restaurants.



The use of the useless

Rebirth of the abandoned

In the traditional townhouse layout on the Daxi Old Street, the first *jin* (enclosure) usually served as the storefront. To decorate the storefront, the Ku Family fully utilizes abandoned wastes that conventionally are considered useless in the restoration process, such as waste tiles, beams damaged by termites, or useless wooden ladders.

Waste tiles are embedded in the floor and form an elegant installation that tells its own story. Wood-curving artisans are commissioned to turn damaged beams into tables and chairs. Selective pieces of humble folk clothes on those wooden ladders breathe in an undertone of artistic flair.



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

Restore to preserve as it is Aesthetics of *wabisabi*

When restoring the townhouse, the old master of Ku Family, Mr. Ku Chien-Guei, prefers to respect the history of the old mansion and not to disturb its current state. Hence, dents and marks of over a hundred years have been carefully preserved. He believes that, imperfectness is a form of beauty, so do aging marks on walls. The philosophy comes from his aesthetic view of *wabisabi*.

Mr. Ku had been to Japan and Europe to observe their restoration treatments of old houses; the experiences gradually formulate his visions for the KU Gallery. Not restoring to the perfect and the splendid, but for the spiritual satisfaction of simplistic harmony, which is the aesthetics of *wabisabi*.

The restoration of the KU Gallery takes the approach of “minimum intervention” to represent the real living context of the old townhouse. Considering both the restoration ethics and realistic concerns, the walls and murals are repaired, strengthened and protected with appropriate materials. At the same time, similar attentions also meticulously pay to preserve the life marks left by the history, such as the traces of smoke left by pastry baking.

The restoration is completed in 2019; restoration marks are hardly noticeable. The townhouse still stands in simplicity and beauty blessed by years.



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

Courtyard

Courtyard well Connection of the neighborhood and manifestation of artisan mastery



In between two *jin*, the courtyard is also called “sky well” or “deep well.” By calling such, one can surely see a well in the courtyard.

Daxi is famous for good water quality. The well in the KU Gallery still pumps up sweet water. Following the tradition, on the day of the Dragon Boat Festival, neighbors will come to fetch the so-called mid-day water from the well. As the Taiwanese proverb goes, “drinking a mouthful of mid-day water is more powerful than 3 years of medicine.” It is believed that the mid-day of the Dragon Boat Festival has the highest level of *Yang Qi* (positive energy) in the entire year.

Stone boards and decorations in the courtyard were used to be ballast stones in the cross-strait ships from mainland China. Due to the difficulty of obtaining construction materials at that time, ballast stones became part of the KU Gallery.

Five-arched grey-brick colonnaded arcade

The original design of the KU Gallery only has two enclosures, thus boasts a particularly spacious courtyard. The plastered colonnades of the five-arched arcade lose the outer coating throughout the years and reveal layers of bricks underneath, bringing out a rustic flair. One can get a glimpse of artisan mastery of the age through those exposed colonnades: even covered by plaster, colonnades of bricks had been beautifully and carefully constructed.



© Jhu Yi Wun / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

Second Jin



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

Aura of *wabisabi*

Integrating tradition and local elements

Even old townhouses have to work with modern appliances. For example, a large power distribution cabinet might look odd in an old townhouse like this. Hence the owner of the KU Gallery commissions Mr. Liu Zhao-min, a master of bamboo art, to work around the machine with smoked bamboo. Master Liu constructs an installation with over a hundred selective slender bamboo sticks, and named it “The Wind Rises.” With creativity, smoked bamboo and the rustic earthen wall form a warm, simple but elegant contrast.

Motley walls, guileless old wooden table and chairs speak about the aesthetics of the owner. Simply integrated in this aged courtyard, they are part of daily life.



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

Marks of the age

Preserve the hustle and bustle of the old days

The main hall of the KU Gallery was the formal space to receive guests and to present offerings to the ancestral spirits.

During the restoration process, the owner engages in continuous discussions with the restoration team, communicating ideas and concerns from both sides. The irreversible damages resulted from past restoration experiences have made the owner particularly cautious in choosing appropriate materials and treatments when restoring the murals and exposing differences of each wall body. By choosing retouching and distressing with mineral pigments to a state consistent with the remaining original, the wall restoration project takes eight months to complete and to preserve its rustic, motley texture.



© Ciou Chuei Jian / Taoyuan City Cultural Foundation

Dining table

In addition to neighbor customers, the Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop also maintained a horde of buyers from Sanxia and Guanxi. Buyers from the greater Taoyuan and Hsinchu area formed a new network around the Ku Yu Fa as the wholesaling hub. During the lunch time, the Ku Yu Fa often prepared fried rice vermillion with dried mushrooms and shrimps to host the continuous stream of traders. This table reflects the vibrant trade economy and the warm hospitality for all trades in those old years.



© Ciou Chuei Jian / Taoyuan City Cultural Foundation

Floor

Though cracked due to constant uses, the floor still bears marks of family and guest footprints left in the past hundred years. The team merely replaces sections of broken parts, but retains the footprints of predecessors.

Common objects Wisdom and Aesthetics of Life

Floor tiles chronicle the restoration history of the KU Gallery

The Ku Family has the habit of reusing remaining past restoration materials. The floor tiles of this corridor are the remains of past restorations. Different sizes, colors, materials present an intriguing randomness. The tiled floor chronicles predecessors' respect for recourses and the unique folk aesthetics.

On the side, vats and charcoal stoves

These folk objects are gifts or deposits from neighbors. The KU Gallery becomes the depository of their memories; previously left-aside old life memories now find a new trusting home. In events, vats will be decorated with bouquets, stoves burning with charcoals. Old treasures of grandmothers are to be seen again, in their exuberances.

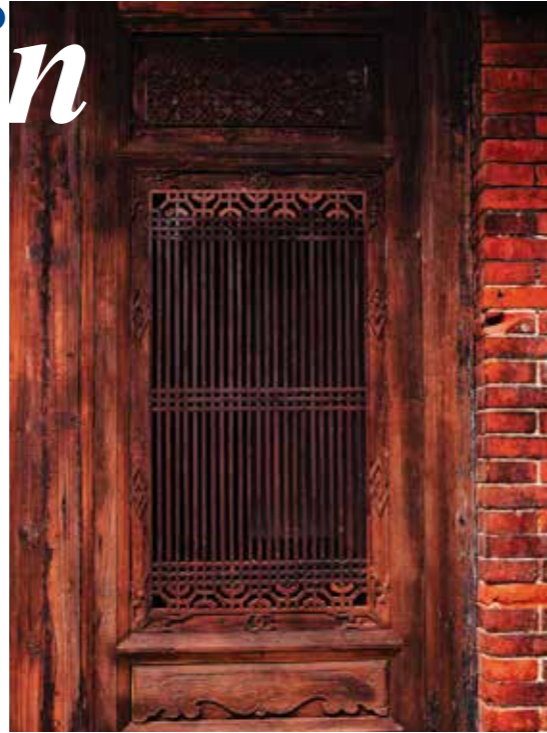


© Doane Tung / Department of Public Information, Taoyuan



© Doane Tung / Department of Public Information, Taoyuan

Third *Jin*



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

The owner's private domain A place of passing time

Back Hall

The hall of the second *jin* served as the space for gods and ancestral spirits. The third *jin* was the living quarter. The private hall of the third *jin* was the living quarter of the family elders. Only family members and close friends were allowed here. This space is especially quiet. Reading or chatting at the bamboo chairs feels like walking onto the time corridor, back into the past.

Today, the private dining room welcomes guests with reservation to join the Ku Family for a day. With seasonal produces and locality inspiration, you will be treated with unforgettable memories and lasting fragrances, flavors lingering the old mansion.



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

The owner's private domain A place of passing time

Tsàu-kha

In Taiwanese, *Tsàu-kha* means “kitchen” while *tsàu-thâu* means “stove”.

In its heydays, the Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop had three *tsàu-thâu*, two of which were located in two *Gou-Sui* (corridors) to cook dried pork fillings for pastries. This one was used for cooking bath water or making desserts for the family. Before restoration, this townhouse had no modern heaters; cooking and bathing had to rely on this giant stove. Fuels were charcoal and leftover woods from the carpentry shop next door. In the past, it was quite a challenging task to heat up bathing water in the winter.

Now one *tsàu-thâu* is intentionally kept in its original state without restoration, to testify the glory days of the Kuyufa Traditional Pastry Shop and to preserve a piece of old memory for the society.

Kitchen Cabinet

The old kitchen cabinet was integrated with the wall and served as the depository of tableware and utensils. In the heyday, many guests were welcomed to join the meal, therefore the KU Gallery now possess a huge collection of vintage tableware. They are not covered up and displayed as some kind of distant collectibles. In the KU Gallery, they are still used in dining, tea drinking and flower displaying. By sharing with guests, the Ku Family hopes to continue the daily warmth of the folk lifestyle.



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan

Annex Building



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



© Chen Fei / Department of Cultural Affairs, Taoyuan



Daxi

The KU Gallery

Supervisor :



文化部
MINISTRY OF CULTURE

桃園市政府文化局