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Prince Edward: a melting pot of old and new Hong Kong

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It doesn't have the name recognition of Mong Kok or Causeway Bay, but the neighbourhood is a melting pot of old Hong Kong culture and millennial creative types

It's past lunchtime, but 7-Up is full nonetheless, its customers packed into narrow wooden booths and small circular tables, steam rising from bowls of noodle soups. Among the customers is singer-songwriter Jing Wong and his sister, fashion designer Kay Wong, who have lived nearby for several years. "I think this is the real centre of Hong Kong," says Jing. "You can be anywhere in less than an hour, even Shenzhen. And for creative people it's close to all the material goods."

Prince Edward is more of a crossroads than a neighbourhood, a place that knits together all the threads of Hong Kong life. Its shops draw people from across the city, but it's also a haven for those seeking affordable space in a central location. While it boasts a number of famous attractions, including Goldfish Street, the Yuen Po Bird Garden and the Flower Market, it is also a breeding ground for more eccentric enterprises.



JL Ceramics Workshop.

COFFEE AND FLOWERS

Start the day at Hung Wan, one of a dying breed of classic cha chaan teng that still maintain their original 1960s decor. The food is exactly what you'd expect — sandwiches, rice dishes, pineapple buns — but the neighbourhood atmosphere is something to be cherished. If you're more inclined towards espresso than a local-style coffee, make your way to the Flower Market, where the baristas at Cafe Hay Fever pull an excellent shot in the back of a flower shop.

Hay Fever marks an interesting step in the evolution of the Flower Market. People have been selling flowers here for more than a century, but its history as a retail destination is relatively recent. Much of the shift from wholesale to retail can be attributed to rising rents and gentrification — a process that will only accelerate, now that the Urban Renewal Authority is buying up the area's collection of art deco shophouses.



Organic goods at Wecons.

To the URA's credit, this isn't one of those tear-down projects that have earned such a nasty reputation. Instead, the authority is restoring the shophouses and leasing them out to social enterprises and independent businesses. The first building to be restored, 204 Prince Edward Road, was built in 1932 and is now managed by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, which has dubbed it GoodPoint.

On the ground floor, you'll find Zen in Five Seasons, a teahouse that makes great use of the space's extra-high ceilings through diffuse lighting and tall wooden shelves. Upstairs, with Umbrella Movement stickers pointedly displayed on the door, Wecons specialises in fair trade products, locally-grown produce and organic goodies such as Taiwanese vinegar and local pickled garlic.



Hung Wah.

"Not many people know about this place yet," says manager Lily Ho. "We plan to have cooking classes and we make soups based on local ingredients. Sometimes we have screenings and talks on social issues."

One floor up, ceramics artist Jackie Leung has opened JL Ceramics Workshop, where he sells his own creations alongside antiques he has picked up on his travels, including a set of 1950s-era fabrics from Shanghai. "Unfortunately, they are all for sale — I've been warned by my family not to buy any more. The warehouse is full," he says.



rwb330's decor.

Leung's space is the only unit in the building that retained its original floor tiles and wooden doors, which gives it a throwback atmosphere that makes many visitors want to linger. "They said: 'This place is so nice and quiet, you should serve tea'," says Leung — which is exactly what he will start doing every afternoon from 2pm to 5pm.

The Flower Market's social enterprises are not limited to GoodPoint. Down the street, designer Stanley Wong has teamed up with the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association to open rwb330, which sells products made with Hong Kong's iconic red-white-blue fabric.



Farm Direct sells locally-grown produce.

MARKET LUNCH

Grab a quick lunch at Jun Jun, a Boundary Street snack stall that has earned a cult following for serving only two dishes, both of which are delicious and remarkably cheap — spicy cold noodles (HK\$10) and wonton soup (HK\$17).



Fa Yuen Street has fresh coconut juice.

Then it's time to stock up on food for dinner. Prince Edward is blessed with a number of good market stalls specialising in local vegetables. Farm Direct sells lettuce grown in Fanling, while Fai Kee is a good source of seasonal local produce such as cherry tomatoes, cucumbers and ginger. On Poplar Street, Hung Wah is renowned for its *lap yuk* (preserved meat), dried outside

on a bamboo rod. If all of this shopping makes you thirsty, head to Fa Yuen Street, where HK\$10 will get you a fresh young coconut — not local, but certainly delicious.



SPACE FOR CREATIVITY

It has been 12 years since Julian Sit opened House of Moments, one of Hong Kong's first upstairs cafes, but it fell by the wayside when he moved to Taiwan for design work. Now Sit is back and giving the space his full attention. In addition to tea, coffee and light meals, you'll find a serene Zen Buddhist-inspired hideaway overlooking the greenery of the Flower Market.

Nearby, Gum Cheng and Clara Cheung run another upstairs oasis — this one with art as its focus. C&G Artpartment is part gallery, part community art workshop. "We wanted to give an example of how you could run an art space without government funding," says Cheng. "We chose this space because there aren't many alternative art spaces in places that are very accessible."



Wontonmeen.

On Shanghai Street, independent music institution White Noise Records found a spacious new home in a renovated *tong lau* after rents in Causeway Bay became unaffordable. Owner Gary leong uses the extra square footage for pop-up shops and events, in addition to a collection of indie vinyl and CDs. "This spring we'll have second-hand vinyl and a guest DJ playing on weekends," he says.

That's the spirit of Prince Edward — accessible yet experimental and offbeat. And nowhere embodies that more than Wontonmeen, a multipurpose space on Lai Chi Kok Road that is part gallery, cafe, record shop and hangout space. You can get locally-roasted coffee from Urban Coffee Roaster or rent a stylish bicycle to cruise around the neighbourhood; there's even a film club showing classic Hong Kong movies every Tuesday night.



Art gallery inside C&G Artpartment.



C&G Artpartment.

It's a decidedly heterogeneous spot, filled with a museum's worth of posters, drawings and vintage knick-knacks. The front section was once occupied by an art gallery called 100 Square Feet, but its curators found a new, 800 sq ft space nearby, so Wontonmeen owner Patricia Choi will renovate the space to give a permanent home to Urban Coffee Roaster, including an on-site roasting machine.

Choi is also planning a festival for the growing creative community in Prince Edward and Sham Shui Po, which will take place in the Maple Street Playground later this spring. "We want to revitalise the neighbourhood before the URA does," she says.



White Noise Records.



White Noise.

Where to shop, eat and drink in Prince Edward

EAT AND DRINK

7-Up, 224 Fa Yuen Street, tel: 2787 6280

Hung Wan, 726 Shanghai Street, tel: 2392 6038

Cafe Hay Fever, 62-64 Flower Market Road, tel: 2397 0668, [facebook.com/hayfever.floral](https://www.facebook.com/hayfever.floral) [1]

Zen in Five Seasons, 204 Prince Edward Road West, tel: 2476 1720

Jun Jun, 456 Portland Street

Farm Direct, 218 Prince Edward Road West, tel: 2431 6299

Fai Kee, 188 Prince Edward Road West, tel: 2142 3628

Hung Wah Meat Company, 7 Poplar Street, tel: 2393 5499

Coconut hawkers, Fa Yuen Street at Bute Street

House of Moments, 1/F, 223 Sai Yee Street, tel: 2668 1810, houseofmoments.com.hk [2]



House of Moments.

SEE AND SHOP

Wecons, 1/F, 204 Prince Edward Road West, tel: 9388 5560, [facebook.com/WECONS.flowermarket](https://www.facebook.com/WECONS.flowermarket) [3]

JL Ceramics Workshop, 2/F, 204 Prince Edward Road West, tel: 9658 9959

C&G Artpartment, 3/F, 222 Sai Yeung Choi Street South, tel: 2390 9332, candg-artpartment.com [4]

White Noise Records, 1/F, 720 Shanghai Street, tel: 2591 0499, whitenoiserecords.org [5]

Wontonmeen, 135 Lai Chi Kok Road, Sham Shui Po, tel: 6186 5030, wontonmeen.com [6]



Wontonmeen.

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- [1] <http://facebook.com/hayfever.floral>
- [2] <http://houseofmoments.com.hk>
- [3] <http://facebook.com/WECONS.flowermarket>
- [4] <http://candg-artpartment.com>
- [5] <http://whitenoiserecords.org>
- [6] <http://wontonmeen.com>