

Ssamziegil

Seoul arts hub that exudes piazza pizzazz



THERE are two In-sadong (仁寺洞) in Seoul. Well, according to *Hokyun Cheon: "I wanted to create an 'In-sadong within In-sadong'. "So this patriarch of the family whose brainchild is now called Ssamziegil, helped develop an unusual open-air shopping complex that has become a popular cultural sector (區段) of the South Korea capital. Ssamziegil's post-modern architecture has helped it become a platform showcasing Korean traditional artworks in a modern setting, writes Catherine Chan.

to the left. This is really a mini In-sadong where you will soon spot dozens of colourful, irregularly-shaped wooden shop signs. Each is hand-painted in *hangeul*, meaning quilt-like patchwork. The concept of this four-storey building is basically a 'vertical street', a continuous ramp which in many ways might remind the Hong Kong visitor of a multi-storey shopping mall with rooftop garden restaurant. You can view Bukhan mountain (北漢山) from a vantage point on the top level.

Ssamziegil logo

At first glance, the Ssamziegil signature logo may seem like a doodle; and the image of two armless yellow men is indeed eye-catching. The pair are, in fact, the *hangeul* characters which represent the double 's' at the beginning of the word *Ssamzie*.

The painter who with this unique logo attempted to convey the theme of everyday Korean life, is Jinkyung Lee. Next to his double 'Ss' is a mother bearing a *podae*-wrapped baby. In ancient times, this swaddling garment kept the infant safe from the insidious winter chill. Also, you see people sleep and kneel in traditional houses protected by an overhanging willow. Interestingly, real willows surround this unique area within In-sadong.

The Ssamziegil concept was taken to reality by two architects, Gabriel Kroiz and Moongyu Choi, who were said to have consulted a wise *feng shui* (風水) master before they began planning this edifice. Thus they made sure that the materials, shape, colours and relative placement of all architectural elements possessed the best environmental advantage.

*Hokyun Cheon is president and chief executive officer of Ssamzie Co Ltd.

Reference: *Koreaphiles' Guide*, August 24 and September 7, 2005 re In-sadong.



FOR outsiders, the name Ssamziegil is usually too bothersome to memorise. But take a few minutes to learn some Korean words as well as their connotations. Ssamzie means 'money pouch' in old Korean, while *gil* is 'road' or 'street'. The archaic use of Ssamzie, an abstract word, implies a 'street filled with ancient items'. The Cat Street (摩囉街) of Seoul, perhaps with the Central Market plonked directly in the middle?

In fact, visitors may consider Ssamziegil as just an uncovered shopping mall rather than a road or street, simply because it is an edifice. However, once inside, it is more like an open forum or even a promenade. Couples stroll hand-in-hand while art lovers browse the bric-a-brac shops before resting on a stone bench under a shady pine tree when tired. Yet again, others will enjoy a street performance by itinerant players in the courtyard.

In the centre of In-sadong, Ssamziegil is set off



*Big word(s) and Amazing phrase(s) are published on page 13.

Glossary

1. patriarch (n. 企業的創始人)
2. brainchild (n. 獨創的觀念)
3. sector (n. 區段)
4. post-modern (adj. 後現代主義的)

5. connotation (n. 含義)
6. pouch (n. 小袋)
7. archaic (adj. 古式的)
8. promenade (n. 散步場所)

9. bric-a-brac (n. 古董或裝飾物)
10. shady (adj. 多蔭的)
11. itinerant (adj. 巡迴的)
12. patchwork (n. 拼湊成的東西)

13. ramp (n. 斜坡; 坡道)
14. vantage (n. 有利的位置)
15. doodle (n. 亂塗; 亂畫)
16. swaddling (n. 襁褓)