



MORIOKA SHOTEN

HYPER-CURATION CAN BE INCREASINGLY VALUABLE IN AN AGE OF ENDLESS CHOICE, JUDGING BY THIS BOOKSTORE SELLING A SINGLE TITLE AT A TIME.

Nearly every bookstore follows the same formula: shelves crammed with titles; tables piled high with staff recommendations; new releases all vying for attention. The interior decor of Morioka Shoten, in Ginza, Tokyo, is more of a blank canvas. Its motto is ‘a single room with a single book’. The stark white space comes alive every Tuesday with the arrival of a new book – and its entourage.

To be clear, Morioka Shoten doesn’t just leave a stack of a single title in the middle of the room and hope for the best. The shop, which opened in 2015, holds an exhibition that’s derived from and inspired by one book. ‘We have authors, publishers or writers come and personally hand over the books. So, rather than a bookstore, it feels much more like a place where communication happens,’ says Yoshiyuki Morioka, the shop’s proprietor.

And so, each week, Morioka Shoten is decorated to match the themes, moods or motifs of the current featured book. Yoshiyuki plans the exhibitions, often with the help of props from the author’s own collection. A book about darning (a sewing technique for repairing worn fabric) was accompanied by beautifully mended socks, sweaters and a colorful assortment of darning eggs (a tool for securing the material being darned). During the sale of a chocolate cookbook, the shop was transformed into a patisserie, complete with trays of truffles.

Yoshiyuki didn’t always work with such limited stock. He first fell in love with bookstores at 19 after moving to Tokyo from his native Yamagata Prefecture. He loved old clothes and tools and liked to frequent vintage markets in the Kōenji and Daikanyama areas. One of his college professors suggested he check out the used-book district of Kanda-Jinbōchō, and there he discovered 200 used bookstores, alongside publishers, coffee houses and more, all next to each other in a gentle,

haphazard jumble. He soon found himself spending more and more time in this neighborhood of ideas, buying a stack of books for ¥2,000 (£12.50) and looking through them while drinking coffee.

Yoshiyuki’s love affair with books deepened, and he worked at The Isseido Booksellers for eight years, a storied secondhand bookshop with more than a century of history. He felt he could stay there indefinitely – until one day he came across an old building in Kayabachō.

‘It was around 100 years old, and I really liked it and thought: I want to become independent in this building... It was right near the canal – the kind of place where, if you throw some breadcrumbs from the window, seagulls will come flocking.’

He decided to take out a lease on the building, and so the first incarnation of Morioka Shoten was born. That first venture specialized in art, architecture and photography books, with half the space used as a gallery where Yoshiyuki held exhibitions and publishing events. It was during one of these events almost 10 years ago when he noticed how lots of the people visiting were gathered around one particular book, generating conversation and buzz. ‘And I thought: why don’t we just have one book? So, that’s how the concept changed, and I moved to Ginza and became what we are today.’

The concept of only one book at a time was a tough sell, and Yoshiyuki had trouble convincing investors. But, finally, one person said ‘yes’: Masamichi Toyama, the founder of Soup Stock Tokyo, a bit of a cult spot itself, specializing in soup both to eat at the store and at-home meal kits. Masamichi believed in the idea and told Morioka to run with it.

‘When a book is created, there’s so much energy concentrated into it,’ says Yoshiyuki. He sees the publication of a book as a release of that energy, fueled by human interest and interaction. ‘The energy that



Founder Yoshiyuki Morioka (*previous spread*) takes on many roles within his business, from bookseller to curator. He works closely with authors and editors to draw out themes from each book.

With only one title on offer, the store focuses less on sales and more on providing an experience to customers. Exhibitions held at the bookstore could include talks and music, allowing customers to connect with each other, the book's author and Yoshiyuki himself over a glass of wine.

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Morioka Shoten sells about 50 titles a year, and Yoshiyuki reads and chooses each one. He chooses books that he likes, and his tastes are eclectic. He likes books that surprise or teach him something, and that have potential for community building. 'I once procured a book on parrots. I know almost nothing about parrots, but a community site formed on [social media] and a location was needed for communication. So, I offered the parrot book for sale and a lot of customers came.'

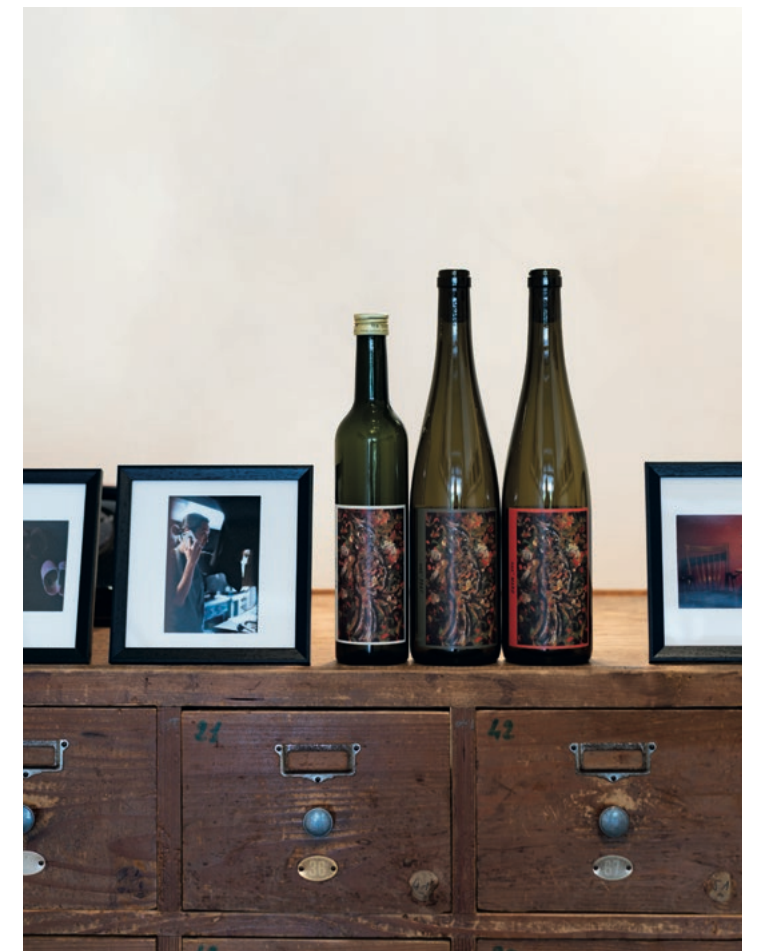
In an age of information overload, conspicuous consumption and general excess, Morioka Shoten is a response to a society that wants everything, all the time, immediately. Society has become more convenient, but it's perhaps also lost a dimension of community. At the bookstore, Yoshiyuki sharpens the focus, inviting his patrons to mix, mingle and contemplate one thing at a time.

'In the past 20 years,' he says, 'digital media has permeated every aspect of our lives.' He's quick to point out that he's not completely opposed to technology, and sometimes uses the internet to buy books or make travel reservations. 'I've benefited greatly but, on the other hand, I think it's important to call for a return to the analog world – and it should advance at the same immense rate as the digital. Books as print media and bookstores as real places are absolutely necessary.'

Of course, for a place that concentrates on in-person human connection and communication, the global pandemic was a shock. The store closed intermittently and, in the summer of 2020, Yoshiyuki thought it might have to shutter permanently. But he received some financial assistance and, during a lull in the pandemic, heard from people who wanted to return to events.

Yoshiyuki would like to start holding pop-up events overseas. He's done a few in Shenzhen and Shanghai, and had inquiries for New York, Florence and Seoul. 'I have no preferences about the place. I'd like to go anywhere.'

He remains hopeful about the future. 'I want to keep specializing in books, to continue in this same direction as much as I can,' says Yoshiyuki. 'To turn two-dimensional books into three-dimensional books, and meet the customer there.'



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01. For one exhibition, Morioka Shoten collaborated with an author and scent brand Tokyo Kodo to create a custom incense.

02. When Grey List by Masakazu Abe – a publication that catalogs 15,000 vintage records – was on sale, Morioka Shoten was transformed into a fictional record shop and played music mentioned in the book.

03. The store features books from any genre – one event was based around the cuisine of chef Yotaro Sasaki.



DIG DEEPER

Yoshiyuki Morioka found the initial aspects of opening a physical store quite intimidating, from finding the location to raising money. It was especially difficult considering that, to many people, it was a concept that seemed old-fashioned and doomed to failure in an increasingly digital world. For a starter pack of what you should have in place when opening a store, check out **Going physical** over on **page 228**.



Although it doesn't sell books online, the store does have a digital presence, using social media platforms to promote and document its exhibitions.