



# KEEPING ITS COOL

TORTOISE GENERAL STORE—THAT OASIS OF CALM  
IN THE MIDDLE OF CHAOTIC ABBOT KINNEY—  
POPS UP WITH A NEW WAY TO CHILL

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In 2003, when Taku and Keiko Shinomoto opened Tortoise General Store just six months after moving to Los Angeles from Tokyo, Abbot Kinney was still a sleepy neighborhood thoroughfare. Inspired by a local general store the couple had discovered in Hawaii, whose owners had impressed upon them the value of a slower-paced life, they christened their new space after the tortoise, a Japanese symbol of luck and longevity. So perhaps it's not too surprising that, 12 years on, despite Abbot Kinney's makeover, Tortoise General Store is not only surviving, but thriving too.

The selection of products, all designed or manufactured in Japan, includes housewares, stationery, kitchenware, eyeglasses, jewelry, bags and clothing, and ranges from traditional (Kameneko body scrubber brushes, Tenugui cloths) to avant-garde to hard-to-find (think Comme des Garçons scents). Merchandise is carefully arranged on wooden shelves designed and built by Taku, the former design director for Idée, a well-known Japanese furniture company (now owned by Muji).

But Tortoise is not immune to change. Under the direction of General Manager Herbert Johnson, there's more goods "for guys," such as leather goods

and cloth filters. A separate building out back, meanwhile, has been transformed into a gallery that sells one-of-a-kind items, including hand-thrown ceramics by Japanese artists. "Those things came from Taku's long relationships with the artisans," says Johnson, who takes twice yearly buying trips to Japan to source items for the front space. "I'm just looking for good stuff," he shrugs, downplaying his role. "Designer Sori Yanagi once said that ultimate function is the ultimate beauty, so if it's functional, it's already beautiful."

Joining the two spaces is a small courtyard that has become the setting for store's popular classes and workshops featuring Japanese artists represent Japan in the community. And now through September, on the fourth Sunday every month, there will be a pop-up ice cream shop from Sweet Rose Cream (celebrating their fifth birthday this May). Head chef, Shiho Yoshikawa, who came to the U.S. from Japan when she was 15 has created exclusive flavors, like month's hit Hojicha (roasted green tea) with black sesame waffle cone, not only express her passion for food, but also conjure her Japanese heritage. "People always want ice cream," laughs Johnson, "it's a little thing that mi

