

My Neighborhood in Roppongi

Photo feature by Sonia Katchian

Roppongi is a cosmopolitan section of Tokyo where intercity expressways, fast-food shops and discotheques seem to have obliterated any sense of "neighborhood." However, just a few steps from the main intersection, you will find a narrow road filled with shops and activities, just about as quaint as any in Japan. Come and visit my neighborhood.



Tokyo's skyline dwarfs my neighborhood—the narrow lane on the left.



Roppongi's main intersection



A minute away from the main crossing, the heartbeat of a typical Japanese neighborhood ticks away.

Sonia Katchian is an independent photographer based in Tokyo.

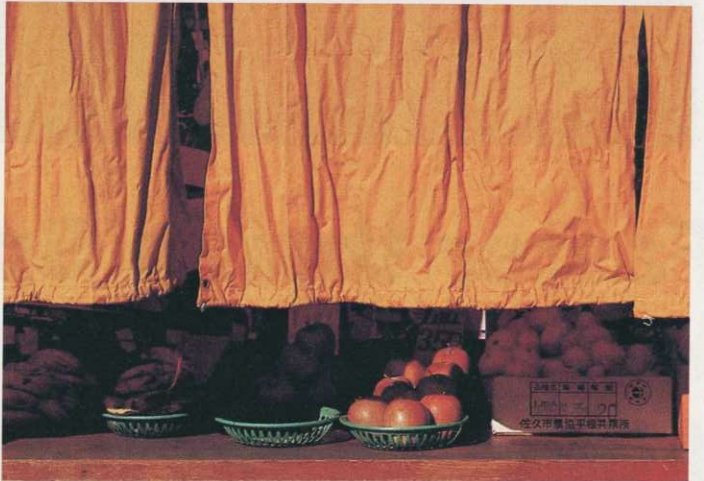
The neighborhood entered the 20th century last year when Mr. and Mrs. Kobayashi sold out their ma-and-pa grocery to the Seven-Eleven Japan Co. They say they are very happy with their new set-up.



We even have our own neighborhood shrine.



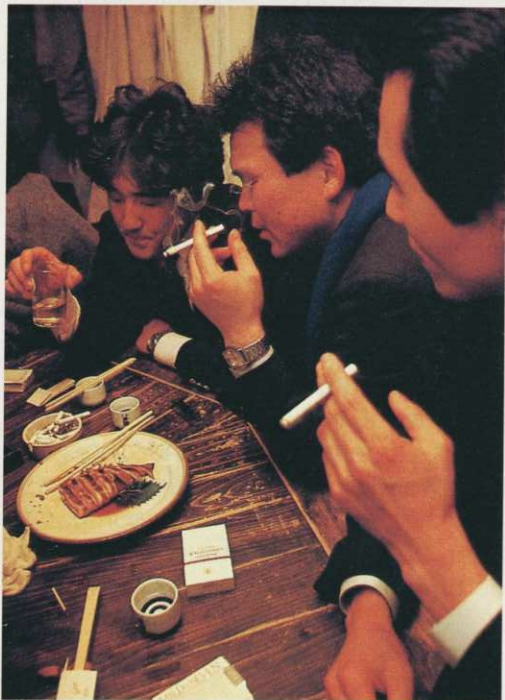
A neighborhood is not complete without a fishmonger. The Uoyoshi's shop is always immaculate and sparkling, and the fish so fresh they seem about to jump out of the case.



Some people prefer to shop at more old fashioned groceries, and the Yaosho's seem to fare quite well, even though they are right across the street from the Kobayashi's Seven-Eleven.



The Kobayashi family has had this rice shop since the Meiji era (19th century). Like most family-run operations, they live right behind their shop.



At the end of the day, most workers like to drop into an eating and drinking joint like this izakaya to wash away the day's strains.

... I will admit there's one thing missing from our street that one would normally find in any neighborhood in Japan: a public bathhouse. With modern baths in virtually every home in Roppongi, the ancient tradition of neighbors swapping stories while scrubbing each others' backs and taking long soaks has—shall we say—gone down the drain.