

New cafe opens for people looking for a low-tech gaming experience

BY DAREN ZOMERMAN, EDMONTON JOURNAL AUGUST 25, 2014



Randy Wong and Kellie Ho have realized their dream after they opened The Hexagon Board Game Cafe on Whyte Avenue this week. They have over 400 board games in stock for customers to use.

Photograph by: Shaughn Butts, Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - After four years of dreaming and researching, architectural designers Kellie Ho and Randy Wong opened The Hexagon Board Game Café this week.

Located on Whyte Ave. at 101st St. and with room for at least 50 people, the new café hopes to attract people who want to enjoy a throwback, low-tech gaming experience.

“It gets people away from all the electronic stuff,” Wong said. “I call it analogue gaming — something you can feel, and interact with.”

The highly popular strategy game Settlers of Catan is set up on the end of every table in the warm and inviting space. Long tables are meant to encourage groups to play or interact with people they may otherwise have never met, Ho said.

Wi-Fi is available, but the use of phones and laptops is not encouraged, Wong said.

“We just want to provide a nice environment for people to connect and unplug.”

According to Ho, this concept has been popular across the pond for the last 10 years, and is only recently making an entrance into American markets.

“This concept is not new,” she said. “It popularized in Europe and Asia 10 years ago. And of course, North America takes ten years to catch up to these kinds of things.”

Edmonton already has one successful board game café on 75th Street and 57th Avenue called Table Top Café which opened last September.

Ho and Wong said they came up with their idea after spending a year in Korea teaching English after the then-recent graduates had trouble finding jobs in their chosen field.

“It was one of those concepts when you’re travelling where you go, ‘I wish something like this was back home.’ So when we came back home we started doing research, and found out that one in Toronto had just opened up ... in 2010,” Ho said. “They’re called Snakes and Lattes, and now they’re like the grandfather of board game cafes in North America.”

A lack of funding kept the couple from getting their dream off the ground immediately after returning to Canada in 2010, Ho and Wong said. But they also wanted to find the ideal location to set up shop.

“We only ever considered Whyte Ave,” Ho said. “Based on who our target audience was, we wanted the university kids, young professionals like us, and there’s a lot of residential in this area.”

The location they chose was a clothing store, which meant that Ho and Wong had to strip and essentially retrofit the space into a café. To save costs they did as much of the work as possible themselves, including tearing up the floor and digging a trench for the plumbing, Wong said.

The couple will charge \$2.50 an hour per person to use their tables and play board games, which are also for sale at the front of the café.

dzomerman@edmontonjournal.com