



## Shenzhen's Shasi Village

“There’s an old woman who has a key. If you knock on her door, she will unlock the temple,” a man says standing in the alley outside his house. His words take a moment to sink in, more fitting for an adventure novel than Shenzhen’s Shasi Village.

Following the man’s instructions, we make our way to house 897 and ‘Aunt Xie,’ a lifelong village resident who has been charged with opening the doors of Guanyin Tian Hou Temple to anyone who asks.

Though Architectural Digest won’t be featuring the humble space’s four walls and modest shrine, the ‘temple’ is notable for being a Taoist site dedicated to a Buddhist god. It was rebuilt in 1829, according to a glass encased plaque that also notes a local man passed the highest level of imperial exams.

Thankfully, plaques in Chinese are placed at different historic sites in the village, because looks can be misleading: we assumed the building across from the temple dated from dynastic times, but Aunt Xie tells us it was actually built around the time she mar-

ried in the 1940s.

Down the alley from the temple is the Weitou well, a mid-Qing era well that is still in use. One of three historic wells in the area, its head is formed with granite blocks in a hexagonal shape. The water is reachable by hand and said to give cooked food a sweet flavor.

Shasi is a notable urban village because it didn’t succumb to the development that began in Shenzhen in the 80s when village landowners erected multi-story apartment buildings to cater to cash-strapped migrants looking to make it in the big city.

Instead, it has maintained some of the village rhythm with families leaving their doors open during meals, allowing passersby a glimpse into the domestic.

In Shasi’s arm-span wide alleyways you’ll find hunched elderly greeting neighbors, children playing with dogs and an air of the unexplored: the village is left blank on map apps and contemporary descriptions of the area are limited, even in Chinese.

Those looking for a more curated his-

tory experience can head to the nearby Hong Shang Temple and Shajing Oyster Cultural Gallery, which – judging from online accounts – is as exciting as it sounds.

The opening of new Line 11’s Shajing Station means Shasi is more accessible than ever, but it also means development in the area is likely to accelerate, with property owners speculating online that razing will begin sometime in 2017.

For anybody interested in a way of life vanishing from China’s cities, a trip to Shasi Village will provide plenty to photograph and recount, just make sure you go before it’s gone. **SG**

### How to get there:

#### FROM GUANGZHOU

From Guangzhou South Station (广州南站) take a train for one hour to Guangming City Station (光明城站) and take a taxi to Shajing Big Street (沙井大街, RMB50). Enter the village on the right.

#### FROM SHENZHEN

Ride Line 11 to Shajing Station (one hour and 20 minutes), from there take a taxi to Shajing Big Street (沙井大街, RMB15) and enter the village on the right, or simply walk 40 minutes from the subway.

