

Sari-Sari Archive

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My vision for this collection project began as a way to archive and reflect on the vibrant textures of daily life in the Philippines. Initially, I planned to focus on a collection of Jeepney photographs I took during a recent visit home. This idea shaped the early stages of the site's development: a simple layout of image rows anchored by a brightly colored header, using custom fonts based on Filipino hand-painted signage. Ultimately, however, the Jeepney photographs felt too precious to me to constrain within the structure of an overly simplified website. Their elaborate designs, symbolic motifs, and layered meanings didn't lend themselves easily to categorization. I had originally hoped to take a more data-oriented approach—dynamically mapping the locations where each photograph was taken—but I ran up against my own technical limitations. Instead, I turned to another rich visual subject: the sari-sari store.

Sari-sari stores are another ubiquitous feature of the Filipino landscape. They serve as hyperlocal nodes of goods, memory, and social exchange. Choosing a collection of food items allowed me to group things into familiar, everyday categories: pantry staples, beverages, canned goods, snacks, sweets, condiments, and fruits. I included 73 items in total, each representing a product often found on the crowded shelves of these micro-retail spaces. Decisions about what to include were intuitive and shaped by memory—brands and packaging I encountered growing up, items I saw recurring across different stores, and snacks or goods that carry specific cultural weight.

Categories like “snacks” or “sweets” highlight the playful packaging of Filipino treats, while “condiments” includes staple ingredients like soy sauce or sweet chili. My system of classification allows each button to be toggled into an active state: corresponding items remain at full opacity, while all others fade. Clicking anywhere outside the button area resets the full

collection. I was also able to assign multiple categories to a single item, allowing the filter system to reveal overlapping connections between ingredients.

In hindsight, I realize I could have structured the archive using a JSON object, with each item stored as a record containing its name, category, image path, and alt text. This would have allowed for cleaner code and more scalable filtering and rendering. Instead, I opted to use data-category attributes within the HTML. This was ultimately less elegant, but more accessible for my current technical skill level. I was able to achieve functional filtering by looping through the image elements in JavaScript.

Design decisions throughout were guided by my desire to create a skeuomorphic, nostalgic effect, as if you were browsing the aisles at a small sari-sari or oriental market. I used Flexbox to structure the layout: from arranging the buttons to creating horizontally scrollable rows of products. I wanted to evoke the layered, improvised, and sometimes chaotic nature of sari-sari displays. I added a warm gradient and series of logos to the footer to mimic the signage often found on these storefronts, and a transparent corrugated roof at the top of the page. An audio button cues the Filipino pop hit, “Spageti Song (feat. Joey De Leon),” which adds a layer of sensory familiarity to the browsing experience.

Ultimately, this project evolved to reflect not only the cultural texture of sari-sari stores, but also my own process of learning to work within structures, constraints, and different kinds of code/metadata. While I plan to revisit the Jeepney archive later, I found a lot of joy in building this site and finding new ways to organize, classify, and represent such a vivid, lived experience within a digital frame.