



TRASK BEDORTHA

technique traditionally uses individual letters made of lead (sometimes wood), which must be set in place by hand. With a mechanized press like Walker's, the washing machine motor powers rollers which spread a thin layer of ink across a metal plate. Once the type is set, the rollers ink the raised surface of the type and then move out of the way, while a padded plate holding the paper quickly oscillates to press against the type. The padded plate swings back, the paper is removed and the next piece inserted by hand, at a rate of about one per second. "It's a long, dirty process," says Walker, "but it's a really cool process."

Letterpress became obsolete during the 1980s as technology allowed anyone with a computer to desktop publish, but today, the allure of hand-set type has revived the craft. Walker studied design at the UO and acquired her business license for Twin Ravens Press in November 2007. Surprisingly, most of Walker's customers aren't from Eugene or even from Oregon – people from California to New York find her website, www.twinravenspress.com, through internet searching and word of mouth.

The advent of photopolymer platemaking has brought letterpress into the modern era: A negative of the text or image is made, fastened onto the plate and exposed to intense ultraviolet light. The parts that are exposed harden, and the rest becomes water-soluble and washes away, resulting in a hard, raised surface to which ink can be applied. "You can do really small type, or big images," says Walker. "Basically anything you can draw or design on a computer you can make a plate of this way."

For those seeking wedding invitations that can't be found anywhere else, a craft letterpress like Walker's represents the ultimate in customization. Walker's machine can emboss, perforate and die-cut, so there's not much she can't do for customers. "I'm willing to try just about anything they want," she says. "The nice thing about letterpress is you can print on any type of paper and substrate, like coasters and wood veneer, even fabric, if it's stiff enough."

Some of Walker's clients have requested invitations in the form of small, bound books with maps, die-cut paper envelope liners and matching reply cards, thank-you cards and placeholders for the table. Some have even planned enough in advance to have their dinner menus printed with matching designs. (Later, many of these clients hire her for baby announcements.) But this can take time, lots of it. Walker often works with clients for six to nine months to create their

wedding invitation package. "People expect this to be like a regular printing service, where you drop it off and pick it up three hours later," says Walker. "You have to plan in advance for this. I ask a lot of questions and try to get a feel for who they are and what they're celebrating."

Because the design work, platemaking and printing are done by hand, it is labor intensive and time consuming. Walker charges by the number of colors used (each color requires a separate plate), the size of the paper and the quantity. Walker has created wedding invitation packages from \$200 to \$2,000. "Budget is definitely a factor for a lot of people, and I try to help them as much as I can," she says. "I try to give them a preliminary quote and ask if that's do-able for them. If not, then I make suggestions to make it work for them."

At Nick & Nora's Classic Interiors in downtown Eugene, manager Heather Upton works with nationally known companies catering to clients who desire the customization and appeal of letterpress. "The people that come here, I find, want something that's truly special that defines them, not something they can go anywhere and pick off the shelf," Upton says. The store's bridal area is lined with albums from major companies and designers such as William Arthur, Crane and Co., and Vera Wang, all of which have created customizable designs for their own letterpresses. Upton can offer brides a choice of just about any design in four printing processes that vary in price: letterpress, engraving, thermography (using heat to transfer letters or images to a sheet of paper) or digital printing. "Brides can't always budget what they want for invitations," says Upton. "I have options. My companies have some great design elements in a price structure that people can afford."

Most of the invitations that Upton helps her clients select are priced from \$2 to \$5 apiece (a digital printing option can be as low as 98 cents per card), and the customizable options allow brides to get exactly what they want, with proofs arriving in about three weeks. "I think that people are really wanting to go back to the special handmade art of our world," she says. "People are tired of disposable things. They're tired of mass production. They want less in their life, but they want more beautiful, well-constructed things."

Twin Ravens Press, 345-3857,
www.twinravenspress.com

Nick and Nora's Classic Interiors, 484-5522,
191 E. Broadway, Eugene,
www.nickandnoraclassicinteriors.com

Love Letters

Letterpress printers offer beautiful customization
BY VANESSA SALVIA

Emanating from Kristin Walker's garage is a rhythmic clatter, a sort of thump and squeal of metal clanging against metal. It's the sound of her letterpress machine, built in 1912 by Ohio company Chandler and Price. Walker has modified the machine a tad, replacing the foot-operated

treadle with a small washing machine motor, but to operate the printer she still has to manually start it by spinning a wagon wheel-sized rotor.

Letterpress is one of the oldest forms of printing – the Gutenberg Bible was letterpressed in the mid-1400s. The

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