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ABOUT GALLEY GAB...

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■ All unsigned articles are those of the editor. Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of *Galley Gab*.

Letterpressing? No, it's Steamrolling!



There are all kinds of presses these days but have you ever considered using a two-ton steamroller to print your linoleum engravings?

The [San Francisco Center for the Book](http://www.sanfranciscocenterforthebook.org) and their annual fundraiser, Roadworks, uses such a beast to print! Local artists are invited to contribute a 3'x3' linoleum engravings to be printed at this annual event; the last was held on September 8, 2007.

The prints are sold at their banquet to raise funds. About 800 people attended the recent event.

Photos: At the top, left, the steamroller drives over the print. Left to right: Makeready. Block placed on road; dampened paper placed; blanket over paper and then carpet over blanket. The finished print emerges and shows the finished print. Now that's perfect makeready!

NEW LETTERPRESS PRINTERS: All aboard with Boxcar Press

By Jessica Spring

The first time I met Harold Kyle was at the Great Northern Printer's Fair north of Chicago nearly ten years ago. In general, folks selling things were men over fifty, surrounded by heaps of presses, type and other letterpress equipment. In stark contrast was Harold, not looking a day over twenty. He sat at a table with a small proofing press demonstrating his Boxcar Base, showing samples of exquisitely printed halftones, and patiently explaining an invention that has changed the face of our industry.

Boxcar Press makes and sells everything for letterpress printers to utilize photopolymer plates: a digital process that creates a plate from a computer file that can be mounted for relief printing on a cylinder or platen press. BB (Before

Boxcar) there were Pat Reagh's Patmags, which hold metal-backed plates in place with magnets but are prone to plate creep without the extra help of messy Spray-mount adhesive. Bunting Bases are incredibly strong magnetic bases that eliminate the creep, but are quite expensive and acquired through reps with minimum orders—better suited to large commercial shops. AB (After Boxcar) small shops have the option of investing in the smallest Boxcar Base for \$150. Send a digital file to Boxcar and get back an adhesive-backed plate. Peel off the backing, adhere to the grided base (without the metal backing, it's translucent and can be aligned on the grid). If the file is two colors without tight registration, it's simple and economical: Cut out the second color like puzzle pieces from the plate; run the first pass and wipe the plate clean; then pop back in the

pieces for the second color and peel off the outer plate to run the second color with perfect registration. Novice printers can jump in without much equipment or experience, and they have been, in record numbers.

Besides Boxcar Press, Harold and his wife Debbie Urbanski own and operate **Bella Figura**, providing "artisan letterpress" for wedding invitations and special events. Most clients shop through the website, which presents an array of choices in design, paper, ink colors and typefaces to create customized invitations.

Since my first introduction to Harold back in the Midwest, he's equipped my studio with a platemaker and I've worked with him and Debbie as one of their Bella designers. Their renown rapport with customers may have some basis in experience, as Debbie and Harold have been through a wedding and the birth of their son, Jasper, while nurturing two growing companies. I asked them to give GG readers a glimpse into the businesses of Boxcar Press and Bella Figura with insights into the commercial letterpress realm.



A panoramic view of the Boxcar Press taken in early 2007.

How have you seen letterpress with photopolymer evolve since starting Boxcar, then Bella Figura?

Harold: When I started Boxcar Press in 1999, many people had already started the ball rolling by using photopolymer for letterpress. The process was not ideal, though. Most everyone was using steel-backed photopolymer plates on magnetic bases. Most people at the time were also making their own plates with

an odd collection of processing equipment—retrofitted Nu-Arc platemakers or Home Depot DIY projects, for instance. Plate quality varied tremendously and a lot of printers instinctively distrusted photopolymer because their first experience processing a plate was often negative—their plates had poor detail and were difficult to print.

Nowadays, our plastic-backed plates and gridded bases have become very popular, allowing easier registration and handling of pho-

topolymer. Printers now can order perfectly detailed plates through professional platemaking services, avoiding all the experiments in the kitchen sink. Gerald Lange has gone through three editions of a technical manual for photopolymer and has created an active online community devoted to photopolymer. A lot of the barriers holding printers back have come down, and new printers are much more likely to go straight to polymer without any apprenticeship handling lead type. In the commercial printing realm, customer expectations for letterpress printing have made impression much deeper than what was common five or ten years ago.

In 1999 I remember clearly thinking I had arrived late to the party, and that the heyday of letterpress resurgence was about to end. I feared every batch of bases that I manufactured would be the last. I only ordered ten to fifteen bases at a time, which cost more but protected my neck if everyone suddenly gave up on letterpress. A lot was uncertain at that time. Presses were still being sold for scrap metal and no one was sure where letterpress was going. Things look a lot brighter these days!

Debbie: Debate on the quality of polymer seems to have subsided—it seems a given now that polymer, when processed and printed correctly, can provide just as good printing as lead type. We see a lot more designers become letterpress printers now, where a few years ago people seemed to come to printing with a printmaking/art background.



Boxcar Press sells plastic-backed photopolymer plates that are easily cut with scissors.

Harold: Fine press printers are also using photopolymer more frequently.

Any projections for where it will go? Will thermography be the next new thing?!

Harold: Thermography will not go away, will it? I can speak in the commercial printing realm:

* Customer expectations of “deep impression letterpress” has gotten to be about as

deep as technically possible. I don’t think that impression can go any deeper without cracking paper, which is where any sensible printer would stop adding impression.

* Quality and crispness of printing will continue to become more important as customers become more savvy about what letterpress should look like.

* High service, high quality, high price will continue to be the formula for letterpress success. Anyone who lowers the bar on any of these three aspects will suffer going forward.



Inking the 10x15 Heidelberg Windmill locked up with a 9"x12" Standard Boxcar Base and KF95 plates.



Harold, Debbie and Jasper.

Debbie: As mass-produced products (made in China) multiply, there does seem to be a continued movement back to good old-fashioned handmade craft—which is good for letterpress.

Do you do any handset printing or is it all photopolymer? (Any twinges of doubt from Harold for releasing the photopolymer beast and making it so easy for newbies to become potential competitors?)

Harold: We are exclusively digital letterpress: all our handset type is on loan to a local school. I regret that (from a business perspective) we cannot justify the time-intensive but



All plates made for Boxcar Press's platemaking customers are tested on a Vandercook Universal III before quality inspection by two different employees.

personally satisfying art of hand typesetting. I have no guilt because photopolymer has helped letterpress as a whole grow and thrive. I rest assured that next door in Skaneateles, New York, Michael Bixler has no shortage of work running Monotype composition casters.

I'm happy to have competitors because it's a sign of a healthy market for letterpress. Ten years ago this healthy, growing market was far from certain: letterpress could have easily become another academic exercise along the lines of collotype or photogravure (and the poor presses that would have gotten junked!). We're all working together to keep letterpress from obsolescence.

Debbie: One of the cool things about our jobs is talking with new printers who just got their first letterpress, or are restoring their first press. They are in love with letterpress!

They cannot wait to get the ink on the press and to start printing. We get to interact with that enthusiasm every day. Boxcar wouldn't be around if letterpress wasn't growing like it is. I like to think that all of us letterpress printers are pulling potential customers away from offset, thermography, engraving—each letterpress customer is one for Team Letterpress.

Do you make a distinction between fine press work and commercial job work, considering what customers may/may not be familiar with in terms of letterpress printing?

Harold: The depth of impression is the most tangible difference between the two types of work. The fine press world is less likely to ask for a deep impression. Otherwise, we strive to impart the same preciousness to each. And more to the point, commercial work and fine press work both have the same workflow in our shop.

Debbie: A little about our commercial job work: During one job interview with an art school candidate, we explained how we letterpress print a lot of wedding invitations, and he was less than excited. He said of course he'd rather be printing something else. (He didn't get the job). We really are excited about all the letterpress printing we get to do at our shop—wedding invitation work keeps our presses busy and healthy, and we think they're really, really pretty too! Our wedding invitation cus-

tomers seem to appreciate the old-fashioned craft that goes into our work. We've had clients cry on the phone because they were so excited about the invitations that they received. Our wedding customers have sought out letterpress and I think we owe a lot to them for the health of our letterpress community. That said, we also love when we get to print poetry, since that's how we got into printing to begin with.

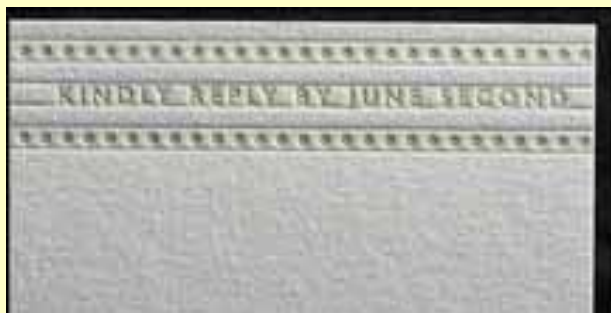
Harold: My first print run was for a book of Debbie's poetry. I always figured we would be printing more poetry, but the boom in letterpress wedding invitations has allowed us more stability than poetry would have ever allowed. Eventually we'll get back in publishing



more writing, but in the meantime we try to help the fine press community by discounting platemaking for fine press printing. I'm very proud of the fine editions that have been printed from photopolymer plates we've processed.

Both web sites do a great job of educating customers—be it newbie printers ordering photopolymer or brides navigating invitation choices. Are you responsible for that aspect of both businesses?

Debbie: Oh my, I'm flattered...I will say we're launching a new Boxcar site that will be so much better! I'm so excited about it. We have been working on it for about a year now, so hopefully it will be done in the next year. We'll have expanded Q&As, expert tips for digital file preparation, a Boxcar blog, and some gorgeous photos of presses. The web sites do seem to connect with people, and I'm so pleased about that—we've never been interested in being an anonymous, corporate business, and we try to put some of our personality



and love into our web sites.

Harold: I think people will really love Debbie's new site. The platemaking section of the website will be much more high tech, and give our customers a lot more visibility of their order during our processing.

You both seem surprisingly cheerful about potentially difficult clients: the bride and the mother-of-the-bride. What are some challenges you've had, especially working long distance via the web?

Harold: For some reason, the brides and mother-of-the-brides we work with are usually wonderful people—as long as we offer a quality product and provide outstanding service. Weddings are stressful. Anyone who has planned their own wedding can understand this. In general, brides are looking for prompt service and satisfying decisions. They want reliability. We do what we can to make the wedding planning in their hectic lives easier.

Debbie: And don't forget the grooms! It seems a trend for the grooms to have their own wedding projects like the invitations....

Communicating color long-distance is probably our biggest challenge, especially since color is so important to bridal clients—and how to explain the natural variation in color that's part of letterpress? We've tried ink jet color charts, and color laser printed color charts, but I think we've finally come to terms that nothing

communicates letterpress color like letterpress-printed ink swatches. We've also tried to do a better job explaining letterpress variation on our web site and in the PDF proofs we supply customers. Sometimes people are so used to seeing the consistency of offset printing in a mass-produced world that they are surprised by the subtle (and beautiful!) variations that letterpress can produce. Other challenges can be avoided, I think, by communicating details in writing, using a contract, and providing appropriately attentive service.

In terms of your views on deep impression, do you think it's a short-term fad or is it here to stay? What's your forecast on the deluge of new "commercial" printers (is it like your old neighborhood video store, now replaced by Blockbuster and Netflix?)

Harold: Oh, deep impression is here to stay. Impression is what defines letterpress in the eyes of the customers who are pumping money into our old craft. It helps distinguish letterpress from the (less expensive) offset.

That commercial printers are getting into letterpress is a sign of a healthy letterpress market, and sure beats commercial printers scrapping our equipment. Even in the world of commercial printing, there is no Blockbuster or Netflix, is there? The printing industry is remarkably diverse and decentralized, and it's a great environment for entrepreneurs. As long

as there's money in letterpress printing, you will see interest from other corners of the enterprising printing world. I think their investments in letterpress are a good thing, as long as the quality of the product and the level of service remain high.

What's the most common error when clients submit files for photopolymer, and how do you handle it?

Harold: That's easy: we're sent grayscale images instead of the preferred Bitmap images. When someone scans artwork into Photoshop, it looks great on screen when it's in the grayscale color mode. Unfortunately, grayscale artwork produces a halftone on a printing plate, which makes crisp line art look jagged when printing. Letterpress images should usually be sent to us in the bitmap color mode (not to be confused with the BMP file format, though, which should be avoided!). Ironically, bitmap images often look worse on screen, but at a high resolution they make a better printing plate.

We're always looking for this common mistake when we receive image files from our customers. Often, we're able to make the conversion to bitmap ourselves, but if not we send an email and make a call to try and get a new file within a customer's timeframe. We do whatever we can to not delay the original scheduled ship date. We don't charge extra for this, but it's an important part of our service.

I remember as a graphic design intern—right out of college—at Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis, I made this same mistake before I sent a design to press. Boy was I disappointed, as was Intermedia Arts! But I always wished that someone in the prepress department at our printer would have called to point out my mistake. They would have saved the day (and my internship). The problem is that schools that teach graphic design don't often teach students how to prepare a job for printing. We're very sensitive to this fact and try to use our letterpress experience to avoid costly mistakes for our customers.

Any other thoughts about work going forward? Folks that helped you get here?

Debbie: For the last few months, we're really trying hard to make a commitment to the environment (and we're going to make more of a commitment in the upcoming year as well). We want our business to do good—for the letterpress community, and for the larger global community too. We donate 1% of sales of our Bella Figura invitation to environmental charities, and we recently became wind-powered and carbon neutral. Highly recommended reading: "Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman" by Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia. It's an eye-opening inspiration for the power of change that a business—or one person—

can do. We'd love to start a certification/organization for letterpress printers that show the printing was done in an environmental way as possible—this would be good for the Earth, for our community, and for our business. Interested printers—please contact me!

Harold: The letterpress community in Minnesota was so helpful and giving when I first got into letterpress. I'm very indebted to the printers who shared their thoughts and techniques with me. I'd like to give a shout out to Paulette Myers-Rich, Chip Schilling, Phil Gallo, and Mary Jo Pauly. I hope that through Boxcar we're able to help give back to the community and share our techniques...keep the flame going. Letterpress pulled through its lean years by the strength of its community, and the community is the key to letterpress's survival going forward.

Debbie: I also think it's great that, in letterpress, there are so many women-owned businesses, and women working with young children too. How great is that? I wish there could be two national conferences for us:

*a fine press and commercial letterpress printing conference, where the two communities can meet, mingle, and become friends

*a get together for letterpress moms (and dads) and their kids – this would just be fun, though also I want to hear other parents' secrets for getting work done with their little ones around....

The letterpress community is such a great one and we're so happy to be part of it.

If only they could have held on for another 40 years!

The clipping to the right was sent to me by Elizabeth Nevin (Briar Press) and

FROM THE EDITOR



MIKE O'CONNOR

she said she found it in a Kelsey catalog issued probably in the early 1960s. With a few word changes they might just be able to get away with putting that little notice out today.

At one time, most notably I think in the late 19th century, some press manufacturers were being taken to task for selling presses to amateur printers. These "amateurs" were competing against the commercial printers albeit on a small level. It sure riled some folks!

But the advertisement is interesting. If this did appear in the early 1960s and it is claiming that in 10 years there would be a shortage of printers—little did they know that in 10 years there would basically be no need for letterpress printers at all. At the start of the 1970s letterpress was rapidly leaving the scene of commercial printing.

If Kelsey were still around and making presses, that clipping would still be viable today with a few word changes.

Look who is doing letterpress printing now and what they are doing and what kind of presses are in demand?

Kelsey could make a fortune selling their presses (maybe a few revisions), type and all the other goodies in those delicious catalogs they used to publish.

It was especially interesting and amusing to read the "Ask yourself these questions" at the bottom of the sheet.

If you could post that on the web to the letterpress wannabes, it would probably be pretty powerful stuff and Kelsey would be swamped with orders.

But then again, maybe there was something in the wind even back when this advertisement was issued. The fact that there appeared to be a shortage of printers coming along might tell the tale of the handwriting on the wall.

Thinking back, I am thrilled that I was at least involved in the very end of commercial letterpress. In 1964 I graduated from a two-year trade school in printing. Yes, you guessed it, letterpress most of the way. We had a little training in offset. It was fun for me but sure some poor training for a career.

Lucky for me a few years out of school my career took a radical change.

Still, seeing the Kelsey promotion brought a thought to mind: "Gosh if old Kelsey could have just hung around another 40 years—then a gold mine!"

There's a SHORTAGE OF PRINTERS

Headline in printing trade paper:

REPLACEMENT OF RETIRING PRINTING PERSONNEL A CURRENT PROBLEM

A survey shows 30% of present printers are due to retire within the next ten years, with **NOT ENOUGH NEW ONES** coming along to take their places.

This shortage will have to be filled. It presents a golden opportunity to any young—or older—man who wants to better himself. With employing printers bidding up wages—and selling prices—the one man shop will have more work offered him than ever. The kind of printing that you can do from the beginning—cards, stationery, tickets, programs and such—will be neglected by the bigger printer who finds his costs up and time at a premium. He will concentrate increasingly (as many do now) on bigger and more complicated jobs, with large runs. He will be glad to see you take the smaller business, and **YOU** with your inexpensive outfit can make a profit on it. And, you'll be lining yourself up for bigger work later, if you wish.

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS

Are you willing to give up some temporary pleasure so you can put a few dollars in a project which will yield you a far greater return?

Do you want to advance in a congenial, well paying business, or are you putting off the decision, perhaps never to go any further?

One—two—three—five years from now, will you still be promising yourself you'll get going—with priceless time already wasted—gone forever?

DON'T PUT THIS OFF. To get anywhere, you've GOT TO GET STARTED.

A Kelsey Outfit is a **COMPLETE** One Man Shop, and can be obtained only from The Kelsey Company, Meriden, Conn.

© 1964

RICHARD J. HOFFMAN

1912-1989

A man to be remembered

By ROBERT TROGMAN

Recently a flurry of interest appeared over the book "When A Printer Plays" by Richard "Dick" Hoffman. The book was several years in the making and finally completed in 1987. During that period Dick was suffering the pains of cancer that haunted him for more than 20 years yet he produced many fine books. He told me that his activity in his home print shop was the main factor in keeping him alive after his retirement from California State University, Los Angeles.



This article could deal more into his personal and family life as I was frequently on the scene being close to Dick and his wife Ruth. If I was asked to describe Dick he would be first a remarkable teacher, secondly an extremely talented typographer and a man who lived his religion.

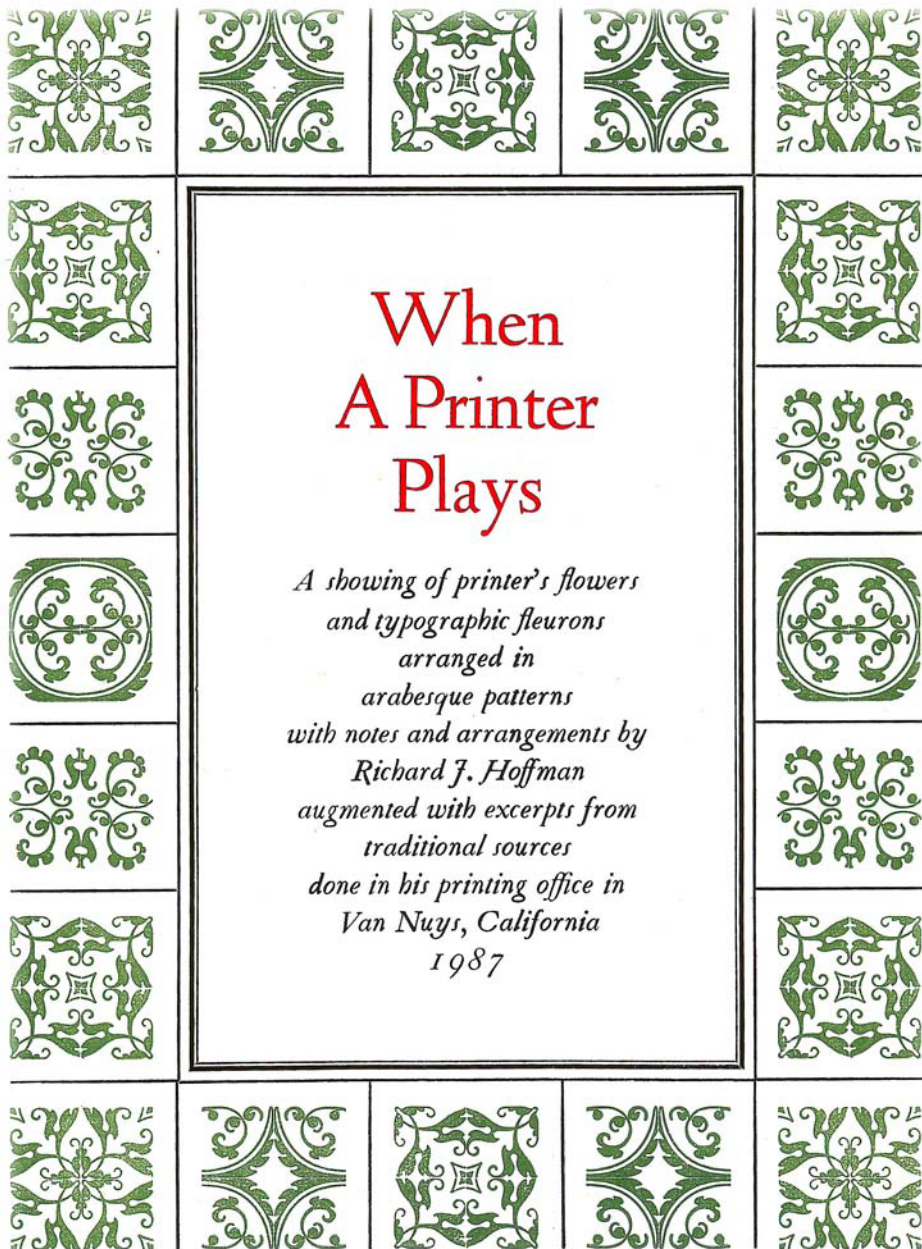
Since "When A Printer Plays" was a limited edition and out of print I felt that the book should be scanned. I called Judy Robbins, the eldest daughter and asked her permission to do the scanning. She said, "you should since the book is out of print and the younger generation should have the opportunity to recognize her fathers talents."

As for illustrations I've included a few of the book pages. I really could write a large article about Dick Hoffman's influence on my life. The least I could have done for him was to name my son Richard.

If there is any interest in receiving the CD of the scanned book, in pdf, you can email me: rtrugman@dc.rr.com

When A Printer Plays

*A showing of printer's flowers
and typographic fleurons
arranged in
arabesque patterns
with notes and arrangements by
Richard J. Hoffman
augmented with excerpts from
traditional sources
done in his printing office in
Van Nuys, California
1987*





When a Printer Plays



FASCINATING—kaleidoscopic—ever changing are the serendipitous arabesques that result from arranging, then rearranging, inverting, adding or eliminating the small decorative pieces of type called fleurons or printers' flowers; all without remotely exhausting the constantly changing visual patterns that are created during their composition. These bits of the type founder's art are almost as old as type itself. Many of the earliest specimens of printing show the fleurons used to embellish and add interest to the text. It was inevitable that enterprising compositors would quickly experiment with assembling the flowers into groups, forming headbands, initials, and tailpieces. They had the examples of the book binder's work on the tooled covers of hand-

lettered volumes for guidance. The lovely Arabian designs were known and were later cast into type; today these same designs are still being used. The most popular series is named for an early punch-cutter and type founder, Robert Granjon, who worked in the early 1500s. The arabesque at the top of this page and the initial are made with today's version of the Granjon ornaments in the 36 and 18 point sizes. Other designs used today are almost as old and their ancestry has been traced back by scholars to very early sources.

Today's printers have access to this rich mine of decorative material, augmented by several hundred years of foundry output by later designers. These accumulated patterns have been used (and misused) with more or less frequency over the years. Today they are somewhat out of fashion for general printing purposes but show up in period pieces and so-called fine press editions.

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COPY FROM PAGE NINE:

"Fascinating—kaleidoscopic—ever changing are the serendipitous arabesques that result from arranging, then rearranging, inverting, adding or eliminating the small decorative pieces of type called fleurons or printers' flowers; all without remotely exhausting the constantly changing visual patterns that are created during their composition. These bits of the type founder's art are almost as old as type itself. Many of the earliest specimens of printing show the fleurons used to embellish and add interest to the text. It was inevitable that enterprising compositors would quickly experiment with assembling the flowers into groups, forming headbands, initials, and tailpieces. They had the examples of the bookbinder's work on the tooled covers of hand-lettered volumes for guidance. The lovely Arabian designs were known and were later cast into type, today these same designs are still being used. The most popular series is named for an early punch-cutter and type founder, Robert Granjon, who worked in the early 1500s. The arabesque at the top of this page and the initial are made with today's version of the Garnjon ornaments in the 36 and 18-point sizes. Other designs used today are almost as old and their ancestry has been traced back by scholars to very early sources.

"Today's printers have access to this rich mine of decorative material, augmented by several hundred years of foundry output by later designers. These accumulated patterns have been used (and misused) with more or less frequency over the years. Today they are somewhat out of fashion for general printing purposes but show up in period pieces and so-called fine press editions."

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It is a source of regret that the designers of some of the commonly used typographic flowers and classic decorative designs are unknown. The many type foundries along with the monotype and linotype companies both in the United States and Europe created ornaments concomitantly with their tremendous outpouring of new type styles. Leafing through the old type specimen books one can find the source or inspiration for much of the decorative material that the machine typesetting firms reworked or copied, thus their origins are clouded. Sometimes, as in the case of the Weiss types, the ornaments were also created by the designer, Professor Emil Rudolf Weiss, and are so named. However, many of the single units are parentless but still add measureably to the resources of the creative typographer. Careful scrutiny will lead the reader to discover these charming single ornaments, generally centerpieces, scattered throughout the arrangements.

Photo-typesetting has all but driven traditional letterpress composition out of the field. While typographic decoration can be and is produced photographically, the ease of combining the metal squares of type and in manipulating their sequence seems to limit this form of typographic "play" to the time-honored hand composition method. And play it is. There is no justification for the complexity of some of the assemblies that are shown in the following pages. A simple grouping could easily satisfy all needs for ornament whose main function should be to make the printed words of the text more attractive. Yet, once the fleurons are brought together and a proof pulled, it is almost impossible not to try other arrangements, units turned in different directions, one flower substituted for another. Thus the arabesques are modified, sometimes grow, and usually be-

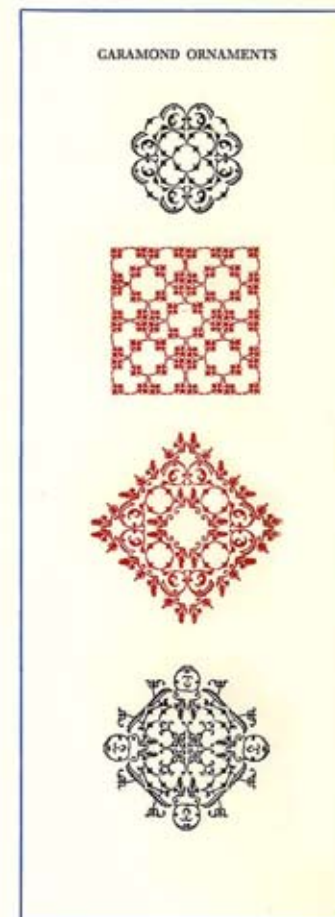
come increasingly complex. The basically simple forms (which are legion) have not been included because they are almost self-evident. Most of the time they were the starting point from which the more intricate solutions evolved.

There are over 200 arabesque settings in this printing. This number could easily be enlarged by simply substituting a different unit in each design, or reversing the order of the type pieces or adding one or eliminating a pair, *ad infinitum*. Often the design shown is the reluctant choice of one of three or four equally satisfactory versions, each slightly different, that evolved during the many trials and proofings that each setting suffered.

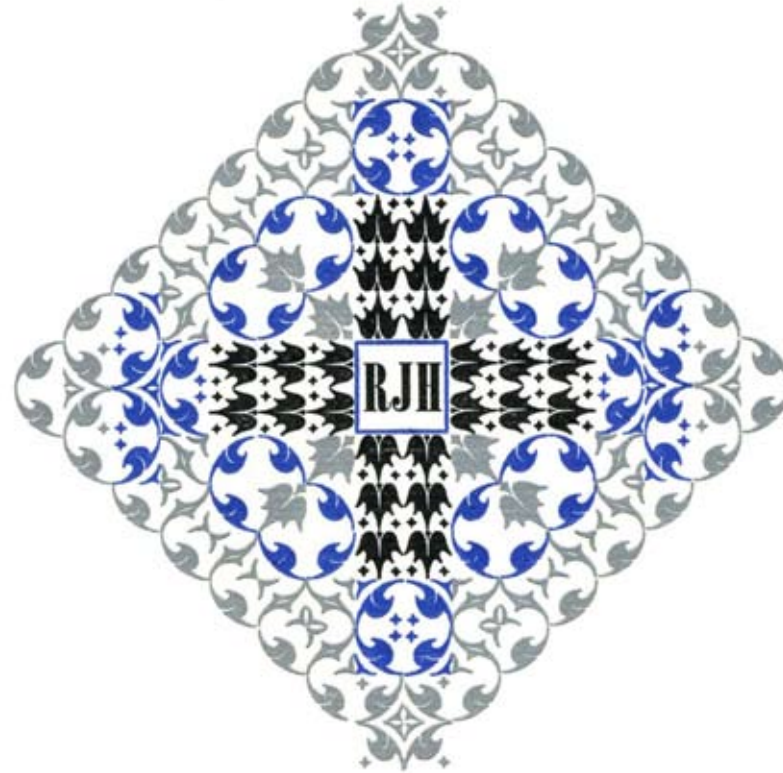
Many of the arabesques in this book are the result of such developmental effort. The first step is to choose a series of related typographical decorative material as the basis for the design. Selecting units, usually four, that combine into a center-piece, other members of the type family are set around the center and a proof is taken and the result studied. Seldom is the first arrangement satisfactory. Some fleurons must be changed, some inverted, some added, some deleted; many additional proofs are pulled. Often the elimination of one of the decorative pieces of type results in a white area that relieves the busy appearance and sparkles the composition. Sometimes the unexpected joining of pictorial elements in the type flowers when joined in other than the usual manner creates a fascinating visual form—a happy accident that results in a design quite different from that of the original plan.

Most typographical arabesques shown in this collection are symmetrical; they need not be. The type material could have easily been arranged in wider-than-deep rectangles, such as headbands, or in inverted triangles

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RICHARD J. HOFFMAN
Printer