

THE Voice

Everything you need to know for design



THE TYPE ISSUE!

New Color
Exhibits
Opening –
and where to
find them.

**Bill Moran
explains why
wood type
is making
a comeback**

THE Voice

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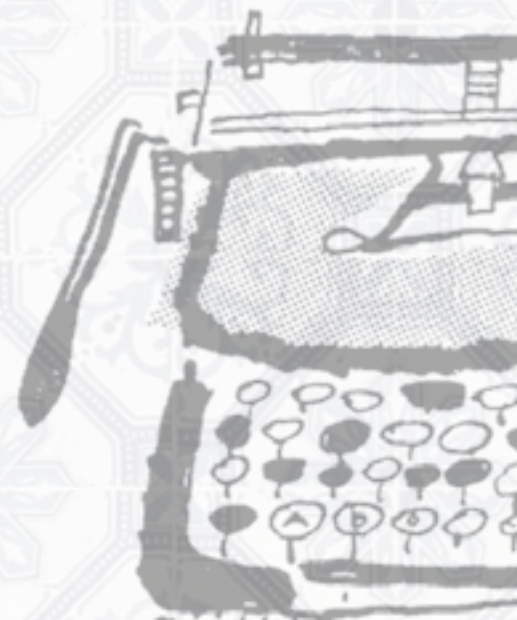
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When Wood Trumped Metal:

An Interview
with Bill Moran

BY STEVEN HELLER

Wood type is back—and it's too heavy to go anywhere, anyway. While there are collections throughout the United States, the most formidable is housed at the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum, in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, at the site of what was once the largest manufacturer of wood type in the country. Dedicated to the preservation, study, production and printing of wood type, the Hamilton is sure make an impression on any typography enthusiast. And for the wood type lover, a trip to the museum is a must—the perfect excursion for a spring or summer's day. To get an insider's perspective, we spoke to Bill Moran, owner and founder of Blinc Publishing, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Moran is a third-generation letterpress printer and a printing historian who teaches typography at the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Through the UMN he leads a three-week European type history tour that showcases the birth of printing and rare books in Spain, Germany and Italy. His work has been published and exhibited nationally, and he is a co-author of *Hamilton Wood Type: A History in Headlines*.



“If you’re going to talk about Hamilton, you have to talk about the community that founded it.”

Heller: Let’s start with basics. What is wood type? And why was it used rather than metal?

Moran: The first known wood type catalog to appear in the U.S. was published by Darius Wells, in 1828. Wood type has been used in various ways for hundreds of years, but the serious production began in the States with the expansion of the American frontier. Printers found that as larger type was required for newspaper headlines and advertising, lead type was simply too heavy to manufacture in larger sizes. So, using a router or a pantograph, type makers would cut the type from a master template based on the styles that were in vogue at the time (see video).

Heller: Tell me about the Hamilton Wood Type Museum. How much type does it have, and how was it acquired?

Moran: The Hamilton Manufacturing Company was founded in 1880 in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, and the museum was established in 1999.

They have 30,000 square feet of space and a 4,500 sq. ft. printing studio, making it one of the largest working printing museums in the world. Since opening they’ve hosted hundreds of printers, historians and designers who are drawn to the million and a half pieces of wood type in the collection. The type ranges from a quarter of an inch to 5 feet tall. Hamilton has had many donations and purchased large collections over the years, so sometimes it comes one drawer at a time and sometimes one print shop at a time.

Heller: Who brought the museum to life?

Moran: If you’re going to talk about Hamilton, you have to talk about the community that founded it. With sheer determination local volunteers and the museum’s technical director Greg Corrigan have preserved and nurtured one of the most important collections of printing history in the U.S. These are generous people who host countless visitors every year. (And if you visit, be sure to get an ice cream sundae across the street—it was invented there.)

Heller: Cool (no pun intended). When we think about wood type, often it conjures heavy slab serifs and ornamental decorative material. Is there a standard the museum maintains in terms of what is collected, or is the sky the limit?

Moran: Hamilton is open to wood type donations of any kind. If they purchase collections, it’s because of the quality or quantity. A key development in the past few years has been the acquisition of hand-cut, wood and linoleum advertising plates. In 2005 the museum purchased a 1,500-plate collection from a defunct printer, and the array of sizes and subject matter rivals that of Hatch Show Print, in Nashville. In fact, [Hatch Show Print manager] Jim Sherraden has visited a few times to advise and help appraise the collection. The typography and illustration captured in these blocks are an amazing showcase of the commercial art of the 1930s to 1940s. The skill of the designers, wood cutters and printers who made and used these blocks is every bit as sophisticated as what we’re doing today in terms of trapping, overprinting and the incorporation of lettering.

Heller: Wood type was reintroduced to designers by, among other scholar/designers, the late Rob Roy Kelly. Have there been any other breakthroughs since his work in the history of the form?

Moran: I wouldn’t say there have been breakthroughs, but wood type has definitely attracted the attention of serious typographers, including a cool project by Matthew Carter, who designed a Latin-style face as a two-color font to be cut at Hamilton. Matthew’s technical demands for the face forced us to look past the traditional pattern making and routing, and we’ve incorporated a computer-driven router to achieve the optical effects Matthew was looking for. Other than that, Rob Roy Kelly’s American Wood Type continues to inspire us with the talent and ingenuity shown by the early wood-type makers like

Darius Wells and George Nesbitt. They made breakthroughs in styles that are still the benchmarks that we look to today.

Heller: At Hamilton you work with students to create specimens, but what other ongoing projects have you initiated?

Moran: The project I'm most excited about right now is a first-time printing of an 1893 plaque that Hamilton made for the Columbia Exposition in Chicago. It features 48 different wood fonts, measures 51" x 22" and boasts the smallest wood type ever made. The plaque is the only known copy that exists, and we needed to print it without getting ink on it. After experimenting with various offsetting techniques we settled on shrinkable window film as a barrier and printed through it. It gives a bit of a ghostly effect but the posters are really handsome and we are able to preserve and share this treasure of typography.

Another exciting initiative is bringing in volunteer groups to clean, sort and classify type from the collection. Over the museum's 10-year history we've had a lot of type that's been donated or purchased that we simply haven't had time to inventory. And with the help of friends, and current and former students, we've embarked on a large-scale effort to dig into boxes that have been unopened for 30 or 40 years. The exciting thing about this initiative is that not only do we have a clearer idea of the extent of the collection, but we're also labeling and storing the type in a way that will be easier for folks to access the type, who want to print with

it later.

Heller: How do you feel about the digitization of wood type? I mean, as with the letterpress purists, is there a line in the sand between the real thing and the approximated thing?

Moran: Well, I think there's a broad spectrum of practitioners who are reviving wood typefaces. On one end you've got Jonathan Hoefler and Tobias Frere-Jones, who've elevated the classic families of wood type to a suite of fonts that not only acknowledge where they come from but also bring a level of discipline and beauty to a craft that wasn't possible when type makers were working in wood. On the other end of the spectrum you've got websites that encourage visitors to download copies of specimen sheets and do it yourself. The struggle between "authentic-looking" and authentic is an old one, and the presence of the internet has only served to broaden that gap.

I'm glad you mentioned the letterpress purists! As a third-generation letterpress printer and a printing historian I'd like to consider myself a purist. But I do have a problem with designers/

printers who bad-mouth polymer plates as being the demise of letterpress. These are individuals who have large collections of type at their disposal and/or have a selective view of printing history. Plate-making to compensate for a lack of type goes back to the Renaissance, and much of the best letterpress produced in the 20th century was made with wood or magnesium plates. I've been printing since the early 1970s and have used all of these media, and at the end of the day—with budgets, deadlines and clients looming—you use the tools at your disposal and do the best work you can.

Heller: One sees bits and pieces of wood type at flea markets all over the place, but how do you acquire full alphabets?

Moran: Mostly with sheer luck. The collections that come available via the web are scooped up quickly by folks with money to spend. Watching listservs and websites like the Briar Press gives you an idea of what's out there, but it also illustrates how great the demand has become. I guess the best strategy is to make your interest known and enlist other letterpress enthusiasts in your search. Small-town newspapers

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seem to be a common source for printing equipment, and many of these newspapers needed wood type for headlines. So that might be a good starting place.

Heller: Who in the past produced the most impressive lots of wood type?

Moran: The work of Darius Wells, and the David Knox Company deserve mention, but for sheer beauty my vote goes to William Page, of Norwich, Connecticut. Between 1856 and 1891 his company made some of the most ambitious and visually stunning wood type designs we've ever seen in the U.S. His company was bought out by Hamilton in 1891, and Hamilton phased these designs out as the demand for them was limited and they required more skill to make than Hamilton could afford to invest.

Heller: Is there anyone actually making wood type today?

Moran: Hamilton has the capability to make wood type, but we only do so on a limited basis. We have working pantographs and a large supply wood, but the number of people who have the skill to do it is quite small. Many of them are retirees and there's a critical need to get younger people trained to use the equipment. But even with the training, much of our work is done on a volunteer basis, so having the time and money to make type is really limited.

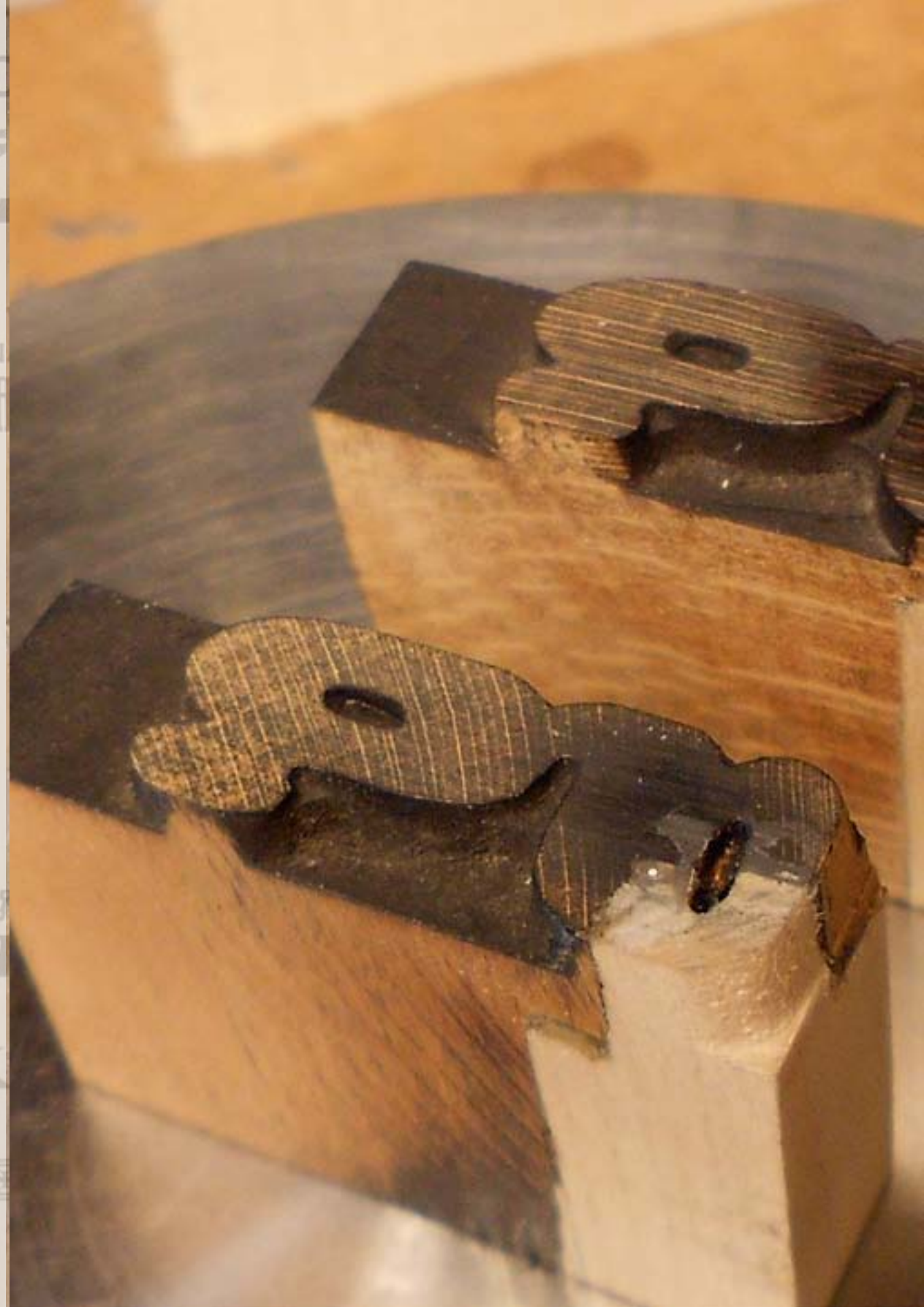
Heller: Nearly all of the museum personnel are volunteers, and yet the upkeep and funding for such a collection must be a burden. How do you do it?

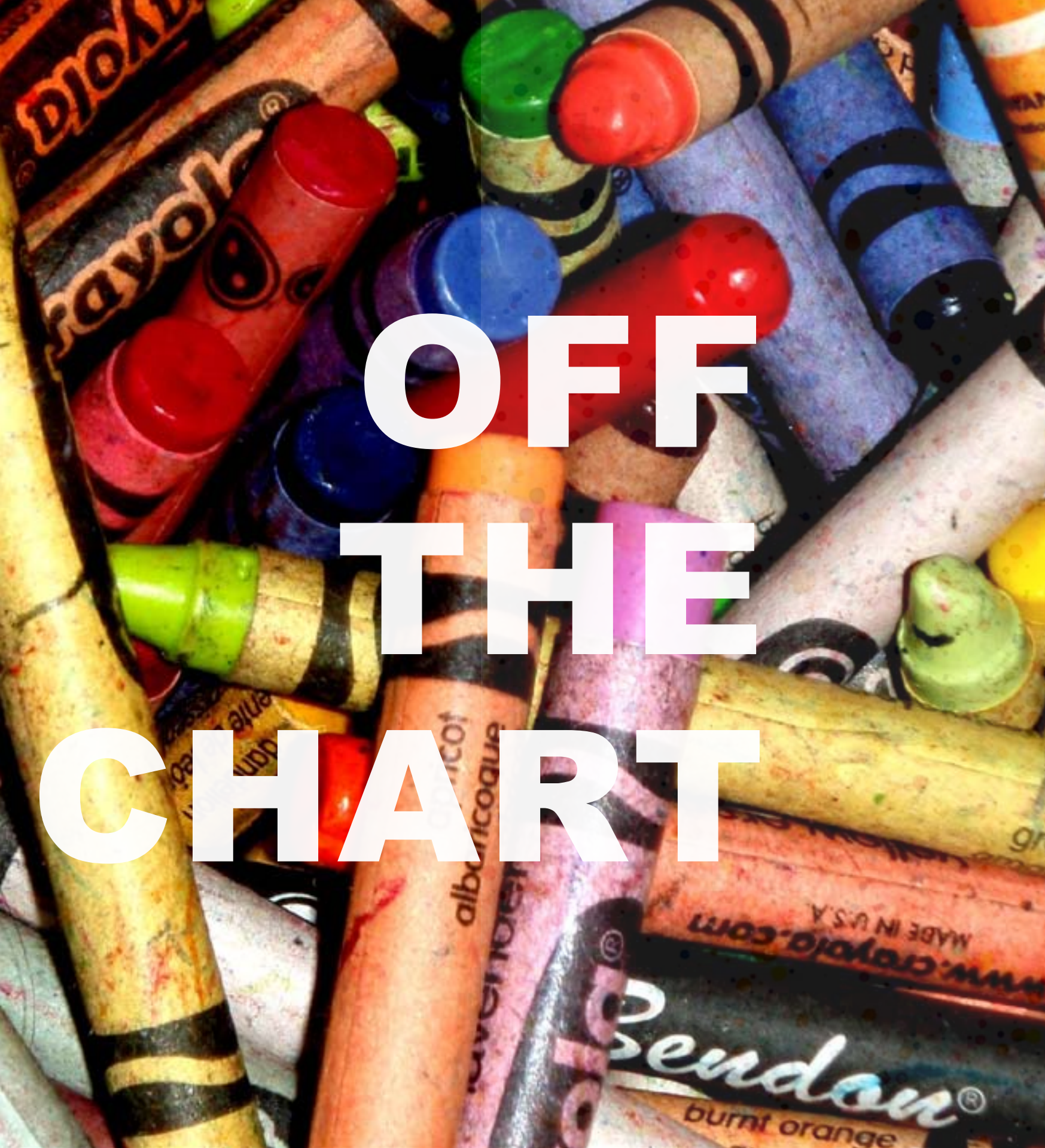
Moran: Once you set foot inside the museum it's hard not to be inspired by the legacy of Hamilton and the community that hosts it. That inspiration has brought dozens of local and national volunteers back, year in and year out, to help out in small and large ways. The work of board member Jim Van Lanen and pantograph operator Norb Brylski and a host of others serve as a great motivation to pitch in and do what needs doing. Recently we've had the hard work and creativity of filmmaker Justine Nagan, who works for Kartemquin Films (Hoop Dreams). She made an outstanding documentary called Typeface that chronicles the museum's history and challenges. When you see this film it's easy to want to get involved.

Heller: What else is in store for the Hamilton?

Moran: Lots of exciting stuff. We're having our first major poster exhibition and open house this Memorial Day to celebrate our 10th anniversary. Jim Sherraden, of Hatch Show Print, is leading a workshop in May, with all proceeds going to benefit the museum. And we're having our first Wayzgoose this fall. It's a printer's celebration where we'll feature demonstrations, workshops and posters for sale. To help with funding we've established membership levels that allow individuals to donate online. We're also working on a corporate sponsorship program and are building up an inventory of posters for sale.

On the personnel front, our long-time technical director Greg Corrigan is stepping down this spring. We'll really miss Greg's expertise—his years of hard work have helped make the museum what it is today.





OFF THE CHART

BY PHIL PATTON

Most designers, I'm guessing, would find it hard to imagine voluntarily giving up control of color in their work...

Yet that notion is being explored at several museums right now. Color Field painting, with its restricted use of brushes, is the subject of a show at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, as well as a citywide festival in Washington, D.C. Despite its name, the "Jasper Johns: Gray" exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, offers other new thoughts about color as well. Meanwhile, "Color Chart: Reinventing Color, 1950 to Today" at the Museum of Modern Art is all about artists who reveled in color as "found object." Curated by Ann Temkin and running through May 12, "Color Chart" is about color out of the can, out of the box and off the shelf.

I love color charts. They recall for me the color matching samples of stamp collectors, from my childhood. I can't resist grabbing those paint strips found in hardware stores, in particularly irresistible hues.

The artists in the MoMA show seem similarly attracted. They let chance or commerce pick their colors by using the colors as they come from the factory. In part, their use of color belongs to the century-long effort of art to escape from craft and become more intellectually respectable. The jokes about color found in the show are similar to jokes played with subject matter and materials by Duchamp or Johns or Warhol.

The chart—like the target or map,

the photograph, the number or letter—is a document. In the show are several paintings that seemed to resemble color charts themselves. Jim Dine pays homage to the Red Devil enamel chart, seen in many main-street hardware stores. Damien Hirst covers a wall with bite-sized color samples of house paint. A Donald Judd piece randomly deploys colors from the European RAL paint system. Both Gerhard Richter and Ellsworth Kelly produce what look like color charts but use chance to deploy color in a grid.

The commercial color chart made it possible for an artist to "phone in" one's performance, as Lazlo Moholy-Nagy did in 1922. He ordered up five paintings from a maker of porcelain sign panels using a color chart and graph paper. He compared the process to playing chess by phone or mail.

Surrendering control over color in this way was anathema to the Bauhausers, like Joseph Albers, working in the tradition of Paul Klee to seek the harmonies among colors. But other artists followed Moholy-Nagy: Sol Lewitt was happy to restrict himself (or actually those who executed his instructions for drawings) to three Koh-i-noor pencil colors or to the eight crayon colors in the basic Crayola pack.

Another piece in the show made me think of crayons and the limits of color out of the box. Byron Kim plays on Crayola's pre-



Civil Rights era “flesh” crayon in Synecdoche, some 250 variations of tans and mochas suggesting human skin colors.

I was struck by how many of the artists in the show used paints from my area of interest: automobiles. Cars began with famous limits to color: Henry Ford’s Model T came in any color you wanted as long as it was black. The Model T came in black because black was the only color that dried fast enough for Ford’s factory. So, one of the most important color charts—and one included in the catalog—was that of DuPont’s Duco enamels. Introduced in the mid-1920s, the brightly colored auto paints for the first time dried fast enough for the assembly line. Duco made the Model T chromatically obsolete. (Ford reluctantly added a dark green.)

Artists themselves have used auto paints. Billy Al Bengsten in California and Richard Hamilton in the UK applied them to canvas. Hamilton used auto paint in 1958 in *Hers Is a Lush Situation*, whose subject includes a 1950s Buick. (Alice Twemlow tells the painting’s back-story.) John Chamberlain is best known for his sculptures made from crushed

parts of cars, often with the paint still clinging to the metal. He is represented at MoMA by paintings from the 1960s made by spraying auto paint onto masonite. The titles come from pop music groups of the day, like Orlons and Dion, suggesting the limited palette of popular taste shared by auto buyer and record buyer.

In 1971, the Italian artist Alighiero e Boetti juxtaposed two very similar reds used by two competing Italian motorcycle makers, Guzzi and Gierli (the latter now defunct), in *Rosso Palermo*. The two brands had fervent fans, whose rivalry was reflected humorously in the slight, yet passionately felt variation in color.

The idea of the palette as ready-made, like Duchamp’s urinal, something therefore “undesignated,” underlies the show. But the more you look, the more designed that palette looks. Of course, Martha Stewart and Ralph Lauren design palettes for house paints. And artistic movements have their own palettes, just as Picasso had his roses and blues.

With color comes a sense of play, which the show grasps well.

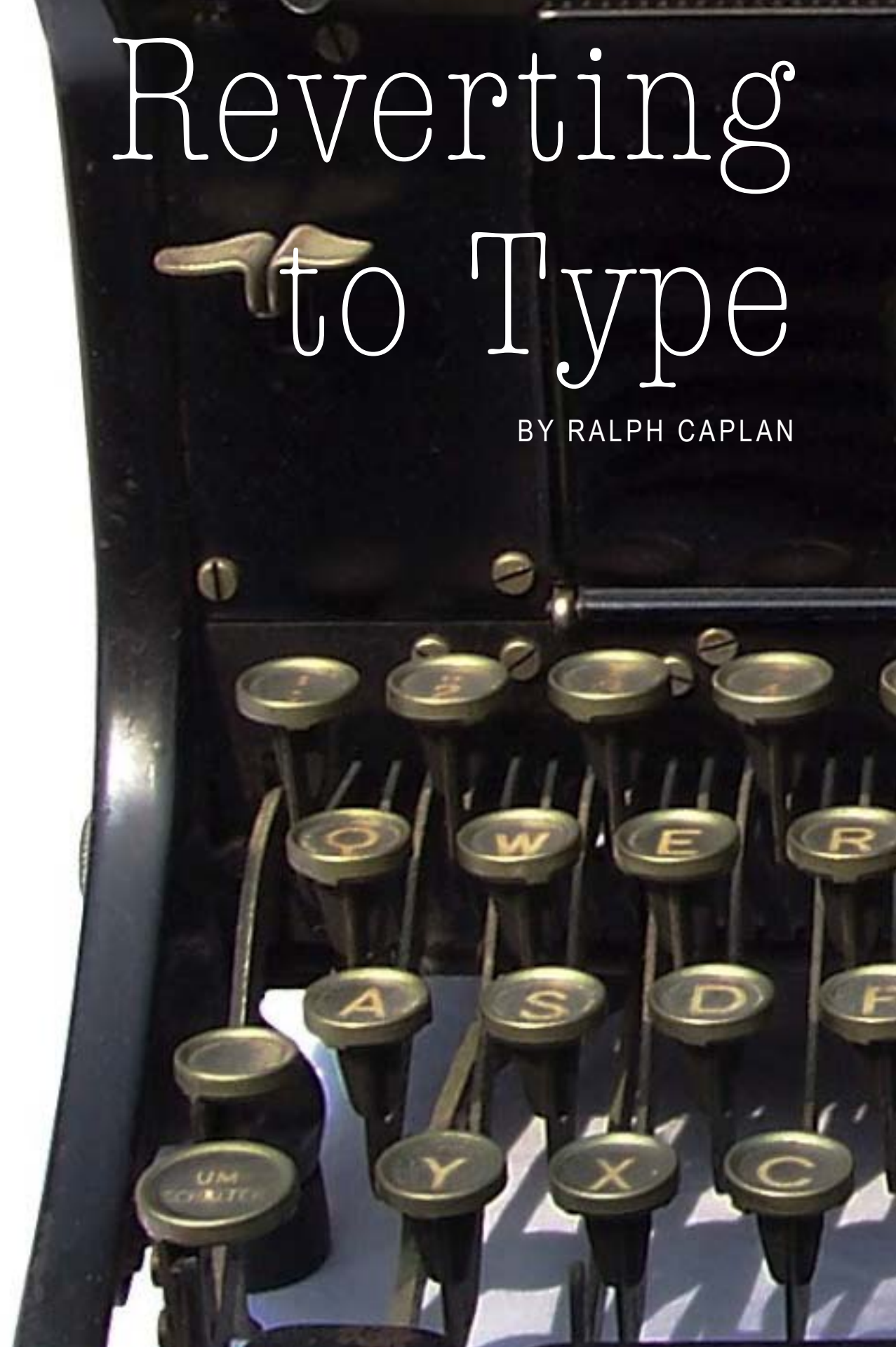
Frank Stella’s 1962 *Gran Cairo*, with its rainbow palette, is riffed off of by Jim Lambie’s *Zobop!*, a work executed for the MoMA show, splayed across the floor in colored vinyl tape.

The day after I saw the show, I visited a design class where students used similar material. They could dream up any color they wanted on the computer, then print it onto adhesive vinyl.

Whereas for the last century or so, as MoMA seems to suggest, the commercial color chart, created by technology, was all about limits, today’s industrial technology promises to color without limits. Could it be that the challenge to the designer and artist alike is to limit the palette? Coloring within the self-imposed lines—how bold.

Reverting to Type

BY RALPH CAPLAN



In the fall of 1960, I.D. magazine published a New York–themed issue. In our zeal to avoid the usual metropolitan clichés, we looked for aspects of the city that had not yet been “special issued” to death...

At the time, Olivetti was universally acknowledged as a model of corporate design leadership, and the sidewalk in front of its sleek showroom on Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue featured a marble pillar supporting an Olivetti Lettera 22 portable typewriter. I don’t remember whether pedestrians were invited to try it out or whether they just did it spontaneously, but the machine was heavily and often revealingly used. A lot of people predictably wrote, “Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country,” but some wrote personal letters and even poetry. Once every hour someone came out of the showroom and rolled a fresh sheet of paper into the machine. The manager generously agreed to save a few week’s worth of anonymous contributions to run in the magazine.

The smiling woman in one Life Magazine photograph wrote, “I’d give up my spaghetti for this here Olivetti.”

As Ursula McHugh and I boasted in the introduction:

New York has the only machine in the world that writes poetry and it is characteristic that the machine itself is foreign.... Here is something it wrote last week:

*Do away with the dubways
Only the insane ride the sibways.
Plant mushrooms in the tunnel
Plant mushrooms in the tunnels.*

Typos notwithstanding, it’s not bad for an untrained portable, without help of parent or teacher. It was clear that a typewriter, like a chair or a car, was an artifact capable of inspiring affection. Antique dealers know that they can always increase traffic by putting an Underwood portable in the window.

By the time the digital age caught up with me (I have never caught up with it) I had graduated from a manual to an IBM Selectric. When I bought my

first computer I called my local typewriter store and asked what I could get for the Selectric, which was in perfect condition. The answer was discouraging. “It has no resale value, regardless of condition,” I was told. “But since it’s fairly new, I’ll give you fifty bucks for parts.”

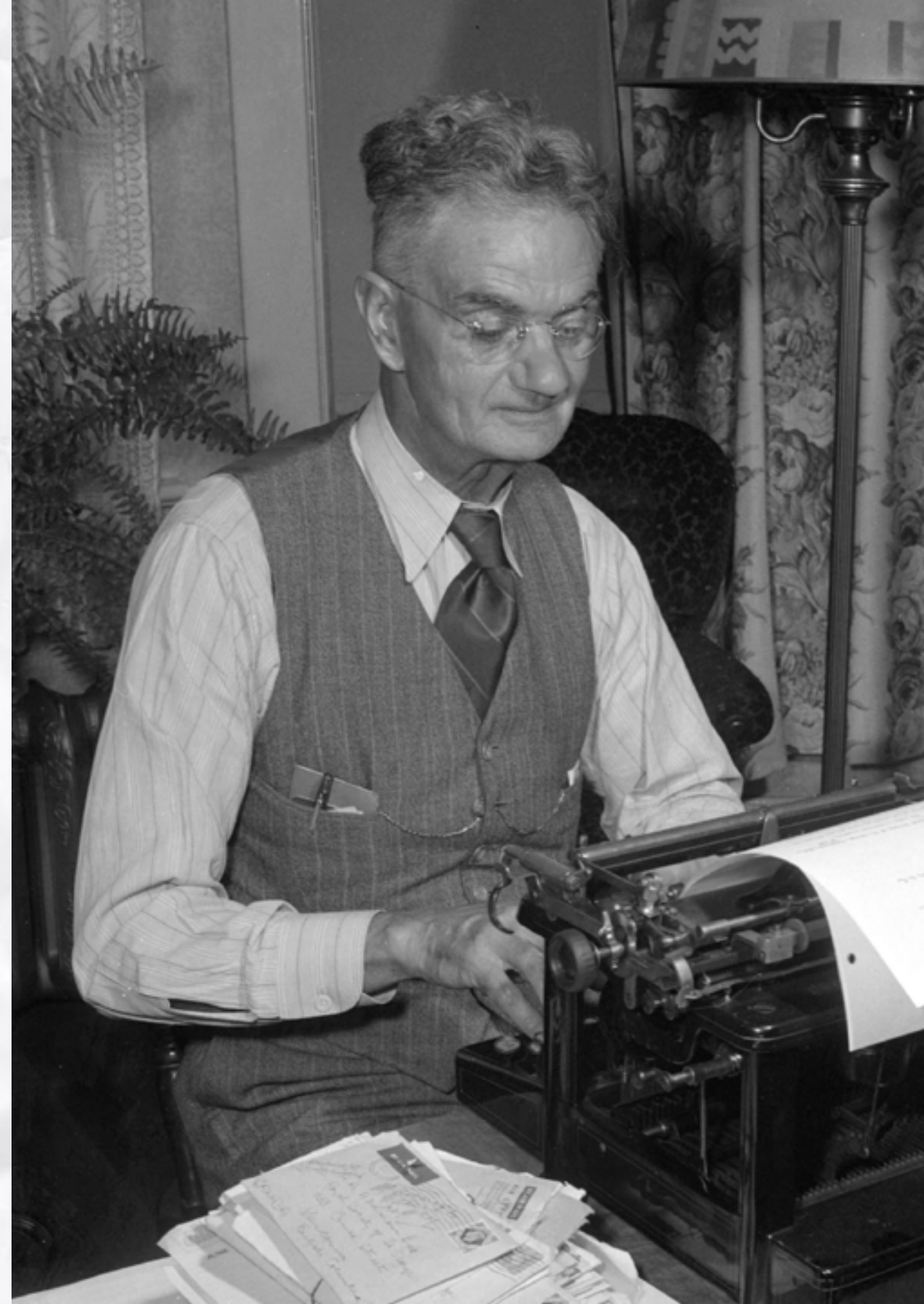
Parting with it was not as traumatic as getting it in the first place, which had meant making the tearful transition from an Olympia that sat patiently and silently on my desk while I waited for ideas to come.

Often they didn’t. I couldn’t stand the Selectric’s humming into my ear, reminding me of how desperate I was and filling me with guilt over missed deadlines and fear that the summoned ideas never would appear. The manual had made noise too, but only when I pounded it. Since I am a two-fingered typist my pounding was not incessant, and the resulting clatter was not annoying. Still, I never thought of it as attractive until my friend Cheryl Yau, preparing to write a design analysis of the Olivetti Lettera 21, decided to buy one, seduced not only by its elegance but by the clatter that sounds so romantic in old movies about the newspaper business. She didn’t get one, having been out-bid on eBay, and her disappointment emphasized that an artifact presumably made obsolete decades ago, has not entirely lost its luster.

There is a resurgence of interest in, and sales of, typewriters by people who already own one or more of the devices that replaced them. The New York Times reported:

In the last three months, type-ins have clattered into cities from coast to coast and even overseas. On Feb. 12, more than 60 people turned up at a Snohomish, Wash., bookstore over the course of three hours for a type-in called Snohomish Unplugged. Type-ins have popped up in Seattle, Phoenix and Basel, Switzerland...

Some of this surely is related to the renewed interest in cooking from scratch, home schooling, and DIY—or almost Y—eschewing Design Within Reach and reaching instead for parts from IKEA that can be cobbled together for short-term use. And some is purely nostalgic. But that’s not the whole story. Typewriters, like bicycles and Newtonian physics, still work.



“The contemporary affection for typewriters may be a passing fancy, but it isn’t necessarily fancy. One reputed advantage of the typewriter is its simplicity.”

Before it was on the way out, the typewriter had a hard time getting in. At least into private offices. Typewriters were parked outside on secretarial desks. And when computers began to make inroads into businesses, they were equally unwelcome. Word processors looked too much like typewriters! Executives were embarrassed to sit near any machine that connoted secretarial work. And besides, most of them didn’t know how to use a keyboard, even with two fingers.

When I was overseas, well-meaning friends and relatives kept writing to ask what I needed. Not cigarettes; I didn’t smoke. Not edibles; they rarely survived the voyage. But one day I saw a newspaper ad for a Hermes portable that was described as the lightest typewriter ever made. I asked my indulgent parents to get me one. They did, probably hoping it would provide an incentive to write letters home more often, and I carried it around the South Pacific for the next three years.

Occasionally one meets or hears about writers who pride themselves on not using computers, triggering memories of writers who refused, for similar reasons, to use typewriters when they were the most efficient alternative to pens. In college I had a professor who had written several books and by the

time I graduated had written several more. I was enviously dazzled by his productivity, and utterly flabbergasted when I discovered that he wrote in longhand.

“Wouldn’t a typewriter be faster?” I asked.

“I suppose so,” he said. “But I can’t think any faster than I can write, so the additional speed wouldn’t help.”

The contemporary affection for typewriters may be a passing fancy, but it isn’t necessarily fancy. One reputed advantage of the typewriter is its simplicity. I have always been attracted to objects, like the strawberry huller, that can only do one thing. A typewriter cannot find information, take photographs, produce a spreadsheet, tell you who’s following you on Twitter, play podcasts, find tax loopholes, flood you with apps or remind you that three friends have birthdays coming up. All it can do is enable you to type. With however many fingers are equal to the task.

and look handsomer, too.

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