



A Life in Letters

An Oakland Printer Keeps the Art of Handset Type Alive

BY JEANNE STORCK
PHOTOGRAPHY LORI EANES

With newspapers folding and books going electronic, the printed word seems to be on the way out, but in East Oakland a small company is bucking the trend and keeping the presses rolling.

Located inside a small warehouse on an industrial backstreet, Horwinski Printing has been turning out handset letterpress posters for music concerts, movies, political campaigns, roller derbies and boxing events since 1906. Hulking flat files fill the space, their drawers lined with alphabets of wood and metal type in every font and size. Owner James Lang, 56, flips the switch on a Heidelberg press, and the motor hums to life. He explains how he inks up the type and feeds in sheets of paper and then moves on to demo a massive Miehle flatbed press the size of a small car that slumbers in the back room. "I remember my grandfather holding me up over that thing to show me how it worked and being terrified."

The shop's walls are a pop culture time capsule — a playbill for the 1963 run of Liz Taylor and Richard Burton's *Cleopatra* at the Grand Lake Theater hangs beside a poster announcing a Cassius Clay/Sonny Liston match at the Oakland Auditorium. Over the years, Horwinski has also dealt in more mundane material — picket signs, "No Parking" placards, letterhead and business cards.

Nowadays, work is slow, but Lang continues to sell reprints of classic posters and has attracted a following of artists who are drawn to the handcrafted quality of his work. Oakland curator Joseph del Pesco has collaborated with him on several art projects and organized a gallery show of Horwinski posters in 2005. "It's a treasure trove experience walking in there," he explains. "You can't help but feel you're witnessing history."

Type and print aficionados eager for a tour can contact James Lang at (510) 562-5656 or jdlang@horwinski.com.

