

Bona Fide creating new works with old presses



Bona Fide HQ becomes a print shop twice a month. Photos/Kim Wyatt

By Liberty Zikos

MEYERS – It all started with the word “Handglovery” painted in black on a plain white wall. It’s a word that designers used in the past when creating new font or typeface, and ever since Kim Wyatt, owner and publisher of Bona Fide Books, put it up in her office last fall, special things have happened.

Bona Fide HQ’s atmosphere is inviting and peaceful, with shelves stocked with books and handmade zines and plenty of comfortable seats covered in bright animal patterns. But these days a visitor’s attention is more likely to be directed to the print shop.



Composing stick

Bona Fide Books is an independent press that started in 2009 and publishes three to four books a year. It's also home to the Center for Wayward Writers, a public space for creative people that is well used by local writers and artists.

By way of donations a print shop was born in summer 2013, when painter and Wyatt's friend Ken McNutt pulled up to the office and said, "You gotta look at this." Inside his car was a book press that he had rescued from a friend's barn. The compact piece of machinery was so heavy that it took two strong twentysomethings to wrestle it inside. But the timing was right. A monthly print club began with community members creating Christmas cards and later fine art. Now they are experimenting with wood block prints.

The arrival of the book press was followed closely by an etching press, and then a proof press was donated in January. It was used from the mid- to late 1950s at the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*. The proof press found its home at Bona Fide when Del Laine, who was once a columnist for the *Tribune*, donated it.

"When Kim showed interest in the hand presses it seemed that it was the home for it [the proof press]. We were happy to know that Kim had it and would be using it as much we had," Laine said. It wasn't just the space that compelled Laine to entrust the proof press to Bona Fide. "The fact that Kim sees the value of the printing press shows the value that she brings to this community – more than just a printed page, but the crafted printed page.



Steve Robison at the letterpress.

Wyatt, whose great-grandmother was a typesetter for a West Virginia newspaper in the 1900s, started Bona Fide to promote new voices and to build community through storytelling. Although the space typically hosts writing workshops and art receptions, a new sort of creative expression has developed. Letterpress printer Steve Robison found his way to Bona Fide through his wife, Karen Cutter, a book arts artist. The couple moved from the Bay Area to be closer to their Meyers family, and Cutter dropped into Bona Fide one afternoon. After talking with Wyatt, she brought in her husband. Robison had his first printing press experience at 7 years old, and has been hooked ever since.

"I talked to Kim and said, 'If you're interested in equipment I can bring some up. Maybe we could create a little space for that.' I told her I'd teach classes," Robison said.

Bona Fide now hosts a twice-monthly book arts club led by Cutter, and recently started offering letterpress classes taught by Robison.

Three of the seven presses date to the 1800s. Wyatt said she would welcome more.

In the age of information, what is the appeal of a heavy, time-consuming printing press?

“The presses, to me, represent the intersection of democracy, writing, and art –there’s nothing better,” said Wyatt, citing the long tradition of print to change the world. Johannes Gutenberg’s innovations in movable type and printing made information widely available to people of all social classes, and beyond borders.

“Those who embrace [the printing press] embrace a hands-on form of communication, one that has been replaced by fast communication,” Laine said. “The printing press takes time and it’s checked and rechecked before it hits the public. It’s a thoughtful form of communication.”

Many people are also seeking ways to build relationships away from social media and text messaging, and the community that has started gathering at Bona Fide wants connection – with materials and with each other. People come to Bona Fide to work with their hands, to learn a craft and also for camaraderie.



Ed and Del Laine’s proof press.

“It’s like the church of ink,” Wyatt said.

Robison believes the hands-on experience is part of the draw to letterpress printing. “When people get involved in the craft of it – I know for me it’s something I get lost in – the pressures of the day disappear.”

Bona Fide’s print shop gives people the chance to slow down and put some time into a well thought-out project while learning to set type.

“Letterpress is crisper, clearer. It has a tactile feel to it. It’s sort of otherworldly and like finding an artifact, and people are drawn to that,” Robison said. Drawing on problem solving abilities and creativity, the process requires attention to detail, and in the end you make something exceptional, one-of-a-kind. Robison says, “With letterpress you can see every single step of the way, and there’s no mystery at all. It’s just honest.”

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Notes:

- Bona Fide Books is located at 1069 Magua St., No. 4, Meyers.
- For more information about the Bona Fide print club, book arts club and letterpress class, go online or call 530.573.1513.

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