



No Balloons ...

We had a party here yesterday. Given the time of year, you might guess that it was a Christmas party ... Nope. Well, a New Year party? Nope. We had a 'Print Party', and a fun time it was!

When Jed Henry and I were planning our Kickstarter campaign last summer, we tried to make our list of 'rewards' as interesting as possible. Rather than just list our print designs so that people could choose the one they wanted, we tried to add some special items that would inject a bit of fun into the process. One of the ideas we came up with was to offer the backers the chance to make a visit to my workshop, to get a first-hand view of how their print was made. We described it like this on the campaign page: *"PRINT PARTY! – Visit David Bull's studio and get a lesson in printmaking! Plus, you receive 1 of our main woodblock prints, and both Chibi Heroes prints. (Transportation to Ome City, Tokyo, not included.) Various dates available."*

Jed and I were unsure whether or not anybody would be interested in this. Our Kickstarter campaign was quite an international affair, and because Kickstarter runs in English, we were not anticipating much participation from people living in Japan. But I was a bit nervous about leaving it open-ended - too many visitors would make it very difficult to get work done - so we limited the number of Print Parties available to 12. As it turned out, that was a very wise move, because once the campaign actually opened, they sold out on the first day.

Over the four months since the end of the campaign, we have held half of the twelve parties. I have played host to visitors from Germany, Singapore, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, and of course the US. As you might expect, not many of these people have flown over to Japan specifically for these events; they have for the most part simply combined the studio visit with a pre-planned trip to this country, adding it to their list of 'things to do when I am in Japan.'

So what happens at a Print Party?

I have no pre-planned agenda for these events, as the visitors vary widely in their experience and knowledge of the woodblock print world. Most times we start with a get-together in my 'Library', and I pull out some print folders and give them a quick survey of what my world is all about. Most of them have actually not had much experience at seeing fine-quality prints close up, and this 'private exhibition' is quite an eye-opener for them.

We then usually move across the street to the family restaurant run by my friends the Hamanakas, where we relax for a bit and get stuffed with udon noodles. Hamanaka-san is proud of his noodles to such an extent that he serves far too large a portion, and not very many of the guests can actually get through their serving.

We then return home and head right downstairs to the workroom, where I have a table laid out with some blocks, brushes and pigments. I give a short demonstration of the process, and it's then 'every man for himself', as the participants have a chance to try it for themselves. The initial attempts are usually not 'quite' a match for my sample, but I always prepare a large stack of paper, and after a bit of practice, pretty much everybody is able to produce a print they are proud to take home to show their family and friends.

That's it for the schedule of events, and we sometimes break up there, and sometimes end up back upstairs in the library with our noses buried in albums of prints for a few more hours. Some party! No balloons ... no beer ...

But judging by the 'Thank you!' emails I receive over the next couple of days, it seems that nobody misses those things at all!

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