



Homeless ...

It has been very warm here in Ome over the past couple of weeks, and the greenery around our workshop has been taking full advantage of that, and growing like weeds (which most of it is, actually).

That opening sentence has already been edited from the way I originally put it down. I initially said, 'the greenery around my home ...' but after a moment's reflection, decided to change it.

Honestly speaking, I am now pretty much at a loss which term to use for this place. It's my home, where I live (and my legally registered domicile, too), and it's of course our workshop, where all the employees come to do their work (making woodblock prints, or packing and shipping them).

When I bought the place around 14 years ago, I could never have imagined that this would happen. To me at that time, this place offered a perfect combination of the two functions; there was a two-story frame house (in which I would live) on top of a two-story concrete structure with large empty rooms (in which I would work).

And so it was - for the first ten years or so. The goods I had brought with me from my previous home - a small 3DK apartment - didn't really make much dent in the new wide spaces, and for the longest time I really rattled around. I slept on a futon in the middle of a totally empty bare room up on the top floor, and my workbench took up only a small space near the windows of the workroom down in the very lowest level.

But as we all know from our own experience, 'stuff' expands to fill the space available (nor does it stop there!). Every corner of every room of every level of this place is now jammed with stuff. And believe me - it is for the most part quite essential stuff. I talk sometimes in these stories about digging through boxes trying to find an old chessboard, or some other trivial item, but believe me, far and away the bulk of the material that fills these rooms is directly related to our printmaking activities. We have literally thousands of woodblocks, hundreds of boxes of prints and printing paper, and the shipping supply shelves nearly fill one room all on their own.

That the situation has become somewhat critical was driven home to me this week. I mentioned that I slept on a futon in the middle of an empty room, but it hasn't been like that for many years. The futon space in that room became narrower and narrower, and then last autumn one day as winter approached, I began to sleep downstairs in my small 'office', with my legs stretched into the warm *kotatsu* (the traditional Japanese low table with a small heating element underneath). I didn't bother with a futon, but just lay directly on the tatami mats, and pulled a coverlet over myself.

The *kotatsu* is where the computer lives (during the winter), so it was a very convenient arrangement. After carving or printing for most of the day, I would then do desk work in the evening until I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer, then just stretch out and fall asleep.

What I hadn't accounted for was that by 'temporarily' abandoning my sleeping space in the room upstairs, I would lose it completely. During the time that I wasn't using that space, the packing ladies began to use it

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for storing printing paper and more shipping supplies. It would now be a very major job to clear a space, excavate my futon from the closet, and start to sleep up there again.

Like it or not, I am now 'homeless'. The printmaking business has eaten the last small personal space that remained for me in this building.

I suppose to some people my current life might be kind of 'pitiable'. Within seconds of opening my eyes in the morning, I am already going through the overnight batch of print orders, getting them in order for the staff to ship when they arrive. And at the other end of the day, the last thing I see - literally a few seconds before being asleep - is the triggering of the daily night-time backup of our data to a secure place in the cloud.

And in between those two events, the day passes in a non-stop stream of printmaking activity. Is this Heaven ... or Hell?

I think you know which one of those locations I think it is! :-)

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