



## Screened ...

I'm sitting here preparing the story today, in a beautiful fresh brand new clean room! (Was that enough adjectives?) That's a *slight* exaggeration of the situation, but not much really.

Later today a TV crew is coming to film a program segment, and - rather unusually - it's not the printmaking workshop that will be the location this time. This program isn't about woodblock prints specifically, but is about a more general topic in Japanese art, and they are visiting here to have me pontificate about the subject for one segment of the show. So I'm not appearing in my usual guise of printmaker, but as a researcher and general 'expert' on the topic.

After looking around the place one day last week the producer asked me if it would be alright if the filming was done in my 'library' upstairs, instead of the workshop. I of course acceded to his request, but he then looked around the room with a bit of a critical eye, and I could tell what he was thinking ... "Sheesh; it's kind of run down. The shoji screens are torn, the mats are very dusty ... I wonder if Dave would be upset if we asked him to clean up a bit ..."

I jumped in before he could verbalize his thoughts, "Don't worry; before you get here I'll have the place spruced up a bit, at least as much as I can in such short order." He was visibly relieved, and we left it at that.

So this morning I set to work. I first cleared out some boxes and a couple of stacks of books that were in the way of the shelves that were to be the target of the filming, and then began general cleaning. I certainly can't afford to replace all the tatami mats just for this occasion, even though they are long overdue for a re-cover, but a good wipe and polish with a soft cloth helped a lot.

The most important thing though - and what really transformed the room from its 'run-down' appearance - was re-papering the shoji screens. This is supposed to be done at the end of every year without fail, as part of the general housecleaning for the New Year season, but I have been delinquent in that chore. My screens are in tatters where my two grand-sons had a run at them a while ago, and I have to admit with some embarrassment that 'a while' in this case is nearly two years ...

Before putting fresh paper on shoji screens, the old stuff has to be washed off, and this job is best done outdoors. I took everything out into the parking space in front of the house, leaned them up against the fence, and started peeling off the remnants of the paper. This soon comes off with a bit of light scrubbing, and the 'bones' of the screens are exposed ready for the new covering.

And something very interesting happens every time I do this chore out there. Every single person - without fail - who passes by and sees what I am doing, has something to say. It might just be a smile and a 'good morning', where they previously would just have passed by with a nod, or it might be a more extended comment about the process, but nobody passes without acknowledging what I am doing, and always in a positive way.

I think that part of this is a general feeling of community spirit. We all like to see our neighbours keeping their place spruced up; we're all in this together and keeping our community standards high is something

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that we all feel is important. But over and above that general sense of goodwill is the fact that these people find it a bit 'quirky' to see a foreigner doing a job that they themselves see as quintessentially Japanese.

There is perhaps *nothing* more Japanese than this scene of somebody re-papering their shoji screens out front of the house on a sunny morning. Nothing. Seeing this bearded foreigner engaged in such work automatically pulls the smiles ...

In any case, the job is done, and when the producer and the staff arrive later today they will find a fresh clean space in which we can have our little interview. And without fail, at some point - this is a law of nature at work - the lighting guy will swing his boom around a bit too far, and ... Pop. A hole in the fresh paper ...

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