



Up Against the Wall ...

The construction work on our new shop in Asakusa is now in the 'homestretch' phase. All the heavy-lifting is done - things that involve building walls or working with concrete - and we have moved on to the finishing stages: painting, hanging wallpaper, and putting up mouldings and other finishing touches.

When I was originally planning the central area of the shop - the place where customers will browse our prints and albums - I tried to come up with a design that would re-create, at least a bit, a feeling of people being in a home, rather than in a shop. I want our visitors to sit down comfortably at a low counter, with small plants here and there, and view the prints under pleasant lighting, just as they might in their own home.

The wall bordering this area has a large shoji screen in the middle, and rather than simply throw a layer of paint on the remaining area, I visited the showroom of a rather upscale interior design company and ordered a high-quality wallpaper from their collection.

When they heard that we would be doing the work ourselves, the staff there were slightly concerned. Their wallpapers are not the easy peel-and-stick type, but are made from thick and heavy paper that requires a strong paste to be hand brushed over the back side. They took special care to supply me with a list of instructions outlining just how we should proceed: wrapping each pasted piece in a sealed bag for at least an hour before hanging it (to let the paper expand evenly from the moisture), the process for trimming and smoothing each joint, and other points where they felt we might 'let them down' and produce sub-standard work.

It all felt fairly forbidding, but the other day, with all the preparation work done, Ioan and I cleared away everything that was in the way, and set to work hanging the paper. I'll jump to the conclusion and tell you that we did get it done, and that it doesn't look all that bad, but I also have to add that over the seven weeks that Ioan and I have been working together so closely, it was during the hanging of the wallpaper that he and I came the closest to 'having words'. The work went far more slowly than we had expected, due to the labour-intensive 'paste and wait' system required, and the two of us - despite our careful planning - made every mistake that it was possible to make. There simply isn't enough space here to enumerate all our screw-ups; each time we thought we had it figured out, we found another way to botch something.

I patched some of his errors, and he patched some of mine, but each time we began to feel frustrated with each other, we just backed off a little and 'let it go'. The two of us have worked together very well for these weeks, for fairly long hours, and have sometimes become tired and frustrated, but our relationship is more important than a bubble behind the wallpaper, and there it is - the room looks great, and we're still friends!

Ioan is leaving for Canada in a couple of days. He had of course wanted to have everything 'finished' before he left, but that simply wasn't a realistic goal. But now that the main shop looks as good as it does - with the bathroom that he constructed from scratch in full service - and with everybody who comes into the building walking up the stairs that he rebuilt - he can return home content that his time here has been very productive.

There is no way that I could have built this shop without his assistance (and that of Lee-san, the staff member who has worked together with us) and I will acknowledge their contribution with a special poster that will hang at the entrance to the shop. We've had a ton of fun building this place, and I am so glad that I made the decision to give this a try. I have no idea whether or not our business here will thrive, but it's sure been worth it so far!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>