

...POSH...



Printing Methods

These artisanal, age-old processes make a deep impression on invitation profits

BY POORNIMA APTE
SPECIAL TO STATIONERY TRENDS



Haute Papier's Bebe album features letterpress and foil-stamped birth announcements, baby shower invitations and children's party invitations, providing one-stop shopping with coordinates including napkins, coasters and thank-you notes. Circle 172.

Custom playlists. Custom sneakers. The list of goods that can be made to exacting demands constantly expands. And while custom stationery is nothing new, the explosion of design ideas through social media has fueled the need for progressively intricate and complex looks. “With the level of customization that consumers expect, we need to use specialized production processes in unique ways to create unique items,” explained Kerry Amidon, product manager at Checkerboard.

While posh printing methods, such as letterpress, engraving, foil stamping and screen printing are nothing new, the high levels of customization they offer are increasingly what your customers seek. What’s more, they’re often willing to spend more on them, especially when it comes to lifecycle events like weddings.

LETTERPRESS

Letterpress printing has lately become the go-to method for high-end custom stationery. “It gives a beautiful, three-dimensional impression in paper,” described Abbey Malcolm, president and creative director of Dauphine Press. “We ink a raised surface that is pressed into soft cotton paper. The amount of impression can be varied, though we normally use a great deal (with) wedding invitations and special announcements.”

Generally speaking, the softer the paper is, the deeper the impression. During the process, a digital design is transferred onto a polymer plate. The press is inked by hand and then pressure applied to transfer the design from the plate onto paper.

Customers appreciate letterpress’ artisanal nature. “Subtle variations in inking, color, impression and position are to be expected, and (are) appreciated by letterpress fans,” Malcolm underscored. “Our printing is done on 50-year-old printing presses — subtle irregularities are inherent in the process. No two pieces are entirely identical, and letterpressing is not an exact science — it is an art.”

Amidon emphasized that letterpress aficionados really adore its tactile quality. “You don’t realize how soft it is until you



Invented by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440 and credited with playing a key role in the development of the Renaissance, Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment, letterpress also plays a key role in these 21st-century designs. Clockwise from top: Fig. 2 Design (Circle 173), Dauphine Press (Circle 174), Rory Mackay Designs (Circle 175) and Checkerboard (Circle 176).

see your customers rubbing their fingers with the paper,” she laughed.

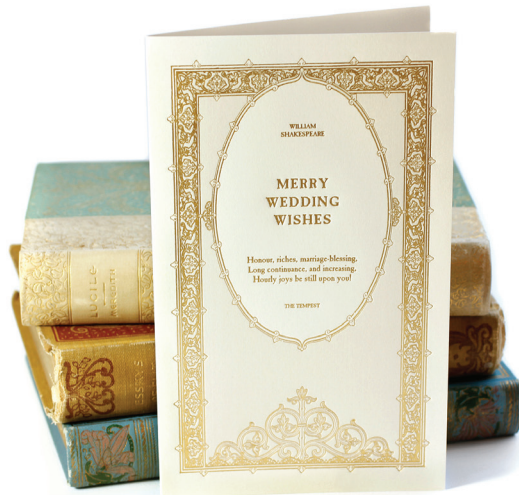
Since each color requires a separate print run, the more colorful the final product, the more expensive the job becomes. Amidon recommended limiting designs to two or maybe three colors.

FOIL STAMPING

In this incredibly popular printing process, foil “sits atop” the paper instead of being absorbed like ink. In fact no inks are involved. So, there is practically no color bleeding and interference and lighter metallics can be printed on dark-colored papers.

To foil-stamp, colored or metallic foils are transferred to paper under pressure. A base die with the design elements is placed over the paper and pressure applied. The result is a raised foil impression.

“From a design perspective, we love to combine letterpress and foil,” Malcolm noted. “Paired with distinctive graphics, the cards are beautiful from a distance but also beg you to hold the card in your hand and run your fingers over the deep letterpress and shift the card to catch the light on the foil — a thrill to multiple senses!”



Foil-stamping is currently very much in vogue and often combined with other printing methods for the ultimate in posh. Clockwise from top left: Love, Luck, Kisses & Cake (Circle 177), Moglea (Circle 178), Faux Designs (Circle 179) and Oblation Papers & Press (Circle 180).



For centuries, engraving — with its distinctively unmistakable raised surface — has been synonymous with luxury. Clockwise from left: Pickett’s Press (Circle 181), Real Card Studio (Circle 182) and Two Paper Dolls using Neenah Paper (Circle 183).

ENGRAVING

Engraving's beauty lies in the contrasting thin and thick lines and swashes, as well as its signature raised surfaces. For centuries, this has been the printing method of choice for major life events; in some families, it's been used for generations of wedding invitations. In short, it screams luxury to the more discerning among us.

Engraving ink, in comparison to printing ink, is dense and opaque, enabling crispness in even the tiniest details. Even light opaque inks work well on dark papers, providing the dramatic, distinctive results for which this method is known.

The method itself is almost the inverse of letterpress. Where letterpress creates an impression, engraving delivers an elevation, a raised image. A metal plate is etched with a recessed image and then inked. Blotting paper wipes out all the ink except the one on the raised surface. This is then used to emboss images on paper. Like letterpress, one die is used per color, driving up the cost of more complex jobs.

Amidon pointed out that thermography mimics the appearance of engraving at a more affordable cost. That being said, most paper enthusiasts can easily verify authenticity by turning the paper over and looking for engraving's tell-tale "bruise" or indented surface.

SCREEN PRINTING

This ancient and very colorful printing technique is also lately enjoying a resurgence. At its most basic, screen printing involves forcing paint through a "screen" onto paper. A designer creates a stencil of an image on a "screen" of porous mesh. Paint is then forced or squeegeed through the screen onto paper below. Mixed color effects can be achieved by overlaying with different inks.

Laurie Johnston with Two Trick Pony turned to screen printing as a way of carving a niche in a market that she felt was saturated with letterpress. "Screen printing is quite different from the textural look and feel of modern letterpress. Rather than leaving an impression, the ink sits on the surface of the paper creating a smooth, almost velvety texture," Johnston observed. "This aspect is most obvious when

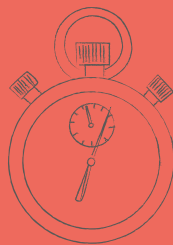
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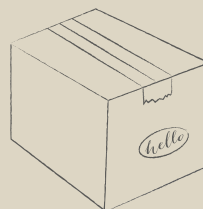
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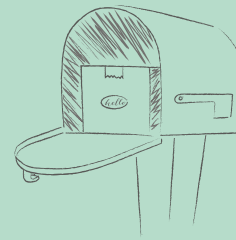
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The smooth, velvety texture of screen-printing sets these cards from (top left) Great Arrow Graphics (Circle 184) and (top right) Katharine Watson (Circle 185) apart from their digitally printed counterparts, while (bottom) Gilah Press + Design (Circle 186) screen-prints tea towels and pairs them with letterpressed coasters.

printing designs with large areas of color. The result is similar to paint swatches you would find in a home improvement store."

Johnston added that screen printing is also a great choice to print light inks on dark paper or when using metallic inks. Another advantage? Screen printing is not limited to solely paper surfaces. "The possibilities are endless really — wood, veneer, fabric, felt, plexiglass and metal are some surfaces that can be screen printed on," Johnston elaborated.

THE HANDMADE BOOM

All these printing processes capitalize on the growth of the handmade market, in part a backlash against mass-produced goods. "Many people want to know who made the items they are purchasing, how they were made and that fair and environmentally friendly practices were used," Johnston remarked.

Johnston pointed to digital culture as a driving factor in the appeal of artisanal handmade products such as stationery.

"So much communication is happening on screen and is therefore fleeting," she detailed. "People want something tangible that can live on their bookshelves or a coffee table. Cards, invitations, journals and photo albums all satisfy that desire to physically connect with material objects and to share them with loved ones."

PROFITS FROM PAPER

As a retailer, sell this category better by selling its complete story. "We feel it's important for retailers to share how the pieces are created and the process behind each technique," Malcolm emphasized. "The fact that no two are entirely identical, that the pressman is watching each piece being created on press and that letterpress printing is not an exact science, but an art ... are all important and of value."

"Demonstrate how customers can take a design and make it their own," Amidon echoed. "Their creative ideas are wonderful and make sure you hear them and recognize that."

Nothing drives sales better than a retailer who understands a customer's perspective. For a customer looking for wedding stationery, even discerning the wedding location might give you an idea of the customer's budget.

Amidon encouraged retailers to remind their customers that the invitation truly sets the tone for what's to follow. "It is the first sign of what to expect at an event," she underlined. "Sending a beautifully constructed and well thought-out design will give your guests a great sense of what is to come. Given the amount of money being spent, it is a worthwhile investment to raise the anticipation of guests."

Finally, not every part of the wedding stationery suite needs to use high-end printing techniques. "You can suggest letterpress for the invitation and then the response or reception card can be crafted using a less expensive method," Amidon suggested. "This way the customer still gets a high-impact invitation and everyone is happy."

It's a win-win all around — for your customer and you. **S**

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