



## THE ARTS & CRAFTS PRESS: Handcrafted Art for All

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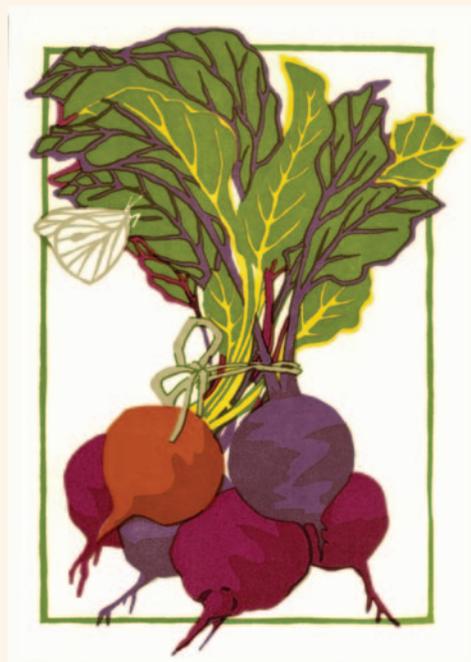
**D**URING THE PAST TWO DECADES, Yoshiko Yamamoto has drawn on the world around her to find inspiration for linoleum cut, woodblock prints, and letterpress designs at her company, The Arts & Crafts Press. The company (run with husband Bruce Smith) started out in California and now calls Tacoma, Wash., home, where the natural beauty of the Northwest captures Yoshiko's sensibilities. The Arts & Crafts Press is approaching its 20th anniversary, though it draws on a much longer history in both influence and process.



Yoshiko grew up in Tokyo, Japan, where she studied sculpture at Tama Art University. As a teen, she collected images by Hiroshige, known for his woodblock prints of landscapes and daily Japanese life. His work was meant for museums and everyday people's homes alike, a philosophy that inspires Yoshiko. She came to the United States to study history and vocal music at the University of California, Berkeley, and it was there that she discovered the Arts & Crafts movement's affinity for the way

hand-made objects enrich a person's life—both aesthetically and functionally. It's a philosophy she embraces in her work and life.

"There's nothing like seeing the sunlight shining through the translucent pink cherry blossom petals, or snowshoeing with my kids for hours, thinking about the hot chocolate as a reward. So I try to capture those moments, hoping to share them with others." She takes ideas from things she sees in her day-to-day routine: Beets at a farmer's market, dragonflies landing on a blade of grass, a boy at the water's edge about to plunge into a lake. Yoshiko is frequently outdoors, sketchbook in hand. Along with her two young children, Yoshiko raises a vegetable garden and a small brood of hens.



She spends time with her family hiking, camping and walking. "That is when I find inspiration," she says, "away from the modern world. It's really important to decompress and get away. Then I can bring that feeling to people in their homes. It's about enjoying something beautiful, not just about my own artistic expression."

The Arts and Crafts Press creates limited-edition letterpress prints, cards, books, and calendars, and her designs have appeared in collaboration with other companies on items like T-shirts, wine labels, mugs, art tiles, and *American Bungalow's* own exclusive subscriber poster series. Yoshiko's philosophy is one that embraces the fundamental satisfaction of a handmade object: both visually appealing and can be touched, held and used. She also believes that having beautiful art should be affordable and attainable to all.

The unique process of letterpress allows these seemingly contrary ideas—handmade art at an accessible price—to thrive together. It relies on the artist for the original design, first sketching and developing a composition, then carving a series of wood or linoleum blocks, applying color, and finally, hand-printing using a letterpress. "We take care to print each color, layering one at a time, in order to make the note cards," Yoshiko says. Although at the time Gutenberg's printing press first emerged 500 years ago it was considered a labor-



saving device, allowing the printing of pages and the distribution of books, by today's standards the letter press is a hands-on and labor-intensive way of producing something truly special. Yoshiko's own letterpresses date from the 1890s and 1940s.

Her designs draw on the artistic tradition of more than 200 years. But she doesn't shun new and modern ideas; she finds a way to balance them with an antiquated process. "Maybe I'm not cutting-edge enough as a modern artist," Yoshiko says. "But through the years I came to the conclusion that for me personally it's more important to make functional things well that are enjoyable for the users than being 'unique,' and I'm happy with that." Technology meets time-honored on her website, where she lists newly created items, from block prints to note cards. She uses more traditional methods of wood block and linoleum block alongside new ways. She draws inspiration for new work from old poetry, like the "When Poppies Bloom" card, inspired by California poppies and a poem by Sarah J. Day from 1901. Her blog recounts her artistic inspirations, including her move from garage to real studio



space, a family trip to Japan, and her appearance on the award-winning PBS series, *Craft in America*.

Yoshiko has embraced the true philosophy of the Arts & Crafts movement: a lifestyle in which our lives are enriched by the tools and technology we have around us, not hampered by them. Where we can appreciate the beauty the riches of the natural world afford us. Where we can revel in something handmade that can also be put to good use. "You know, reflecting on our 20 years of art print making, our letterpress note cards are a perfect embodiment of William Morris' ideal of 'art for all,'" Yoshiko says. Her art doesn't hang in a museum for an elite few to enjoy. It's on desktops, a thank-you written to a friend, hanging near the kitchen sink marking off the days, worn on a baby onesie. At the Arts & Crafts Press, Yoshiko creates something everyone can relate to, afford, and have in their home to enjoy every day.

The Arts & Crafts Press  
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