

The Studio at 300 Broadway
Pino Trogu



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Issued in July of 1966 by the California State Board of Equalization, a seller’s permit on the wall of the Greenwood Press authorized “the selling of tangible personal property at the above location.” Thus it began, and continued for five decades, that Jack Stauffacher would sell his printed editions and book design and typography services out of this historic address: 300 Broadway in San Francisco, known as the Printers’ Building. Jack moved in just as the printing houses that produced *Sunset* magazine and the United Nations charter moved out, thereby extending by half a century a tradition whose technological feats may have multiplied but whose art and craft have yet to be surpassed.

Later in 1966, a Vandercook SP15 proofing press arrived at 300 Broadway, and Jack could once again use his beloved Kis-Janson type, purchased in the early 1950s. The Vandercook became the heart of the studio, and Jack used it to produce typographic experiments with large wooden letters that he received upon moving in. Those prints, as well as five portfolios, went on to bring him attention from younger generations; they are now in museums and private collections. Shortly before Jack’s death, the Vandercook moved to the Bancroft Library Press at the University of California, Berkeley, along with much of his Kis-Janson type.

There is a sense of wonder in going through the studio of a person that was intensely true to his work. Every book inscribed or annotated by Jack, indeed every item, tells the story of a life dedicated to craft. Jack called himself a printer, but the studio was also a library, an academy, and a historical atlas of typography. To have set type by hand or printed on one of his presses was to have been part of this special place of culture, knowledge, and craftsmanship.

Jack’s friend Adrian Wilson was referring to 509 Sansome, which preceded the Greenwood Press’s 300 Broadway location, when he spoke of “that oasis of migrant printers, misunderstood poets, starving calligraphers, and beautiful girls.” The image aptly described 300 Broadway as well. Visitors would gather around Jack’s large desk, where he would share books and engage them in conversation. His attention was as penetrating with the beginning student as it was with the renowned type designer, graphic designer, poet, or artist who made the pilgrimage to see him. A lucky one might leave with a print or a booklet inscribed by Jack. But if really lucky, one might come back for more discussions and possibly a collaboration.

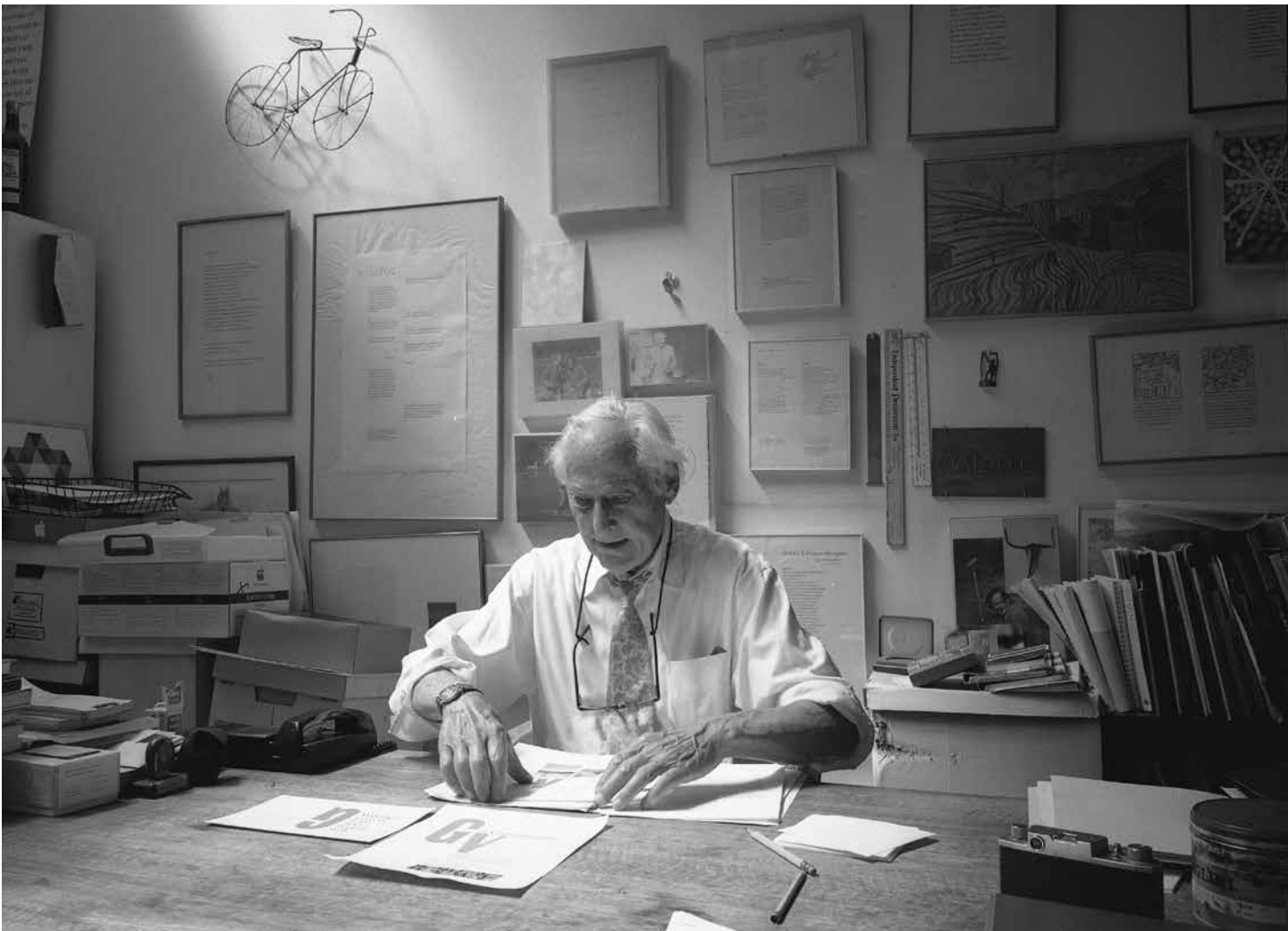
Jack’s life was his work. He bicycled daily to the office on his Legnano and, once there, the studio and its objects became his companions. There was printing but also music, film, photography, painting, poetry, food, and literature. There were records, cassette tapes, CDs, engraving blocks, books, pictures on the walls, still and movie cameras, drafting tools, glue, tape, and precision knives. And, of course, there were the type cases with his Kis-Janson, Hunt, and Univers types, the composing sticks, and the Vandercook and Gietz platen presses.

The Gietz, which Jack called a “jewel,” joined the Greenwood Press in 1988 after sitting dormant for twenty-five years at the Carnegie Institute of Technology.¹ It first landed at Sam Francis’s Lapis Press in Emeryville, California, where Jack operated it until 1994. As such, it does not appear in Jack’s 1966 sketch of 300 Broadway’s future layout. With the Vandercook along the eastern windows, the room constantly changed, taking on items, such as a Macintosh computer in 1987. By the mid-1990s, it could not fit anything new, with books, files, printed editions, and more added to (but rarely subtracted from) the floorplan. Jack still managed to carve paths between the shop’s vital corners: the Vandercook, the Gietz, the type cases, the Mac, the bookshelves, and the large oak desk where the conversations took place.

Jack was not known to throw away anything. Most objects were important artifacts of a project, but some were simply reminders of a moment in time—like a crooked bicycle fork, twisted by a polo ball that had lodged itself in the wheel. And yet he did eventually let go of things. After the Bancroft Library acquired his archive in 2011, and after San Francisco Bay Area printer Peter Koch adopted the Gietz, the narrow paths opened up to reveal the floor between bookcases, type cases, the Vandercook, and the chrome-and-wicker Breuer chairs. It was to this renewed space, close to the original 1966 layout, that Jack was able to work (albeit not every day, as he was now in his mid-nineties). It was a fitting culmination to a career dedicated to printing and typography that this period saw the completion of his last book: *Oxen Plough. Bicycle*, a diary with photographs from his years in Tuscany in the mid-1950s.

In 2003, Jack kindly agreed to print a poem by a young San Francisco politician I knew, and I watched him handset the type. The *click-click-click* of the type falling into the composing stick was one of his favorite sounds. Later he let me print the broadside on his Vandercook. Being there, with a man at peace, at ease with his tools, surrounded by his books, was to sense another era, one I could only experience through him. In that way, Jack’s studio was a time machine, always carrying history forward for new generations. Started in 1936, when sixteen-year-old Jack and his father built a print shop behind their San Mateo home, the Greenwood Press continued for eighty years, until Jack, as a ninety-seven-year-old gentleman, closed the door at 300 Broadway one last time.

- 1. *Pino Trogu and Jack with a broadside project at the Greenwood Press, 2004.*
- 2. *Jack at his desk at 300 Broadway, looking at what appear to be press materials for one of his Vico projects, 2004.*



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- 3. *Jack’s small collection of woodcut illustrations, known as cuts, displayed in his studio, 2015.*
- 4. *The business license for the Greenwood Press on the wall at 300 Broadway.*



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