

Alphabet

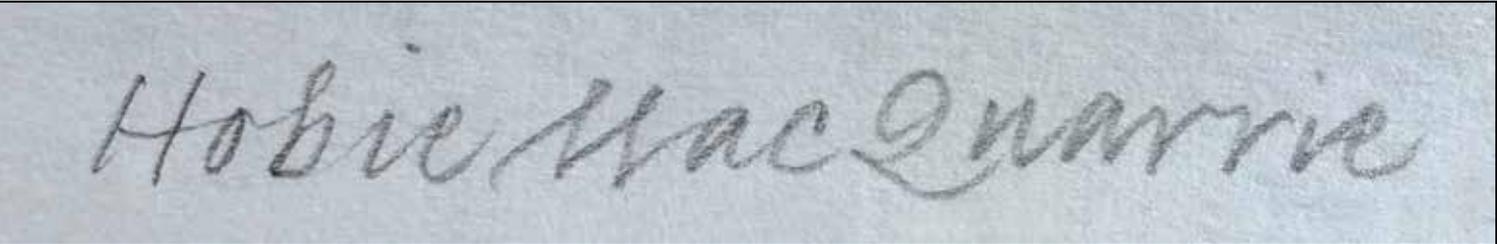
THE JOURNAL OF THE FRIENDS OF CALLIGRAPHY
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OUR GREAT PAL, *Hobie MacQuarrie* is, to put it mildly, a singular presence in our club — unless you can name another calligrapher with a comic flair who's also a comic book enthusiast & letterer, classic old school signman & showcard artist, out-of-control collector, local opera star, world traveler and legitimate, documented, downtown SF character and Market Street legend. There's just no one like him — in or out of FOC. It's a wonder that his three- or four-level hillside home in the Sherwood Forest neighborhood hasn't tumbled down to Portola Drive, so full of shelves of overflowing books as it is. Some rooms have actual mazes built of bookshelves. And, unlike some people I am — I mean, know — his are actually organized. As you walk through, he'll tell you what gigantic section is blending into which merely enormous section. Mostly, he does seem to be doing

it to be informative, but other times, I suspect it's to help you find your way out, should you get separated from the guide. But that's only when you're in the middle of the room — because if you're near the edges, the old sign, illustration and original comic artwork-covered walls offer landmarks to help you get to a door. He calls himself The Accumulator.

You could say it's a museum but, like Kilauea, it's an active one. Hobie still knows how to get to any of the three work stations located in the mazes to produce his varied art and memoir projects. Recently — maybe because, despite his efforts, his house isn't sliding downhill at all — he agreed to house the FOC archives and past-issue Alphabet surplus that had previously been anchoring Susie Taylor's house to 19th Avenue. Then he actually found more space in his place to follow through on his promise, and now fulfills back issue orders. This is only the latest and a very small fraction of the volunteer work and service he has done quietly for us over the decades. — C.R.



HOBIE WAS RAISED DOWN IN WATSONVILLE. His first artistic love was comic-art, but he was always interested in producing art-related stuff, not just simply drawing. He had that art factory attitude that seems required of true sign guys. A desk in his room wasn't good enough. He built his own studio out in the back yard while still in high school — and he quit high school early on.

In 1949, after a year or so of working in the concrete business, he and a friend headed to art school in San Francisco, to become comic artists. Even though — again — school turned out not to be for him, San Francisco did end up being the place he was meant to be, and he has lived here ever since. After six months, just as he was about to head back down to Santa Cruz County, he decided to see if an art-related job could be found and was hired at the first place he walked into, Shepard Studios, a classic sign, screen-printing and display shop. He worked there seven years (minus a couple in the Korean War), picking up the skills and tricks he needed to start his own business, and has been the wily maverick of his own destiny ever since.

His first shop was an upper floor at 617 Market Street (between 2nd and Montgomery), and became more of a display and showcard business than one for exterior shop-front signs. His bread and butter were the travel industry — hand-lettered and/or silkscreened showcards for the airlines out at the airport and full-on display windows

for their downtown offices. He became known for solving unusual production problems and reliability in getting the displays installed overnight, so that business was not disrupted during open hours. This kept him busy throughout the sixties, right up until airline industry deregulation in the seventies changed the amount of money the airlines had for individual location promotion. He branched out into more kinds of signs for different businesses, but the subject matter of his old work around the house shows that the airlines were definitely his main clients.

When asked where he learned to letter, he claims he was an autodidact with a bad teacher. In his teen-age, self-built Watsonville studio, he came up with the first of many unusual Hobie-like methods for self-education and production — to practice lettering, he got a sheet of glass and lettered on that, wiping it off and keeping going without wasting any paper or other substrates. When he got something worth keeping, he'd trace it in pencil and ink it on paper for his personal morgue. Hobie knew that the most stylish of his comic producing heroes used brushes, not pens, so he got himself some Winsor/Newton 1s and 2s and got started.

At Shepard, where he started out as a production grunt for other artists' designs, his hand-cutting of lettering layouts for silk-screen stencils taught him more formal lettering construction — he literally traced his way through his first

*Headline by
Susie Taylor*

HARRISON COLLECTION,
SF PUBLIC LIBRARY.

professional lettering lessons. After leaving Shepard, one of his comics pals, Frank Hill, had the contract to produce “Dennis the Menace” comic books (not the daily strips) and Hobie was hired to hand-letter the speech bubbles and thought balloons for the Mitchells and the Wilsons, estimating that he must’ve lettered 1500 pages over the years. That’s not taught in college. There wasn’t time for any more formal training – business was hopping – so he continued to just learn on whatever job that was due next. His Q & D but snappy showcard brush lettering was developed this way. Even though based on the classic flooded-brush casual, it became his own style as he figured he could move more quickly – and with more élan – if he lettered from bottom-to-top.

Calligraphy entered the mix somewhere along the way, but nary a lesson interfered with his style. He picked up his skills by emulating his own local heroes. It began with United’s art director, O. Basil Johns (the O. stands for Original, his real name) requesting a calligraphic look occasionally, and he was chiefly inspired by Bill Hyde of downtown design agency Butte, Herrero & Hyde. Loving Hyde’s distinctive feel, Hobie developed his own style by “following my hand. I found I could do anything if I set my mind to it.”

He joined FOC in the eighties, and has been an active member since. While speaking of influences at one point in our conversation, he said that inspiration has come from fellow members too numerous to count. He loves volunteering for the Kalligraphia set-up just to get a load of the entries as soon as possible. The top of the list for him, though, will always be Susie Taylor. He sat next to her at the Book Fair one year during demonstrations, and was floored by her carefully deliberate action, loading the nib with a brush and crafting each letter with the utmost of care – a stunning revelation to this crank-’em-out-&-get-the-job-delivered sign artist. Despite their contrasting styles and work methods, they were good friends. You can see Susie’s hand in the gathering and care of Hobie’s work in the Harrison Collection .

Since this story was Christine Colasurdo’s idea (a good one!) I asked for her take on our pal Mac: “Hobie has lived through the great age of 20th-century hand-lettered signage and can recall all the old design offices of bygone

San Francisco. He has a marvelous sense of humor and an encyclopedic knowledge of American cartoonists. Hobie’s lettering amazes me for its lightheartedness and beauty, and always cheers me up. What a gift!”

ALL ALONG, HE was never shy about writing to comic artists he admired. As a result, correspondence, the collecting of original strip art and friendships began. Peanuts



creator Charles “Sparky” Schultz was a friend; they usually sat together at the annual Northern California Cartoon and Humor Association dinner (Hobie thinks it was because he didn’t bug Schultz for production tips). Hobie also began to appear as a character in several strips, including “Farley,” “Star Hawks” and his own strip, “The Adventures of Sgt. MacQuarrie,” a birthday present from Jeff Greenlaw. He made over a dozen appearances in Lee Holley’s famous “Ponytail.” Holley was a friend from [Continued on page 6]

I like days with
a snowwhite collar
and nights when the
moon is a silver dollar
and the hills are
filled with eiderdown
stuffing and your breath
makes smoke like an
engine puffing

I like days when
feathers are snowing
and all the eaves
have petticoats
showing and the air is
cold and the wies
are humming
but you feel warm...

SEASON'S GREETINGS
CAROL & HOBIEMACQUARRIE
1993



BAY AREA



BOOK ARTS

THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA
THE COLOPHON CLUB
EXPLORE PRINT!
THE FRIENDS OF CALLIGRAPHY
HAND BOOKBINDERS OF CALIFORNIA
MILLS COLLEGE CENTER FOR THE BOOK
PACIFIC CENTER FOR THE BOOK ARTS
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Opposite, clockwise from top left: *Hobie's punchy italic*, Christmas '93; a *MacQuarrie sci-fi strip*; one of his appearances in "Ponytail," 1965; *Hobie's calligraphic showcard brush caps on a sign for the Bookfair.*



Hobie's always been as comfortable with a blade as a brush. All the lettering on this page was cut with a knife. Hobie would do the letters with a brush or a pen, to capture the swing, then use that as guide for cutting the stencil or vinyl.



Top: Two screen printed showcards for United Airlines. The one on the right was one of a dozen different cards, part of a large display; the lettering for each of them was modeled after Hobie's favorite lettering artist, Fred G. Cooper, who was the subject of an entire 1996 issue of *Broadside*.

Middle, right: a detail of a hand-cut, screen printed Xmas card.

Bottom right: hand-cut vinyl.



The two above illustrations courtesy of the Harrison Collection, San Francisco Public Library.

SPRING FURN

Watsonville, a Bugs Bunny veteran of Warner Brothers, and a fellow “Dennis the Menace” ghost artist before selling the “Ponytail” strip to King Features Syndicate on the first try. Hobie’s wife, Carol, appeared regularly as well, as high school teacher, Mrs. Mack. Hobie reports that every one of the comic artists to whom he wrote never failed to write him back, sometimes sending original art.



HE WAS MARRIED 52 years to Carol, the love of his life. They had three sons, Robin, Denis and Scott. He is still very much in love with Carol. Ever since her passing in 2009, he has not slept in their bedroom, moving into the guest storeroom/library, where there is just enough room for his single bed amongst the shelves and flat files. He bids her good night every evening as he lays down his head.

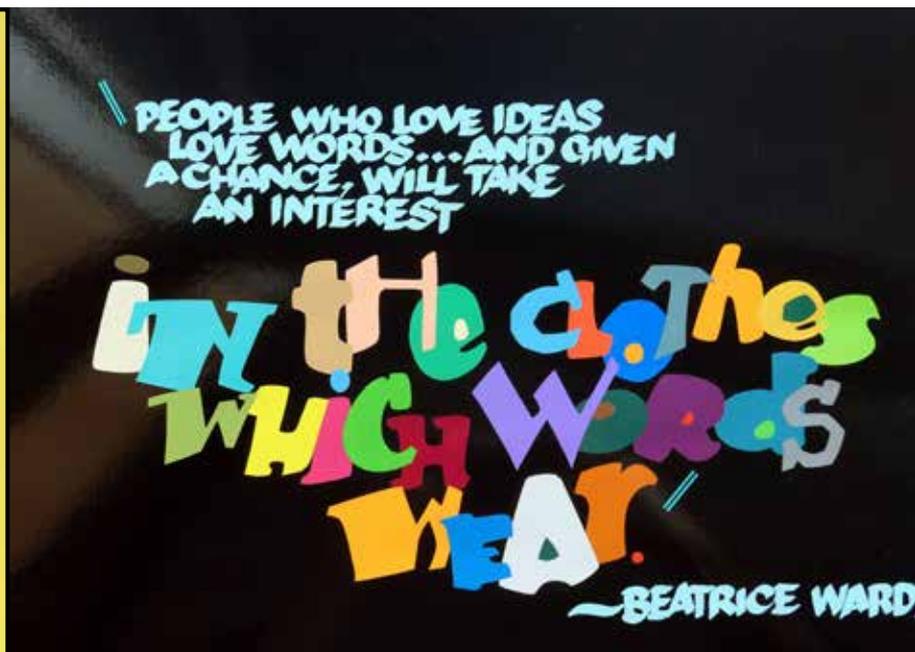
Their globe-trotting began after he “retired” in the eighties (self-employed sign-dogs never really hang it up). He and Carol took a month-long trip to Australia, which they both loved. Once home, Carol asked, for the first

time, “where do you want to go now?” — the opening line of the script for this oft-repeated play, which continued, *Hobie*: “Can we afford it?” *Carol*: “We’re going.” Racking up countries, while filling his travel diaries with sketches and poetic verse, the MacQuarries, like Sherwin-Williams, covered the Earth together, as long as they could.

Which brings us to the third of Hobie’s artistic loves, poetry. His self-published, crazily eclectic, memoir, *Hobie’s Chap Book* from 2016, is filled with verse, doggerel and limericks. He may not consider himself a poet, but he loves to commemorate his experiences, friends and even acquaintances with rhymes, as well as rewriting Gunga Din and other classics to celebrate any occasion. The 1991 FOC Christmas party saw him perform “A Visit From St. Inkolos,” his custom rewriting of “The Night Before Christmas,” to the delight of the stunned party-goers. Sample lines: “. . . not a pen-point was stirring, not even a Brause;” “. . . to the edge with the deckle! Now write away, write away! Just like Ann Hechle!” Hobie confessed to me just the other day, “I think I was born with a goofy streak.”

To pad his resume as a City eccentric a bit further, he

Top & below, left & right: Three examples of Hobie’s bottom-up brush casual on showcards, from his collection.



VITURE MARKET

was a non-speaking actor (a “super”) for the S.F. Opera for three seasons in the '50s, possibly the only comic-loving, showcard writing, calligraphic autodidact in their history.

IN MARCH OF 1994, Hobie decided to put his extensive morgue to work and began issuing *The MacQuarrie Studios Broadside*, “Hand Lettering of Our Century.” When it outlasted the 20th century, the subtitle became “Hand Lettered Nostalgia.” Whatever its secondary name, *Broadside* offered up the fruits of fifty years of paying attention and keeping the evidence. Each issue was just a single tabloid sheet of as much of the greatest commercial lettering as could be snugged together. It was all hand-collaged down at the copy center and photocopied. *Broadside* (like the rest of Hobie’s life) was a computer-free zone — every word he wrote was written. It soon became a 2-sheet wonder, Hobie adding a legal size supplement, frequently containing a themed rant from the Kurmudgeon’s Korner or a new episode of an attack on particularly egregious modern typefaces, but just as frequently themes of grace,

eccentricity and approval. The main sheet, though, was always a celebration of lettering beauty and history or tribute to a hero. It also was frequently devoted to a theme or style or individual artist. There were often all-calligraphy issues. Once a month, cost a buck, what a deal. Hobie didn’t make a cent — it was certainly a labor of love. This went on for eleven years, until 2005. I subscribed double to have an extra set as a reward for a future hero. To this day, he is still the most deserving of getting that extra set, but he’s the only guy who doesn’t need one — and not just because he’s got the originals. He has absorbed the thousands of lessons that each one of those featured hand lettered words has offered.

Hobie’s a hoot to hang with. Just about every yes or no question I asked him resulted in a story. He is a gentle guy, but there’s no doubt he is passionate about the things that matter in his life. Every room in his house is devoted to those passions — again, there are lots of rooms. His lettering style may have been fast and casual, but those passions — for his work, the appreciation of others’ artistry, his friends and his family — are deep, slow and lasting. — CR

Below, center: *hand-cut vinyl, 2015, from the Harrison Collection, San Francisco Public Library.*



JAMAICA

BROADSIDE BLACK

the Macquarie Studios

BROADSIDE

BODIE

Broad-
side #5
"lettering of our century"

BROADSIDE #52 JUNE '98

"HAND LETTERING OF OUR CENTURY"

broadside

Broadside

Jazz

SQUAW
VALLEY

PUBLISHED MONTHLY • \$12 PER YEAR (\$16 OSEAS) MACQUARRIE STUDIOS • PO BOX 27174 • SAN FRANCISCO CA. 94127-1602

"hand lettering of our century"

Broadside #56 OCT. 1998

the MacQuarrie Studios

BROADSIDE

Lettering of our Century

Broadside

BROADSIDE

THE MACQUARRIE STUDIOS MONTHLY

BROADSIDE

Calligraphy

#109 MARCH 2003 - OUR 10th YEAR

hand lettered vintage

BROADSIDE

the macQuarrie Studios

#23 Jan '96

BROADSIDE

\$12. PER YEAR \$16. OVERSEAS

broadside



Above: one of Hobie's five appearances in Herb Caen's SF Chronicle column. The rest of the spread are various examples of the 132 different Broadside mastheads and a few other words.

THE MACQUARRIE STUDIOS "BROADSIDE"!

"HAND LETTERING OF OUR CENTURY"!

PUBLISHED MONTHLY \$12. PER YEAR (\$16 OSEAS!)

#29 JULY 1996!

SPECIAL ISSUE ON COMIC STRIP LETTERING!

MACQUARRIE STUDIOS • POBOX 27174 • SAN FRANCISCO CA 94127



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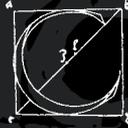
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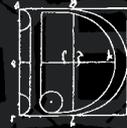
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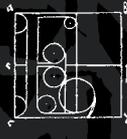
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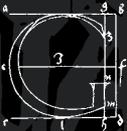
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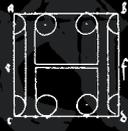
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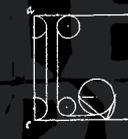
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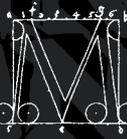
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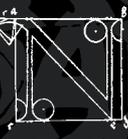
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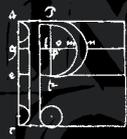
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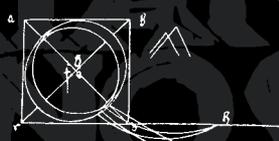


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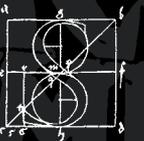
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Q Q



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