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Carving a Niche

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Carving a Niche



A Merwin & Wakeley Galleries exhibit brings the works of a great American poster shop to the walls of Illinois Wesleyan.

With the slogan “Advertising without posters is like fishing without worms,” brothers Charles and Herbert Hatch opened their full-service printing business, Hatch Show Print, in Nashville in 1879. Using a hand-carved letterpress technique similar to the one Johannes Gutenberg employed to print his 15th-century Bible, the brothers developed a distinctive, Southern style to produce poster ads for products such as “whole hog” sausage and “easy starting” gasoline as well as entertainers, from country music legends to obscure vaudeville magicians.



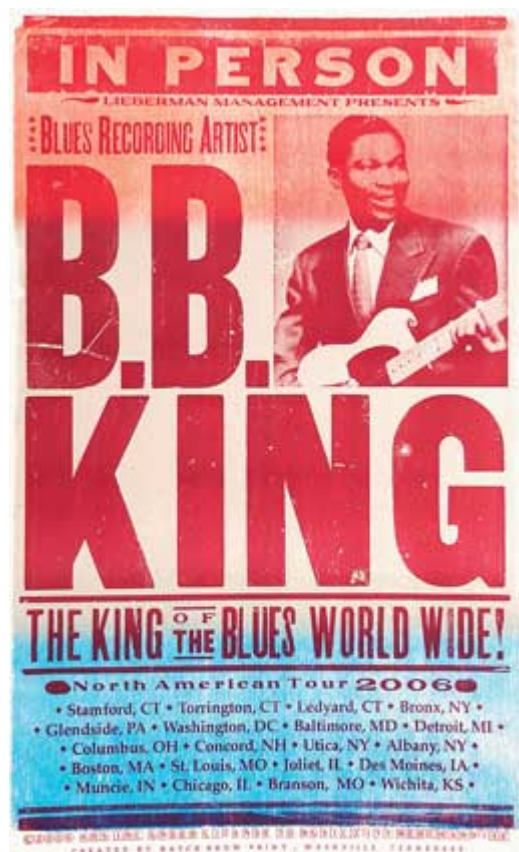
Hatch Show Print (above) is a Nashville landmark. The distinctive graphic look of Hatch prints helped define country music in the 1940s and '50s and continues to be sought by today's musicians. (Photo provided by Hatch

Show Print)

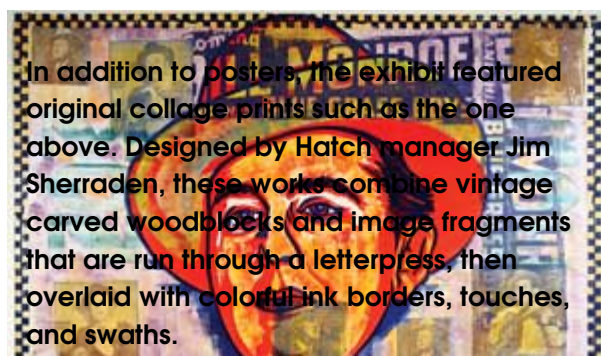
Reproductions of posters that once covered the sides of buildings and barns across America were on display this past summer at IWU's Merwin & Wakeley Galleries. Restrucked from the shop's archive of vintage woodblocks, the parade of colorful posters showed just what makes a Hatch print so special — a combination of “color, individuality, and a bold, tactile design,” according to current shop manager and chief designer, Jim Sherraden, who gave a lecture on Hatch's history prior to the exhibit's Sept. 7 closing.

With striking simplicity and consummate craftsmanship, Hatch prints impart an iconic view of American culture that has garnered appreciation from music lovers, graphic arts collectors and designers, and commercial advertisers of all persuasions. Now part of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Hatch Show Print continues to thrive, designing and printing posters for the likes of Merle Haggard, Coldplay, Destiny's Child, and B.B. King, as well as companies such as Nike and Taylor Guitars.

Still hand-set, hand-inked, and hand-pressed, Hatch Show Print posters “are the antithesis of the digital era that we live in,” says Sherraden. And that may be precisely why people continue to adore them. — *Tim Obermiller*



The above posters demonstrate the diversity of performers featured on Hatch Show prints, from legends to historic relics.



In addition to posters, the exhibit featured original collage prints such as the one above. Designed by Hatch manager Jim Sherraden, these works combine vintage carved woodblocks and image fragments that are run through a letterpress, then overlaid with colorful ink borders, touches, and swaths.