
The Hand Is Mightier Than the Font: An Interview with Bernard Maisner

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Bernard Maisner is an old hand when it comes to handwork, an expert stationer whose custom calligraphed invitation sets are masterpieces of Spencerian and Copperplate hand lettering. His elaborately embellished invitations and envelopes are either personally produced or printed under his supervision, and his “Italian,” “French” and “Americana” styles are unique in the world of fine social stationery and calligraphy. Maisner’s handwriting has also been used in advertising, as logos, and on books and CDs. Perhaps most fascinating are his lifelike re-creations of historical writings and interpretations done for fictional characters in motion pictures: his hand has stood in for Johnny Depp’s, Daniel Day Lewis’s and Sean Connery’s, among others. Those who witnessed his illustrated lecture for the Society of Scribes, held recently at New York’s Grolier Club, reported it as electrifying—and so inspiring that we could not pass up an opportunity to interview Maisner for *Voice* about the challenges of being a letterer in the digital age and his passion for this venerable art.

Heller: With everything gone digital—school kids aren’t even required to learn good penmanship anymore—do you think that calligraphy and lettering are here to stay?

Maisner: Calligraphy is here to stay in the same way that some people know Latin, that there are “colonial villages,” that some people play LPs on “record players,” that some artists paint using glazes in the manner that Hans Holbein did, and how some photographers still use emulsion film in their cameras. Hand lettering is a little more alive in that it is more flexible and more easily interpretable in a modern way than the traditional styles of calligraphy.

Heller: How did you learn this detailed art?

Maisner: I was self-taught from the age of 15 or so. I was in many rock bands and I made signs of the band names for the bass drumheads. Our bands were so bad we changed the names frequently so that we wouldn’t get a bad reputation. I had lots of lettering practice as a result. In high school, a school group asked me to do some kind of certificate. I did it using a Gothic lettering style, but not with a calligraphy pen—just copying an alphabet model