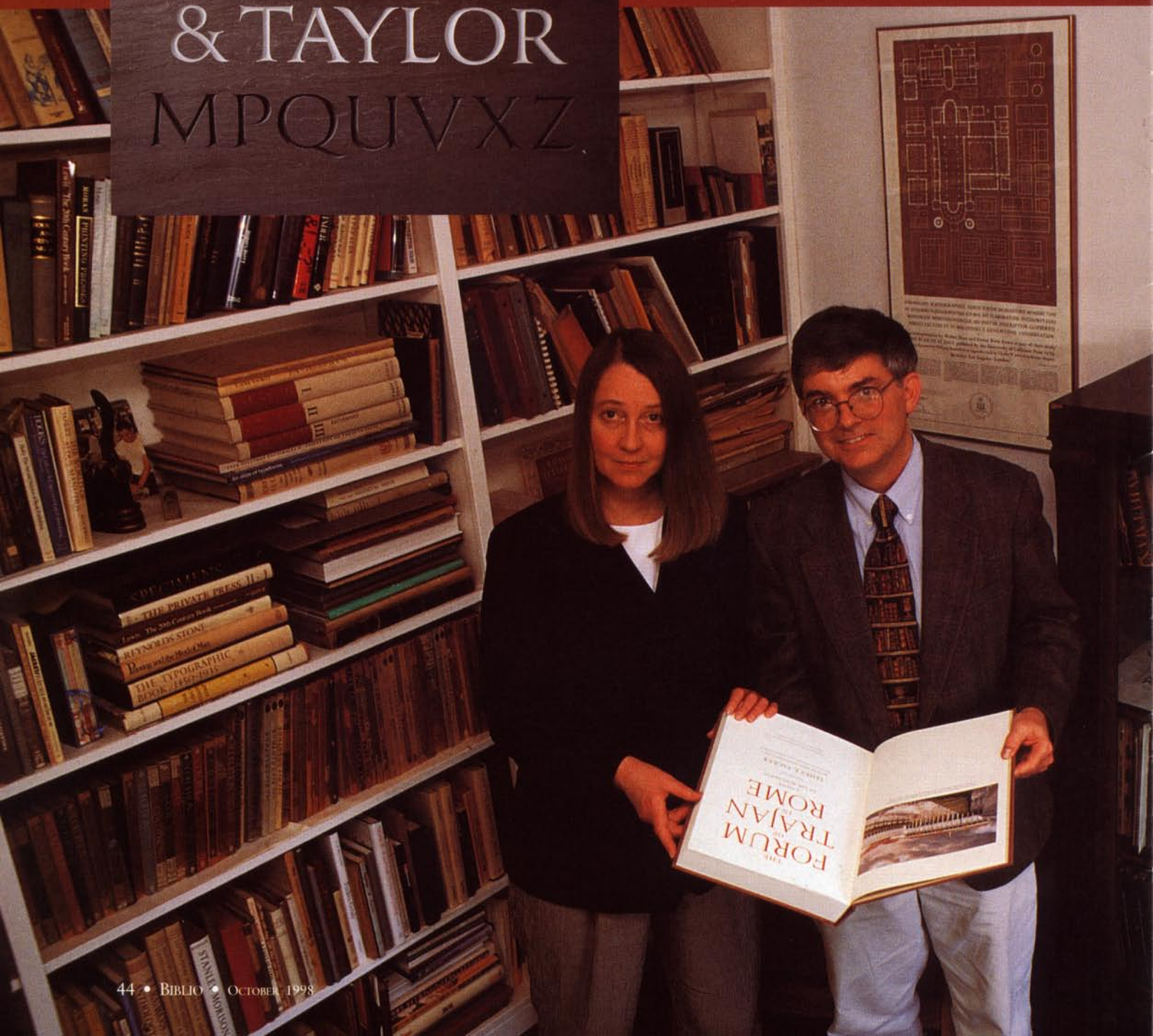


To the Letter

by Leah Brumer

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A framed broadside as big as a window hangs in the Oakland, California, office of typographer and book designer Christine Taylor. "This is a Printing Office," it proclaims. "Crossroad of Civilization, Refuge of all the arts ... Friend, you stand on sacred ground."

The declaration nearly jumps from the page. Like the message, the letter forms are forceful, upright, and uncluttered. No wonder Taylor treasures the broadside. It captures her creed: the harmonious marriage of elegant design and revered words. Since 1982, the publishing-services

firm founded by Taylor and her husband, Leroy Wilsted, has produced nearly fifteen hundred books and catalogues for university presses, museums, and literary publishers across the country. Today, when anyone with a personal computer can become a desktop publisher, the couple insists on drawing from the rich and deep heritage of typography and design. The result is books that soothe and satisfy the senses. "We got into this because of our love for the printed word, of the meaning in text," says Taylor, the firm's manager and a former medieval studies scholar. "We see ourselves as part of the fine-printing tradition. We are making beautiful objects that have life and that last."

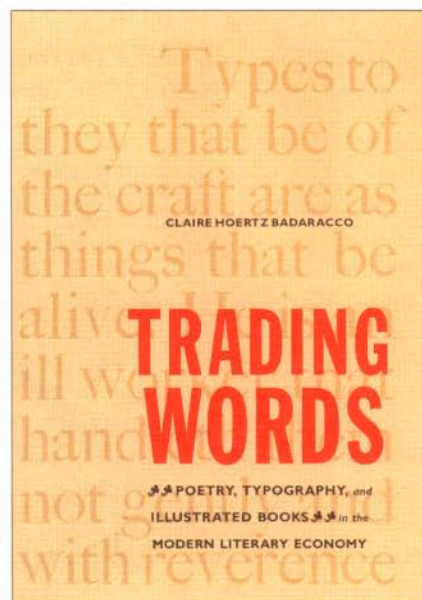
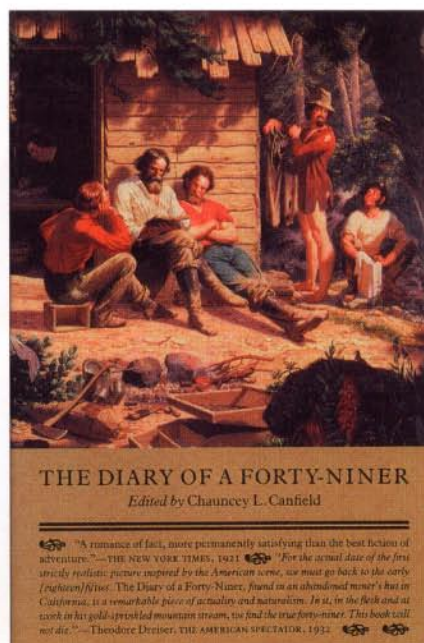
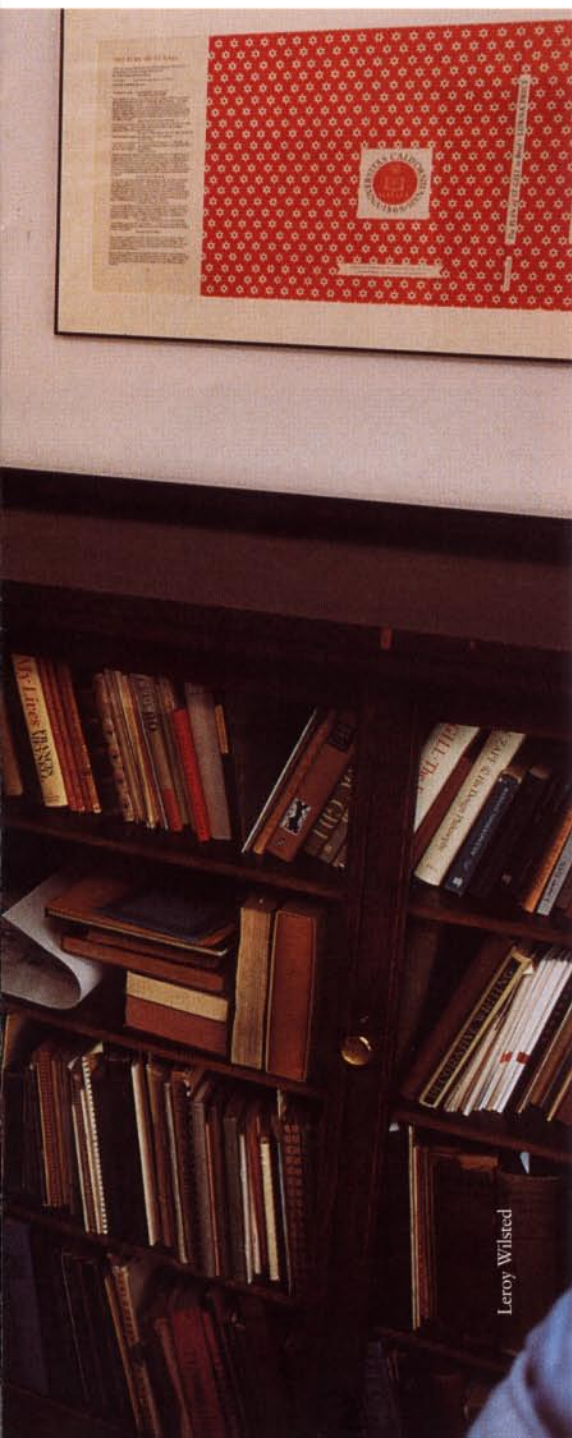
The art and craft of typography boasts an age-old lineage, one based on the earliest forms of writing. Many designs used today reflect principles of clarity and legibility that emerged from Venetian Renaissance workshops. Taylor finds inspiration in this

century's typographers, such as Englishman Stanley Morison, who developed the now widely used Times New Roman font for the *London Times*. She also refers to the work of American Beatrice Warde, typographer, printing historian, and the broadside's author, and counts as her mentor Ernest Born, an architect, designer, and typographer who designed lettering for the Bay Area Rapid Transit System, Stanford's Hoover Memorial, and the University of California at Berkeley's Greek Theater.

A tiny notice next to the doorway of a nondescript brick building on a busy four-lane street points to Wilsted & Taylor's shop. The card offers no hint of the literary labors underway upstairs. Perhaps the near-invisibility is by design. Taylor prefers not to call attention to herself on the page. She sees her task as honoring, rather than overshadowing, words. Morison suggested as much, defining typography as "rightly disposing printed material in accordance with a specific purpose." Taylor treats her tools with respect. "Letter forms are among

A typographical tradition: Husband-and-wife book designers Christine Taylor and Leroy Wilsted adhere to a centuries-old printing heritage while forging their own signature.

Hewing to tradition still allows Wilsted & Taylor to work on projects ranging from a reprint of a turn-of-the-century book to a contemporary history of literary culture.



the most refined, evolved shapes," she says. They embody centuries of skill and craft distilled into simple forms. As she pages through a book she designed, a curtain of dark blond hair falls across her face. Friendly but reserved, she allows her reticence to dissolve as she describes what happens when print meets page. "People aren't aware of type fonts, but they influence how you read," she observes. "You respond differently to different faces. Some are more scientific, others are literary and humanistic. Some jump off the page." Thousands of fonts exist today, though just a fraction are used regularly. To design well with even a few takes years of practice, but the best work looks effortless. "When type works beautifully, it's like diving into a smooth pool of water," Taylor says. "You go through it without a ripple."

Floor-to-ceiling bookcases in the shop's library hold the volumes Wilsted & Taylor has worked on. Sierra Club books about wild places share space with the likes of the award-winning catalogue *The Mask of Venice*, designed, edited, and typeset for the Berkeley Art Museum for a 1997 exhibition of the eighteenth-century artist Tiepolo. Books from Beacon Press, the University of California, Cornell, and Stanford also stand in these stacks. North Point Press literary titles, including works by M.F.K. Fisher, Wendell Berry, and Marcel Pagnol, fill four shelves.

When Taylor begins a design project, she analyzes the manuscript like a math problem, calculating the number of characters on a page and determining the density of text she wants. Her goal is to create tension between type and white space. To her eye, a homogeneous, evenly spaced page looks bland and weak. "The eye sees text as a unit," she explains. "I like text isolated and concentrated." Of a page devoid of ornamentation, she observes, "Even if you have only a block of type, the page can be pleasing with the right proportion of margins and width of text block." Her comment suggests that the beauty of a page is as simple — and as complex — as a symbiotic relationship between letter forms and white space.

Her well-defined visual sense comes from studying thousands of pages. Readers may ignore margins, for example, but not typographers. Margins have a practical, as well as aesthetic, purpose: They give readers space for their thumbs. "The classic page has heavy margins on the bottom and sides," Taylor says. "I like gutters [the inner margins of a book's facing pages] to equal the top margins." She grumbles over budget constraints. "Publishers always want more text on the page."

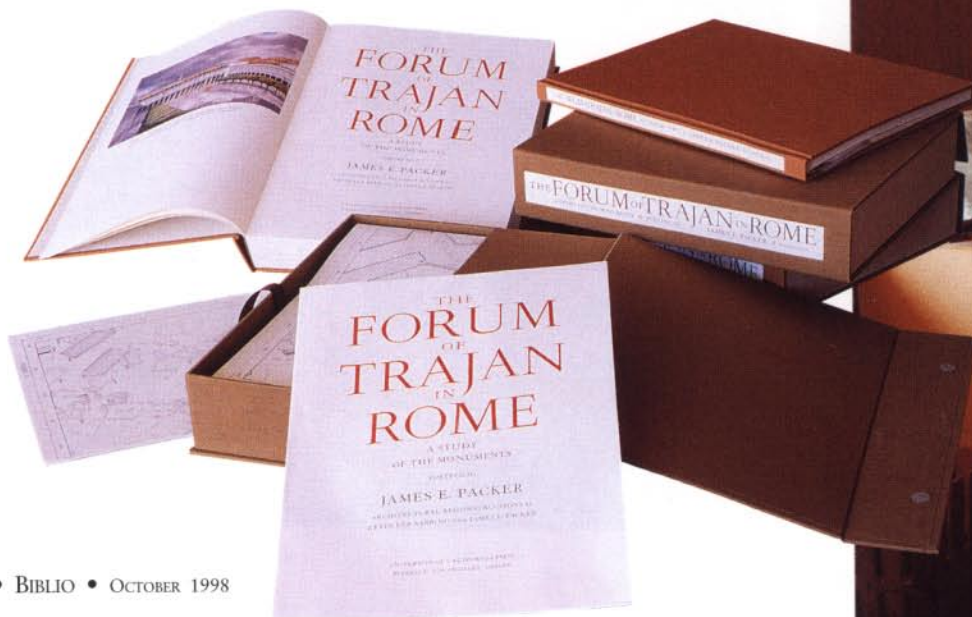
The myriad details of a book's visual elements must work together. If they don't, the result can unsettle, even discourage, readers. Skilled typographers search pages for such irregularities as unevenly spaced letters and words, recurring hyphens at the ends of lines, and "orphans," the last line

of a paragraph carried over to the top of the next page or column. They know a line of sixty-six characters is ideal, and they wouldn't justify lines of fewer than forty. They know, too, that if lines of text are set too closely, the eye will slip to the next before reading to the end of the current one. But too much space between lines also creates problems. "The page will look flaccid," Taylor says. "It will pull apart."

Art books and museum catalogues introduce even more elements to weave into the page. Illustrations must appear close to their mention in the text. Reproductions of large and small works must be in proportion. Captions and information on a work's provenance must

In the team spirit: The truths expressed in the broadsheet at right, created as a memento by Wilsted & Taylor, reflect the staff members' ability to join forces and shepherd a book all the way through the production process. From left: Jeff Clark, designer; Melody Lacina, editor; Jennifer Brown, chief of staff; Tri Do, typographer; Nancy Evans, editor; Melissa Ehn, designer.

The massive, three-volume *The Forum of Trajan in Rome*, the firm's biggest project, pays homage to Taylor's mentor, typographer and designer Ernest Born.



be included without disturbing the contrast between illustration and white space. Given these variations, each page must be set individually. Taylor points to sample pages from a catalogue on the work of contemporary painter Joan Brown. Subject and style also influence typography. "Her art is autobiographical and personal," Taylor says. To evoke an epistolary feel, she will set the catalogue's chapter headings in a script type.

In 1992 Wilsted & Taylor's work attracted the attention of publisher

Jonathan Rabinowitz. His Turtle Point Press reissues forgotten literary works, mostly in paperback. Drawn by the couple's design style and scholarly interests, he found the firm well-matched to his books. "My book list is so diverse I need a reader as a designer," Rabinowitz says. "These people are readers." A new edition of *The Diary of a Forty-Niner*, first published in 1906, was one of Taylor's early designs for him. Turtle Point's edition of the gold rush memoir is now in its tenth printing, and for that

success Rabinowitz credits Taylor. "We made it into a real period piece," he says.

That was Taylor's goal. A first edition of the book inspired her to suggest an early 1900s design. For the typeface, she chose the rich, dark Plantin. Freed from the constraints of scholarly books, she decorated the top of each page with a border composed of the running motif of a miner's pick and shovel leaning on a pile of rocks. Summaries of diary entries introduce each chapter.

A simpler design suited Turtle Point's *Chapters from Childhood*, a memoir by Juliet Soskice, sister of English writer Ford Madox Ford and niece of painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. For the new edition of this early 1920s work, Taylor selected comfortable margins, a pair of thick and thin lines running across the top of each page, and an occasional ornament. The round, open typeface evokes a child's book from another era. The paperback's coated cover is smooth but not slick. Like other books from this press, it rests comfortably in the hand.

THE ART OF TYPOGRAPHY

In the sense in which architecture is an art, typography is an art: making or doing intentionally, with skill. But they are not one-man arts. The finished work is in every case the work of a team, depending for its success upon the clear conveyance of intentions from one human mind to the concert of specialists who are responsible, not only to the master designer, but also to the public. Faulty masonry, or a misprint, is not simply a betrayal of the whole intention, it is also a matter of public concern.

This headline was produced by Wilsted & Taylor Publishing Services on the occasion of the 1997 Association of American University Presses Production Managers Meeting in Berkeley, California. The text, in *Centaur*, is adapted from the writing of Beatrice L. Ward.

Typography is known as a conservative craft. For literacy to survive, readers must be able to recognize letter forms over centuries. British designer Morison warned against experimenting on books designed for mass audiences. "The typography of books, apart from limited editions, requires an obedience to convention which is almost absolute," he wrote. Displays of typographic ego must not distract readers. Of course, rules can be broken for effect; even Taylor's pages do not surrender to tradition entirely. And today, computers offer unlimited design choices. "Look at *Wired* magazine," Taylor says. "They're taking type in different directions. It can be shocking and exciting."

Her expression, however, conveys disapproval. Fad and excess have no place in her work. Wilsted & Taylor's books are admired for restraint and elegance. Comments Anthony Crouch, production manager at the University of California Press, "[Their books] don't scream, 'Look at me, I'm so beautiful — oh, and by the way, there happens to be an author.'" Crouch relies on Taylor for help when deadlines mount and his own staff is busy. He trusts the firm's exacting standards and knows the staff can take a project from design through printing. Thanks to



Leroy Wilsted

editor Nancy Evans' fluency in Greek and Latin, Wilsted & Taylor has also built a reputation for editing scholarly works. And like earlier typographers who for centuries typeset books in languages they did not speak, the firm offers typesetting in Hebrew.

Taylor's connection to the printed page began early. "I was the kid at the beach with a book," she says. "I was always aware of the look and feel of books. I loved to be in libraries, surrounded by paper and ink. I loved decorated bindings." In 1971, after earning her B.A. from Radcliffe College, she entered an English doctoral program at U.C. Berkeley. By day, she taught and did research on fourteenth-century mystic Julian of Norwich. Wilsted, a photographer, had received conscientious-objector status and was completing his government work assignment at a federal health agency. At night, using borrowed printing machines, the two produced poetry magazines and books for friends. They published *University Press*, a tabloid-format review of university-press books. "We lived in an apartment filled with light tables," Taylor recalls. "Finally, we had to admit we had a real business. We gave up doing it at night and rented this space."

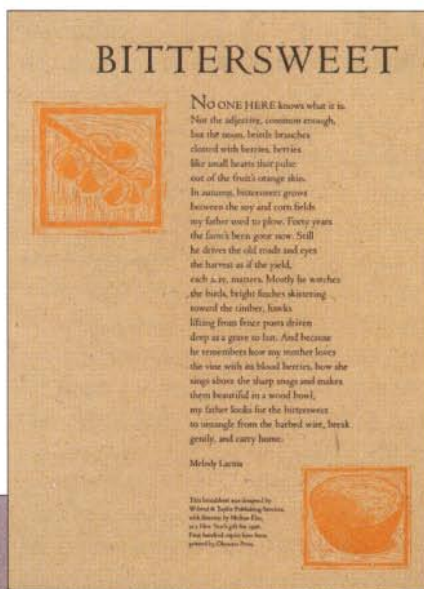
Sixteen years later, their primary reference materials remain a collection of

yellowing books that Ernest Born left them when he died. They met Born during the early days of *University Press*, and he often critiqued their work. In 1980 Wilsted & Taylor designed promotional materials for Born's three-volume masterpiece, *The Plan of St. Gall*, a plan for a ninth-century Carolingian monastery, and in 1984 they all worked together on the Sotheby/University of California Press *Book of California Wine*. "That was his first non-metal-type book," Taylor recalls. Her mentor's tattered volumes and a few packets of metal type from a long-gone foundry reflect his teachings. A humanist above all, "he liked unevenness, roughness, the stroke of the hand," Taylor says. "He didn't follow consistency out the window."

For Taylor, working with Born amounted to an advanced seminar in typography. The apprenticeship grounded her in the craft's principles, tempered by Born's appreciation of lively, sparkling design. He rejected rigidity and believed the printed page could entertain without distracting. That foundation gave Taylor the confidence to seek her own design signature. Says retired U.C. Press edito-

Melissa Ehn produced the linocuts and Melody Lacina wrote the poem for this broadsheet that the firm created as a New Year's gift in 1996.

Production assistant Heather Rudkin, surrounded by posters, broadsheets, and books — all fruits of Wilsted & Taylor's industry.



rial director William McClung of Taylor's work, "It's not a lunge toward innovation, but an intelligent move in that direction. It's a gradual liberation within the classic typographic constraints she learned to admire early on."

With a computer at every desk, Wilsted & Taylor's traditional printing shop is also a modern one. Unlike earlier shops, it is quiet. With manuscripts delivered, edited, and designed on computer disks, the only machine noise is the hum of laser printers. Says Leroy Wilsted, the shop's computer wizard, "Maybe it's just nostalgia for a time I never knew, but I would love to have been doing this back when it was all hot metal. I miss seeing the ink pressed into paper." When he and Taylor started out, he taught himself typography by reading every book on the subject he could find. "The ones I liked best had yellowed cards in the library catalogues," he recalls. Slight and soft-spoken behind wire-rimmed glasses, he oversees computer files and equipment and prefers a behind-the-scenes role. The two partners have different skills but a shared style. Wilsted & Taylor produces more books each year than some university presses, yet order reigns in the shop. The spare, plain-spoken chairs and bookcases from Taylor's Arts and Crafts furniture collection shun clutter. Dressed often in a crisp linen smock recalling an impressionist painter's jacket, so does Taylor.

Taylor's heroes wrote of typography as a calling, even a public trust. Today, colleagues use similar words to describe the couple's skills, dignity, and honorable business practices. "They are passionate believers in humane conduct and typography," says McClung. "Behind that is a driving force of anger at things not being done right." Indeed, the couple abhors slapdash book production. Still, however much she strives for perfection, Taylor admits to mistakes. "When you're producing books, you must reconcile yourself that every one is a compromise," she says. "The initial reaction [to errors] is one of horror. But if you decided to make one book the perfect book, it would never get published."

Deadlines and high standards leave little room in the couple's life for much beyond work. Rare free time resembles

a busman's holiday. During a recent gathering with friends, the couple dusted off the sixty-year-old press stored in their garage and printed a Shakespeare sonnet. Taylor reads mysteries for pleasure and always reads the text of books she's working on. Subjects from Irish music to the history of a small college captivate her. "I need to see how the author thinks," she notes. "Design comes out of the substance." And type is the center of design. "You wouldn't want to set a scientific textbook in Perpetua," she says, wincing. "It's a pretty type. It looks like a novel." A contemporary art catalogue, on the other hand, might suggest the vertical, modern Electra.

Although known for high-end art catalogues and books, Taylor has never confined herself to limited editions. "I've always wanted to design beautiful, legible books within the [cost] constraints of selling to a large audience," she says. Always under pressure to keep costs down, Wilsted & Taylor relies on time-saving, sophisticated computers to set pages. Even so, she still believes the human touch gives life to print. "Technology may allow fewer and fewer people to be involved," she acknowledges, "but it makes worse and worse books. A talented designer may not always be a talented editor or typographer. Someone with a great visual sense might not have the meticulous patience to do letter spacing."


Letter spacing is one of Wilsted's jobs. He has kerned thousands of digital typefaces, that is, altered preset spaces between pairs of letters. Working with tiny measures, he adjusts some pairs by $\frac{5}{8},_{000}$ of a space. That way, combinations like AV, (f), and gy fit snugly without merging. The result is smooth, even text. "Beautifully set type is like haiku poetry," Taylor says. "It's spare but evocative."

Wilsted & Taylor's largest project, *The Forum of Trajan in Rome*, is her homage to Born and her opportunity to apply all he taught. Published in 1997 by U.C. Press, it is a study of one of the most important monuments of imperial Rome. The massive work, six years in production, is comprised of three ten-inch-by-thirteen-inch volumes and contains text, architectural reconstructions, plates, maps, and microfiche. The manuscript was fifteen hundred pages long, with over eight hundred pieces of art and extensive

notes and tables. The result is a feat of bookmaking. Each photograph, fragment, and drawing is numbered and cross-referenced. In the midst of production, author James Lee Packer returned to Rome, only to learn the Italians had renumbered all the monuments' fragments. "We had to redo everything," Taylor recalls with a slight smile. "All the cross-references had to change."

For the text Taylor chose Granjon, a typeface designed in 1928 and named after a sixteenth-century Parisian typesetter. "It's one of my favorites," she says. "It's very accommodating." Chapter initials are from a 1569 alphabet based on lettering from Trajan's Column, which stands in the Forum's center and has inspired type designers for centuries. Pages are thick and creamy, with some renderings and maps printed in deep red ink.

The Forum may be Taylor's formal tribute to Born, but her more modest projects offer daily homage to words. Consider the U.C. Press's 1988 *Images of Flight*, a small-format study of the theme of flight in Western art. The binding is light and flexible. Oblong pages are quiet and clean. Headings are set in small and smaller capital letters. Unlike some illustrated books, the art does not overwhelm the text. The cover, stark white with a single illustration, raised eyebrows in the publisher's office, but the book won a Book Builders' West award for jacket design. "[It] is classically beautiful," McClung says.

Such works bridge the generation gap between hot-metal type and digital fonts. They will be part of Wilsted & Taylor's legacy. Twenty years ago, Ernest Born recognized his apprentice's gifts. He referred to them when he inscribed Warde's broadside hanging in the shop entrance. "To Christine Taylor," it reads. "Typographer, printer, editor, but mostly a servant to perfection in the things she loves." 

Freelance writer Leah Brumer lives in Berkeley, California. When she read the Turtle Point Press reissue of Hannah Green's The Dead of the House, the book's lovely, simple design impressed her. Intrigued, she sought out the designers and wrote this profile.