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Southern Living

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Time of Year*

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Christmas at
Biltmore Estate



SOUTHERNERS

PRINTERS IN THE OLD STYLE

In today's modern world of chain bookstores and mass production, a few dedicated craftsmen continue to produce books that are works of art in every sense of the word.

Why, in this instantaneous age of digital desktop publishing, would anyone devote his career to creating books by hand, one letter at a time?

Gray Zeitz provides an eminently logical answer. "I still think hand-set type sets better," he says. The spacing is more precise, he explains, and he can use beautiful typefaces that you can't get on computers.

Those are the logical reasons. But they're not the real reason. Gray laughs as he finally confesses, "It's fun. I enjoy setting type by hand."

Gray Zeitz (rhymes with "heights") runs Larkspur Press out of a pleasantly cluttered building on his farm outside Monterey, Kentucky, 15 miles north of Frankfort. He hand-sets and hand-prints maybe three exquisite books a year, plus a few broadsheets and small custom printing jobs.

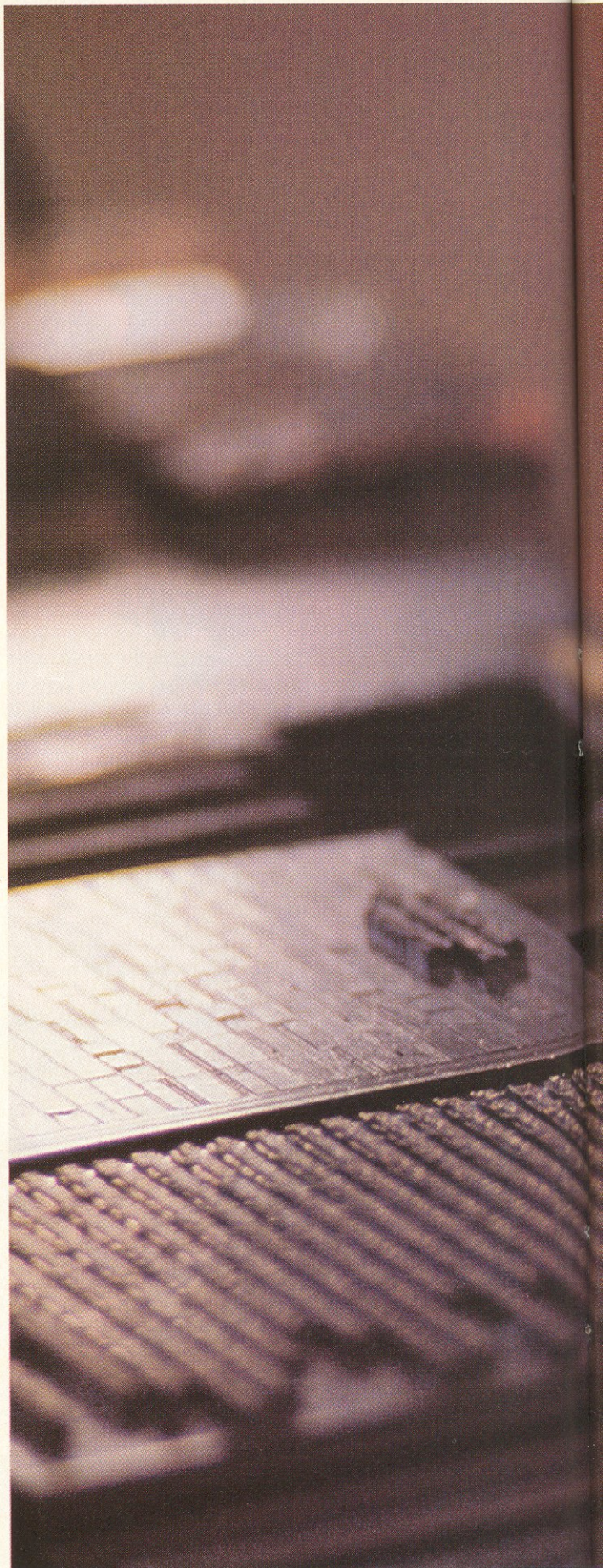
Your hands reach instinctively for these books. Your fingertips caress the thick, nubby paper. The printing lies crisp and black against the cream-colored page, irresistibly inviting the eye.

You look up and see Gray smiling, enjoying your reaction. You have never encountered anyone who seems more satisfied with his life.

He is a big, comfortable fellow with wire-frame glasses, a gray beard that tickles his chest, and suspenders that frame his Santa Claus belly like parentheses. He was born in Alabama 45 years ago but grew up in Kentucky, attending Elizabethtown Community College and the University of Kentucky.

His passion for printing flared in the mysterious way of all love affairs. During his student days, he wandered into the King Library Press, a handpress at the University of Kentucky Libraries. "One step into that print shop," says Gray, "and I was hooked."

Larkspur Press books generally come in two editions. Regular editions ("nicely done but affordable," Gray says), in runs of 500 to 1,000 copies, sell for



PHOTOGRAPHS: GARY CLARK, ART MERIPOL



between \$10 and \$30 each. Hand-bound special editions are limited to between 25 and 60 copies at \$60 to \$130 each.

Most of his authors are Kentuckians. One of his regulars, Wendell Berry, lives right across the river. And scanning a bibliography, you notice other familiar names: Bobbie Ann Mason, Thomas Merton, Guy Davenport, Robert Aiken, James Baker Hall . . . and Gray Zeitz. The printer, it turns out, is also a poet.

And now you understand why he finds so much fun in this painstaking labor. What greater joy can there be for a poet than to actually hold words in his hand?

Steve Millburg

(Below) At Larkspur Press near Monterey, Kentucky, Gray Zeitz, who creates fine books one letter at a time, makes final preparations to the type before he begins printing a page.

