

Diesel Fuel Prints

Andy Stern



by Paul Grushkin

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Interview

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INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design. Some of these articles still need work.

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Interview Diesel Fuel Prints Interviewing Andy Stern

By Paul Grushkin

Produced by Michael Erlewine ()

All eyes in the rock world are on Andy Stern's Diesel Fuel Prints. Not only has this skillful printer every month - now going on fourteen years - handled dozens of sticker and t-shirt jobs for bands across the country, he's actively printing and promoting the poster work of many top illustrators.

Quietly, beginning a little less than two years ago, he began to actively promote

-- with the bands' involvement and approval -- these artists' gig posters for resale through an artist-friendly publishing program. And subsequently he's helped create entire tour's worth of individual-gig posters for bands such as the Melvins and Supersuckers (the latter in association with artist Darren Grealish's direction), for the bands' own sale at their gigs and subsequently through the Diesel Fuel website.

Not since the early 1990's when Phil Cushway's ArtRock presented publishing (distribution) opportunities to artists like Frank Kozik, Justin Hampton, Ward Sutton, and Alan Forbes (to name only a few) and Dennis King published John Seabury, has poster-publishing been talked about so actively. Now, established artists in the current -- and very hot -- alternative and power-punk scenes like Greg 'Stainboy' Reinelt, Jeral Tidwell, Tara McPherson, and Guy Burwell are heading the Diesel program

-- newly joined by Frank Kozik, Mike Martin, and others doing Diesel- published art prints.

I spoke with Andy about his roots, the new directions, the challenges, and the pleasure he takes in producing beautiful screen-printed art.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Andy, exactly what are you to Diesel Fuel? The owner, proprietor, president, general manager, CFO, and CEO?

ANDY STERN: I would be all of the above.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: When did you begin at Diesel Fuel in earnest?

ANDY STERN: At the end of 1991. I was then living in Northern California, the Santa Rosa area, Sebastopol, actually. I had no job, I had to make money. I started going around to stores asking them if I could start printing their stickers.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: You've always been a sticker kind of guy.

ANDY STERN: Mainly stickers, yes. I've personally done a lot of work on vinyl, hand and automatic work on paper products, and then branched off into pint glasses, a lot of cylindrical products, and, of course, t-shirts. My background in silkscreen printing came out of home printing -- printing stuff for friends' bands and stuff for myself.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: How old were you when you did your first screen print?

ANDY STERN: Fifth or sixth grade. I was living in Bethesda, Maryland.

Circumstances brought me and my family to Southern California and I lived there for four years. What brought me

to Northern California was college. But what attracted me to printing was that I love art, that's the bottom line, and printing art was a great way for me to get free art.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Did your love of music and your desire to do things for bands bring you into the commercial world?

ANDY STERN: Actually when I first started Diesel Fuel, I didn't want anything to do with bands because oftentimes they're such a pain in the butt to deal with. Not getting paid is a hard thing to deal with. I was mostly doing stuff for retail around town. I started out with a "Mean People Suck" sticker.

Funny, a lot of people thought "Mean People Suck" had something to do with Grateful Dead heads and jam band fans. Not. One of my distributors, this guy from Purple Moon Design, used to sell a lot of the stickers I printed on the Dead tour and I think that's how all the hippies picked it up. The slogan originated from a San Francisco band called NOFX. They have a song called "Mean People Suck" on their second record. It was stickers like that -- retail, retail, retail -- up until about 1995 and then I figured I had no idea what new trends would be, so I started doing production work.

The Move to Portland

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Tell me about the move from Northern California to Portland. How did that come about?

ANDY STERN: The dot-com boom, I couldn't afford rent anymore. I was sick of California and I thought I should get out while I could. I came to Portland for a delivery of a something like 1,000 shirts. I liked Portland so much I decided then and there it was the place I wanted to move to.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: When you set up shop as Diesel Fuel Prints in Portland, what kind of equipment did you have immediately?

ANDY STERN: Well, when we brought all the equipment up from California, we had two semi-automatic flatbed sticker/poster presses and one manual t-shirt press and a UV dryer and all the other accoutrements that go along with it.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: So at that point you were t-shirts and stickers, but really had not entered the world of screen-printed poster art.

ANDY STERN: Not really. I was doing some posters for my friends' bands and my brother's band, but I'd no idea people were going to be looking to buy rock posters! I think the first screen- printed poster I did . . . the first good one I liked . . . was in 1996. We're talking post-punk hardcore here (my brothers band) and my band -- I played guitar -- was straight-up old-school hardcore.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: The thing about the revolution in poster art is it didn't really come immediately after Kozik's high-point period of '92 - '96. There was this seeming lull.

And then in late 1999 and really in earnest by 2001, we began to see this great resurgence in rock poster making. Did you feel the impact of gigposters.com at about that time?

ANDY STERN: I think the guys at Stonerrock.com or the bass player of Nebula told me about it. I was like, "Who wants to talk on the Internet?" I never looked at it again until Darren.

Grealish told me about it. I came back on the Internet and looked at it for about a month and then got all chatty like I am now.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: What's so interesting, and surely ART OF MODERN ROCK had something to do with it too, is that as we begin 2005, there's literally a whole new audience of artists and customers looking at the book, looking at gigposters.com, looking at ClassicPosters.com, a whole new audience to reach with something that's obviously become a hot commodity -- screenprinted rock posters. Some of them are picking up on your printing and the art coming from your artist roster.

ANDY STERN: Definitely!

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Which I think is a good thing, in general because what you've evolved into is a publishing operation for artists that you believe in.

ANDY STERN: Exactly!

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Tell me a little about how that came about, Andy.

ANDY STERN: About two years ago, at this time, while we were on vacation, Grelish called me to get some posters printed and he talked about this whole poster deal where I get half and he gets half and the band gets some and he brought me in a whole bunch of gigs. I was like sure, I like Beck, I like this band, sure, I could sell some.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Now in order to pull that off you have to have a nice production run. Did you set your sights on 300-400 or did you have to set your sights on a 1,000 pieces to...

ANDY STERN: No, then we were doing about 200-250, now we've upped them to 400 - 500. The band always gets 20%.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And that means they can distribute them, they can put them up on their walls or they could even throw them away if they wanted to.

ANDY STERN: They can do anything that want to with them. It's our hope that they sell them and make some money, then come back to us for another one. Article:

PAUL GRUSHKIN: I'm sure you secure permission from all the bands involved in order to pull off this publishing program.

ANDY STERN: We always try to get permission from the band. If not, then we have permission from the venue or from the promoter. We never do anything without permission from the venue, the promoter, or the band.

Recently we've been talking a lot hand- in-hand with band management.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: I'd imagine the Melvins series was done both with the permission and involvement of the band.

ANDY STERN: Exactly, both the Melvins series and the Supersuckers series were done with the direct cooperation of the bands. We're hopefully going to be doing many new tour series of gig posters -- but I don't have all the details yet.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Now that means, Andy, when you're looking at doing a series of pieces for a band, the opportunity is to take a particular tour and then match poster artists to that tour and see what comes?

ANDY STERN: Basically.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Basically?

ANDY STERN: Usually I wouldn't pick someone who draws pretty flowers for a Cramps poster. After the Melvins thing, I'm never doing an open call for artists ever again, that was just a nightmare.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Is that because what you got back from them in some cases wasn't entirely representative of what the Melvins are?

ANDY STERN: Luckily just about anything could be representative of what the Melvins are.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Now it's funny that we're talking about the same thing.

When Dennis King and I were doing ART OF MODERN ROCK, the same criteria applied. Each poster had to have a visceral appeal. It had to leap out at you and say, "I'm a great poster."

ANDY STERN: Exactly. And because I'm the one putting up the resources, I have to determine if something's in or out. I have to apply some kind of criteria. And, I have to sell the damn thing.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Have you had to say no to an artist whose submitted work wasn't up to snuff?

ANDY STERN: I haven't yet, but I've just decided that I'll be doing that if I'm not really into a poster.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Now you have a very established shop and there aren't that many commercial shops within our world that we speak of, Drowning Creek being the obvious other one, maybe Patent Pending being another. Your shop exists on the basis of stickers and t-shirts, but you're now commanding press time within your own shop for this published series.

ANDY STERN: Since we've moved up here, we've gotten two more presses to handle the vinyl sticker printing and the posters. So now we have four flat-bed presses and hopefully will get another. These are all semi-automatic machines.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Are you using a particular manufacturer that you think is particularly good for this work?

ANDY STERN: For posters, it's not a big deal, as you can use an older press, and with air-drying inks the tolerances aren't as high. For the vinyl I have to use higher-end presses usually Saturn M&R equipment.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Is that because the registration on vinyl is harder to achieve without a real technically adapt press?

ANDY STERN: Well registration isn't so much the issue; it's rather a squeegee control issue, along with the inks we've learned are best to use for stickers.

Sticker printing is just a lot more technical.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: The equipment that's devoted to the posters themselves, have you modified it to make it better for poster purposes?

ANDY STERN: Not at all. It worked perfect, right from when we first got it.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Do you generally have one print technician working the poster press?

ANDY STERN: I have one guy who works 5 days a week just doing posters, about a poster a day.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And that means that once you've burned the screens and set him up, he's responsible for

the pile of blank paper feeding into the press and printing the entire run.

ANDY STERN: All I have to do is proof everything! He brings me every color proof for my inspection, and Nathan, my art guy, mixes all the ink.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: After Darren Grealish, which artists did you begin working with? Jeral Tidwell?

ANDY STERN: Yes, and Stainboy Greg Reinel. I hooked up with him right after Flatstock 3 in Seattle. The minute I saw his stuff, I told him I'd print anything he wanted.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: So the first Flatstock that you attended was Austin (Flatstock 2)?

ANDY STERN: Yes. I would have gone to the first one in San Francisco, but initially, at that time, I was like, "who's going to buy a rock poster? Those things are dead."

PAUL GRUSHKIN: So what changed your mind?

ANDY STERN: Just doing a few posters. I started liking it; it was a fun thing to do. It actually brought the fun back into the screenprinting business. I was so sick of doing production work. I was missing that kind of fun.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Do you see yourself at the forefront of a kind of populist explosion? If we're talking about going from fundamentally production work to artistic output where you're actually working creative deals with poster artists, bands, club owners and even yourself in order to create a run of 300- 400 of which a portion goes to the band, a portion goes to the poster artist and then you have the opportunity to sell the balance, I mean this is all pretty recent stuff.

ANDY STERN: Yes. Yes, it is, definitely new territory.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And the question again is: do you see yourself at the front of what we're calling a populist explosion?

ANDY STERN: I'm not sure really. I know it's going on everywhere now, all across the country. Amazing. Even just a few years ago, who would have thought? Yet I still look at it as a hobby, kind of. Maybe it helps me keep everything in perspective, but I still look at the whole world of rock posters as a hobby, a really cool hobby, but not exactly a business. Yet, it gets bigger every day and it's helping support me and seven other people at the shop. It's not our key source of income, but it's increasing.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: You wouldn't be in the position you're in -- that of a successful publisher -- unless, number one, there was an enormous body of poster artists cranking out great things, and number two a resurgent interest from the collectors' standpoint.

ANDY STERN: Yes, I think a lot of people see me at the forefront of this whole deal. Just dumb luck I suppose, having the right resources there at the right time. Remember I've got stickers and t-shirts that pay for everything, and I was able to publish 175 posters before really selling anything. Now of course I'm concerned to put in the energy that makes it a good investment.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: In your particular case have you invented an output code for your series, like Phil Cushway did with his PCL's?

ANDY STERN: Not yet, not exactly.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: So they're basically under the copyright of the artist, but the publishing deal allows you to sell off a balance portion. But there are no series numbers.

ANDY STERN: Exactly, all it says on there is "printed by Diesel Fuel Prints." It doesn't have some crazy weird stock number. Once I get into that, won't that take all the fun out of it?

PAUL GRUSHKIN: On the other hand, you don't want to create an acre of printed pieces you can't track. So how do you sell your portion, and what is the community that's buying them?

ANDY STERN: Right now we're doing really well with Internet sales. The community that is buying them I'm not sure really, I'm assuming that it's mostly young kids. People who are supporting all the new music -- metal, punk, alternative, whatever. I'm hoping we can begin wholesaling to record stores in the next six months. I'd love it for people to be able to see them up on the wall.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: When you're doing a production run... when you're committed to doing a certain number of pieces with Stainboy on a particular piece, lets go with, say, one of his 'Flogging Molly' pieces, and you've got a balance quantity sitting in your flat files or on racks. You as a publisher have to be pretty concerned that the pile starts to work itself down on a regular basis.

Otherwise you're going to get stuck with an acre of paper.

ANDY STERN: But you know what, some things just aren't going to sell, no matter how good they look, they're just not going to sell. The really good sellers kind of make up for the bad sellers.

Sometimes it's just a matter of time before the sales come.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: You know who said that to me last was Kozik.

ANDY STERN: And he told me the same thing too! That's why I have to put it in some perspective even while I'm thinking, "God, we're never going to sell those." Even with Tara McPherson's work, there are a few things that just don't move very fast, but the rest of it . . . hey, we're selling out of some Tara prints in less than two months. So if only two out of ten don't sell so good, well, that's not so bad. Ten out of ten is asking the impossible, except I couldn't tell you going in to a particular art piece of hers if it was going to be one of the two slow movers. I just think to myself, "it's all good. I made a choice to publish it."

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Now in order to pull this off, you have to have a fulfillment operation. Do you have people who do that in-house for you as well?

ANDY STERN: Yes we do.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: So you have staff who wrap the purchased print in brown paper, uses a heavyweight tubes, seal the ends properly, addresses it carefully, and all that.

ANDY STERN: You've got it.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: That's the whole tedious part of being in the publishing business.

ANDY STERN: It's insane! Business is such that I've been running around for the last four days trying to tighten up the whole back end process of the retail and the wholesale area. People get upset when they're waiting to get posters they bought.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And that means you're interacting with the public and inevitably you're going to get a few people who say their tube arrived bent or the poster wasn't what they thought it would be.

ANDY STERN: Luckily we haven't gotten anybody thinking the poster wasn't what they thought it would be and luckily we ship everything UPS insured. So as long as it isn't a sold-out run, you can call us up to track your purchase. If it's lost for good, we'll deal with the insurance and send a replacement.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Now when you were working with the Melvins series and the Supersuckers before that, were you aware how complex it is to do an entire series of posters?

ANDY STERN: Can you believe I had absolutely no idea?

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Would you do it again?

ANDY STERN: Oh definitely, I'm working on a few others; there are a few big ones that we're hoping to get this year.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And you were able to begin a subscription series as well, this past year, where people were able to pre-order an entire set.

ANDY STERN: Yes, we did that for the Supersuckers. We haven't done that for the Melvins yet. I wanted to fulfill the Supersuckers set as a group, but people were waiting like nine months to get them, and that is just wrong. So this time we're waiting until I have the boxes and the complete sets in my hands.

When I've got them, people can place orders. They can reserve them beforehand, but I won't take any money.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: How many posters went into the Supersuckers series?

ANDY STERN: That was 15 different posters and the Melvins was 41 different posters.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: So, if I were a customer looking to purchase Melvins posters today, the more modern posters would be coming out of the Diesel Fuel array?

ANDY STERN: At least from 2004 on. We'll probably continue working with them from here on out, in some shape or form.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: I was really impressed, Andy, with the array of artists that you brought in for the Melvins run. Was that your first open call?

ANDY STERN: That was a big, big open call and I chose from about 150 people.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And whittled it down to forty?

ANDY STERN: Forty with maybe an option to go to forty two, yes. And we got some great names involved: Jay Ryan, Emek, Mike King, Dan Grzeca, Print Mafia, Patent Pending (Jeff Kleinsmith's shop), Chloe and Yannick's Serigraphie Populaire, Squad 19, Casey Burns, Heads of State, Jeral Tidwell, Clay Ferguson, Guy Burwell, and Little Friends of Printmaking, to name only some.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: In your business, whether to do a single piece or a collection of forty two, you have to keep your eyes open for new talent, like, all the time.

ANDY STERN: I'm still surprised so many top-quality artists are doing gigposters.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: What are you looking for?

ANDY STERN: Imagination, mostly. Either I see a poster having really terrible qualities or having really amazing qualities. That tells me about the artist. I let the poster speak first.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And Tara

McPherson's and Stainboy's posters have to been among the first.

ANDY STERN: Well, when Tara came into the program, the first pieces I did were in trade for prints, or for her paintings. Soon we did 'Built to Spill', the big one with the merry-go-round. That got me a painting, luckily.

Supergrass was the next one we published of hers.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Right, that's with balloons above. And then the Shins came after that, which was her great horizontal piece with its central figure dragging the dead balloon-character behind. What attracted you to Tara McPherson's work?

ANDY STERN: It's really different, and she's really nice. I only work with people because I like someone or I really like their art. If I like someone's art, but don't like them, well, I won't work with them.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: In other words, as a production person, as a head of a publishing company, the word 'difficult' comes into mind. The person may be a great artist, but if they're difficult to collaborate with, it just slows down your operation and gives you headaches.

ANDY STERN: Yeah, then I become a stress case, and you don't need 'that' trouble. Printing and fulfillment are hard enough!

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Tell me about your relationship with Greg Reinel, Stainboy.

ANDY STERN: I met him and got along great. Told him that I'd print anything that he wanted to do.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Is that because you saw in him that Coop popularism... the ability to draw figures so easily and well, to automatically have great appeal?

ANDY STERN: I liked his... it was Cheap Trick's black and white poster... is that the one with the geisha girl on it?

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Yes.

ANDY STERN: And then there was another one, there were two black and white posters that I really liked that made me really want to produce him. I didn't even think of Coop at first. They both use brushes and they both draw cartoon-ish women. I think Stainboy's layouts are better, his layouts are really tight. He has the talent of Coop and the wit of Kozik, and there aren't many people with both of those.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: What do you like about the way that he works and the professionalism in which he turns his stuff over to you?

ANDY STERN: The files that come in are perfect. I don't even have to look at them. I don't even have to be here for them to print. He uses all fluorescent colors. Everybody in the shop knows how he wants stuff done. If I'm going out of town, that's when I usually schedule Stainboy prints to run. He turns in stuff so incredibly perfect that nothing goes wrong. He turns them in on time too, even if they're a day before the print day.

They're perfect! All I have to do is pop out the films and get the screens prepped and we're ready to roll. I've no idea how he learned how to be so professional.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: He has such control over his line work.

ANDY STERN: Yes, and to have that control over his lines ... with a brush!

PAUL GRUSHKIN: When you market somebody like him when he's not doing a piece for a band per se, like his new Mustang art prints, how is the marketing different for you? Or is it the same rock poster customer who'd be attracted to the Mustang as well?

ANDY STERN: Well, we're thinking the rock poster crowd will be attracted as well, but mainly these car prints are intended for car club people and major car enthusiasts because they've proven in other arenas they'll spend money on this stuff. They understand when they see quality in a piece of art -- because so much car art is so shitty -- and besides which Stainboy is fascinated with the newer muscle cars and nobody is doing that, especially in the way he's doing them with hot women, and without the "'50s diner" look.

He himself belongs to a Mustang car club, and he owns the car he drew, so he just started talking to his Mustang buddies and those people started talking to other car people, and it just steamrolled from there. It's great to find new markets for screen-printed art prints; if we can get into an established market where the collectors are just as crazed as any crazed rock poster collector, well, we think they're gonna' go nuts. These prints will sell themselves, you just watch.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And when you look ahead... here in 2005 we've re-established the rock & roll poster, but in long term as a publishing house, maybe you have to get into things well beyond rock.

ANDY STERN: Oh totally, because this rock poster renaissance can't last forever. It didn't last for Kozik, great as his first oversize prints were. And, you'd have to say the market for modern gigposters could find its limits. I think we'll know if that's true over the next five years, if the young crowd continues to support exponential growth.

The fact is, in Stainboy's case, we're producing 400 Mustang prints and there are a lot more Mustang owners than that!

PAUL GRUSHKIN: And I'm guessing between the lines you can probably increase the... or even set the price for a car print higher initially and even graduate the price as the production run goes down in quantity quicker than you could do for a rock poster.

ANDY STERN: You've got that exactly right. We started out the Mustang poster at \$30 because a lot of these car people likely will feel that is a rather low baseline price for a special art print -- with a lot of them not knowing what a screen print is, or what it feels like to the hand, or why the colors are so brilliant, and why each piece comes off as a one- off creation. We just want to get it into their hands so they can start talking to their friends, like, "I can't believe the quality of this poster; it's nothing like I've experienced before with an offset print, and it's really under priced." So, when we come out with our next print and set its regular price at \$50 for a seven-color oversize print, they will appreciate it's really worth that \$50 and would be a bargain at \$75.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Who's handling all the sales at Diesel Fuel? Is that the role you play? Or, are you currently depending on word of mouth from satisfied customer to satisfied customer? Are things well enough established now that sales, and new publishing jobs, are coming in on a consistent basis?

ANDY STERN: At the moment our relationships with poster dealers are keeping the interest in our program strong, and our website has been very effective. This year we might invest more in advertising, we might even get a salesperson to bring in more corporate work so I can pay

even more attention to the dynamics of the publishing program.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: I want to speak about Kozik now because he speaks very highly of you. He's a picky guy! He could easily have gone up to Portland, not turned on to your scene. But as things turned out, he's said, publicly, it's a pleasure doing business with you and the shop is totally professional and all that. What have you enjoyed about working with Frank?

ANDY STERN: He's a nice guy; he's fun to work with. He does some pretty weird to odd prints that I might have never even have done. Hey, I got to print the new version of the Green Girl (off the original Soundgarden/Pearl Jam gigposter) -- which like everybody else I felt stood out as one of the great rock images of all time. When he's at the shop, we're all excited. He's really focused; he's always thinking.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Do you want to do that kind of work with other artists, not rock and roll per say but art prints?

ANDY STERN: Definitely. I think this year alone we've got Tara scheduled for 6-8 art prints. I just talked to Burwell about doing six to eight, one every six to eight weeks. Stainboy is going to be doing an art print every six to eight weeks. I think we've still got more art prints coming in from Jeral Tidwell, more of that spirit-tree stuff. We're publishing a lot of Mike Martin's art prints now, anything oversized art-print wise beyond what he does at his own shop, Enginehouse 13, in Ohio. I think we've published eight of his prints now.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: So that would be his hot rod related stuff?

ANDY STERN: I hope we'll do more of that. His "pray for beer" is outstanding, like his tiki art. We just finished a kind

of Coop-like devil head with wrenches behind it; it was an old logo from his car club. We've got another two to four things on the chopping block now for him.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Do some of these art pieces get to you, emotionally speaking? I mean, you can look at your publishing program as a cold business deal, or you can look at it like, "I can't believe I've got Tara McPherson. She's such a great painter; she's got such a large following, and her art will be coming out of her brain for such a long, long time." I mean, Andy, when you see a gigposter like what she did for Air, do you sometimes just stand back and say to yourself, "fuck, this is GOOD. I'm PROUD."

ANDY STERN: Usually I won't even like to put out stuff that I wouldn't want to put on my own wall. Because I figure if I want to hang it on my wall, there's got to be at least 50 or 200 or 400 people that would want to do the same thing. It might take awhile finding them, but I know they're out there.

PAUL GRUSHKIN: Have you seen photos of peoples' homes where they've hung framed art -- pieces that originated at Diesel Fuel? I ask these things not just because I'm inquisitive. It's about "changing the world," or "making the world a better place," or educating people as to beautiful, accessible art -- do you know where I'm going here?

What I'm saying is: is what makes your work exciting when regular people buy it, frame it, stand back and love it, that you've achieved something?

ANDY STERN: One of my ideas behind doing the publishing is putting more art out there and making everybody happier. It's just a good thing to do. And yes, when somebody stands back and admires the whole package -- the art itself, the screen printing involved, the

professionalism in which the finished piece was delivered, and then the framing and the placing on the wall, and the standing back, and all the good thoughts that come with that . . . well, then at that point I've totally succeeded. Bottom line for me is, I like living with beautiful art. So I look at our program as a sort of assisted artistic living.

Michael Erlewine: When and how did you get interested in art?

Jb: One of my earliest memories was of my dad drawing an Indian. I was stunned that you could just make a picture of something like that! Later, in high school, I knew I was going to be an artist, and I worked hard at it, even winning an award or two. I went to work early-on in a local art gallery, and then during the Vietnam era enlisted in the air force, ended up at the Defense Language Institute studying Chinese during the week and dropping out on the weekends. When I got out in 1968, I lived in the Haight and worked in galleries again, but as time passed I became more interested in restoring art than in creating it. Now I'm the head of a museum conservation lab, and not an artist anymore. But I'm still stunned at the art that surrounds me everyday.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of art influenced you?

Jb: Beatnik art, the art of the 60's, and the vibrant colors I saw in the Mission District: Galleria de la Raza during the Dia de los Muertos exhibition; the mural on the facade of China Books; and the Fillmore posters tacked to telephone polls. Mookerjee's "Tantra Art," cheap copies of ukiyo-e prints in Japantown, and especially the work of Tadanori Yokoo.

Michael Erlewine: What concert- posters artists influenced you?

Jb: Wes Wilson, Kelly Mouse, Rick Griffin, David Singer, Victor Moscoso,...heck, ALL of 'em. The folks who did the light shows, my pal

Demetrios and his florescent puppets upstairs at the Avalon (whatever happened to him), that darned white rabbit poster above my refrigerator...

Michael Erlewine: What was your first concert-music poster?

Jb: After a sailing trip to the Lesser Antilles in '72, I started seriously hanging out at Kingston Records on Fillmore Street, Ruel Mill's tiny enclave of riddim and vibes. One day I saw Ruel drawing up a flyer for a concert he was producing with Toots, Dennis Brown, and Jacob Miller at Winterland. He was doing such a lousy job that I offered to whip something together overnight, gratis. The result was crude, but after hanging out later with the talent I figured it was a pretty cool gig.

Michael Erlewine: What are the main bands you have done posters for?

Jb: Most of what small amount I've actually done was for Reggae bands: local groups at neighborhood clubs, Toots et al, Big Youth, Third World Band, Burning Spear, Soul Syndicate, Earl Zero, Epiphany Records, Mango Records, and a few others. Once I started getting into the "big time" I realized I really didn't want to compete with the pros on the fast track (hey, it was a hobby, ok?). I was only active for about 5 years. But I still dream of doing "one more" for Toots.

Michael Erlewine: Please describe the media and size/formats you have most used?

Jb: My first job was a hand separation on bristol paper (I used a desk lamp on the floor under a piece of Plexi). The printers jaw dropped when they saw what I brought in, but it worked. After that, most of my work was done oversized with india ink and screens on mylar. I did B&W hand separations, and spec-ed the colors for the plates at the printer. On the Big Youth poster you can see where I missed an area of the green. One of my last jobs had something like 16 individual separations!

Michael Erlewine: What other poster artists have you collaborated with?

Jb: None really, though I worked on one album cover with a graphic designer friend (a mixed result), and was so laid up with the flu once for a Third World deadline that another artist friend bailed me out with most of the coloring (we never signed that one).

Michael Erlewine: What are your favorite bands?

Jb: Alpha Blondy, Oliver Mtukudzi, Henry Dikongue, African Reggae in general, and of course all the old stuff: Freddie McKay, the Clarendonians, Abyssinians, Junior Byles, and of course Lee Scratch and most of the stuff out of the Black Ark, and almost anything with Hucks Brown and Jackie Jackson and Paul Douglas doing backup.