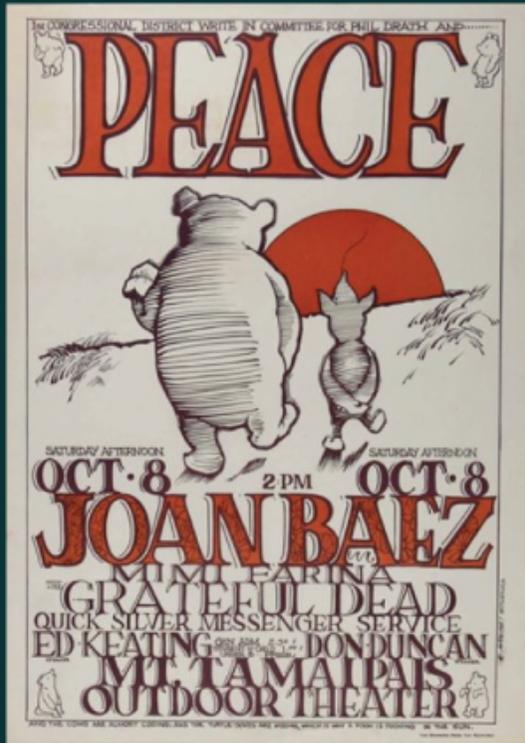


# Frank Westlake

Poster Printer



by Tina Moore

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SF Poster Printer Pioneer

Article

by

Tina Moore

## 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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## **FRANK WESTLAKE**

Pioneer San Francisco Rock Poster Printer

by Tina Moore

"Oh, man, that's a long story." Frank Westlake, pioneer psychedelic poster printer, described his early printing career in San Francisco with that simple statement.

Westlake started Bindweed Press in 1954 in San Francisco and ran it until around 1973. "I don't know how I got the name, but I just did," he said. "I got sick and tired after many years of that name, but I kept it and it's all right, but I don't think I would ever do that again."

Printing was only a hobby for Westlake, who was working as a machinery salesman when he started making programs, posters and things of that sort, because he had many friends in the theater. "I finally got so darn busy with that stupid hobby I had to quit my job. I just couldn't do both, he said. "I would go to work the next morning still wearing the clothes that I wore the day before and probably looked like it too."

Somewhere between the years 1958 and 1963 Westlake met Bill Graham, and they became good friends. "Bill was down on his luck as he usually was back in those days, and he lived with us for about six months," Westlake said. "One day he left for New York to get rich. The next thing I know he showed back up here again a few months later. He had gotten a job as a drive-away driver where you transport their car from there to here. He brought out Buddy Hackett's car, and he thought that was big stuff there."

Westlake said he also printed for the Mime Troupe, and Graham engineered a deal to manage them. "They were putting on probably the first of some pretty racy, rowdy

works at Golden Gate Park. They finally got busted out there for their performances," he said. "Of course, Bill saw immediate opportunity for publicity out of that, and it apparently worked because we printed a lot of stuff for raising funds for the Mime Troupe's appeal of their conviction on this kind of thing."

Westlake explained that as far as psychedelic posters go, the first ones weren't psychedelic. "Bill wanted them to look like wrestling posters." Westlake said that he did not print Graham's early posters. "I printed a few of them, but not the very first ones at all." From there, Westlake went on to printing for the Family Dog. From there, "it just exploded," Westlake said, and, by one fortuitous fluke, Bindweed wound up with a virtual monopoly of the (low budget) West Coast poster business.

"They wanted it on a certain kind of paper, and we printed on that paper, Westlake said. "It wasn't a big stocked item, so I bought everything they had from six or seven paper representatives out there, and by the time they got more in I needed that too, and I bought all of it. And no one else in the area could get it because I had it all spoken for. And that put us in the poster business, and no one else could do a damn thing about it." Westlake said that he has never printed a perfect piece. "A lot of the posters were pretty neat, but there was always something wrong with every damn one of them. I'm too critical," he said. "I fussed and fussed for years because in those days they used to come up with new poster artists and man, they didn't know anything about reproduction. We would have to get on their cases and get them to make it right so we could print them."

And his technical advice wasn't always welcome. "Lordy, some of them just had disposition problems. Of course, maybe they were just shot out on acid or something," he said. "The one I worked with the most and enjoyed quite a bit was Stanley Mouse." He said Mouse lived right behind

him, and they associated a lot anyway. "He was a funny guy. One day he came over there and was trying to get up an idea for drawing a poster. He came in and sat down at an organ I kept in the store and started playing it. He sounded horrible, and I told him to cut it out. 'Hey, man, this is good.' He was sitting there just flopping his hands on the organ, and he would listen to that noise for a couple of minutes each time he hit the keys. He was really zonked out. Everybody in the shop was about to go crazy. Thank goodness, he finally lost interest in it and meandered off. He was a real mellow cat."

Westlake said that many of the artists he worked with were not as creative as they could have been. "I'd see their clip art that they would rip off from somebody and elaborate on it all the time. At times, they would go down to the damn library and go back in the research records and they would see some far-out picture, and they'd rip the page out of the book and go get it enlarged and fix it up."

Westlake was printing for the theater, art groups, art books and poetry books when, by accident, he printed his first "psychedelic poster." "It had a solid orangey-red background with flourishes in a symmetrical pattern in a bright green, and it jumped. It wasn't what I intended to do, I wasn't aware of that, but I had posted it up on the wall and Stanley Mouse saw it and it just lit him up. He stewed about that for days and days and finally got to me and tried to figure out how we could do that again. We tried that on something - can't remember which one. The colors flashed, and we thought, wow, man, that is really cool and different, so we tried other colors. They all needed red, but blue and green really jumped. And that's how we got psychedelic posters - sort of by accident."

It reminded Westlake of a guy who used to dig through the print shop trash for posters. "We used to work at such a pace that we never had a chance to wash the presses. I'd start out in the mornings with this yellow ink or something,

and the next poster that needed a light or darker yellow or light green we'd just throw the ink in the press and start running that poster, and then not too many times we might get a two-color again and we'd work with darker colors toward the end of the day. This guy used to come around - we would take this stuff and throw it everywhere, it was a heap of crap - he would dig around in there and look at them. He'd look at a Grateful Dead printed over a Jefferson Airplane poster in yellow and purple or something and ooh and aah over them. He saw me a few years back and recognized me and told me that he had given them all away. He had stuff people would have given their eyeteeth for."

Of The Family Dog, Frank Westlake said, "They were the loosest bunch of cowboys you ever, ever saw." He said they were closely associated with the Grateful Dead, who were Westlake's neighbors. "Everybody was living anywhere they could then. It was a horrible building, but the Grateful Dead and Mouse lived there in the building where my shop was."

Westlake said that even though he wasn't the first Family Dog printer, it seemed like he had printed hundreds of thousands of their posters, but it was probably only forty or fifty, he guessed.

Westlake said that he is totally away from printing now. "I just got busy with other things." He has done many things, including working in real estate and driving a truck. But he has settled down in Arkansas where he and his wife own a doll studio, and says he is happy to not be quite so busy anymore. "I have tons and tons of work to do," he says, "but if we decide we need to go somewhere or do something, we do it. I like it this way. It's an easier way of doing things."

[Note: This article originally appeared in Wes Wilson's publication "Off The Wall," and is used with permission of Wilson and the author. Copyright © Wes Wilson and Tina Moore]