

## *Halifax Nocturne Showcases Letterpress*

*Amphora* editor PETER MITHAM tours a printing spectacle.



*Bruce MacDougall, one of the Letterpress Gang, at Halifax's Dawson Printshop, demonstrates hand-setting type during the Nocturne arts festival. Peter Mitham photo*



*A member of the Letterpress Gang works a small hand press to produce gift tags. Peter Mitham photo*

ONE OF THE STAR attractions at the Nocturne arts festival in Halifax this past October was the Dawson Printshop at the NSCAD University (formerly the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design) on Granville Street, just a few doors away from some of the city's most venerable (and bustling) watering holes. Among more than 100 installations and performances on offer during

the nighttime festival, the print shop attracted long lineups through the evening—primarily, it seems, for the chance to pull one's own souvenir keepsake from a 1960s-vintage hand press.

The shop's volunteers, known as the Letterpress Gang, came together in January 2010 to revive a venture originally hosted at Dalhousie University's library school. The



*A visitor prints a keepsake, detail below,  
at the Dawson Printshop.  
Peter Mitham photo*



*Pulling a keepsake under the watchful eye of  
Daniel MacDonald on the Golding Pearl jobbing  
press at Inkwel Letterpress Studio in Halifax.*

original Dawson print shop was named for the late Bob Dawson, who operated it with his own group of dedicated volunteers and assembled a sizeable collection of movable type.

When the collection was acquired by NSCAD, the shop made a short foray into the market as a commercial venture, but its run was cut short and—as Andrew Steeves notes on the Gaspereau Pres blog, <http://bit.ly/i4YOCG>—its future was left in limbo.

Under the direction of Steve Slipp, the Letterpress Gang moved in and revived the shop and now holds weekly meetings during the school term to spark enthusiasm for letterpress printing among those unfamiliar with the practice.

Nocturne: Art at Night, launched in 2008, attracted more than 20,000 people this year. This means significant exposure, as the endless line outside the shop underscored. Demonstrations in addition to printing keepsakes included gang member Bruce MacDougall demonstrating hand-setting of type for a German recipe for minestrone found in the shop's basement. Another member of the gang pulled gift tags on a small jobbing press to the sounds of wild Latin music.

A few blocks away on Market Street, Inkwel Modern Handmade Boutique & Letterpress Studio partnered with the Letterpress Gang to offer Nocturne-goers the chance to print a second part of their keepsake on a 1910 Pearl job press.

