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Screen-print company 'courted' to Norfolk: Prince Ink opened last month

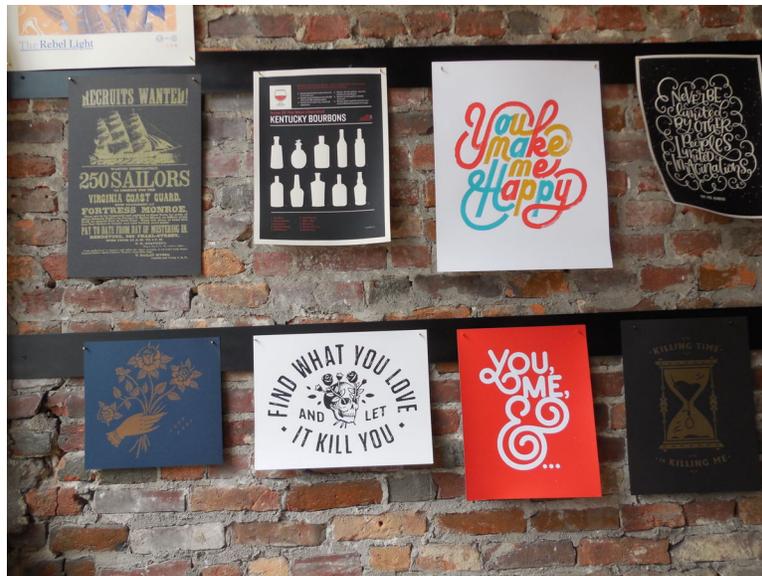
By Bruce Ebert
Correspondent
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Bruce Ebert | For The Virginian-Pilot
Matt Wallace, owner of Prince Ink, looks over some banners. His business focuses on screen printing, as well as other forms of printing.



Bruce Ebert | For The Virginian-Pilot
Matt Wallace stands next to the 1928 letterpress he bought via Craigslist.



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Some of the posters Prince Ink has produced.

In a business district growing to keep pace with a young clientele, a company has opened a shop that prominently displays technology of a bygone era – a 1928 iron letterpress.

Prince Ink, a screen-print company, relocated from Hampton to 433 Granby St. late last month.

Illustrated T-shirts comprise the bulk of the business, said owner Matt Wallace, 31, but heavy-stock posters, standard-size business cards and wedding invitations are also offered. And the shop will print on items such as handmade bags, footballs and packaging for companies.

The 1,500-pound letterpress was manufactured by Chandler & Price of Cleveland. Wallace bought it via Craigslist and it's capable of what he calls "luxury" printing: embossed printing, which is raised above the surface of the paper, and debossed, which depresses the lettering.

"It's definitely a perk that it's so pleasing to look at," he said. "When the press is in action, the smooth movements, spinning gears and flashes of color are hypnotic. It would be a shame to hide that beauty in the back of the house."

The company's name is a play on the words "prints" and "ink," Wallace said. The business opened in 2009 as Fairwell Design.

Most of Prince Ink's work will continue to be done on silk-screen equipment capable of producing 13 pieces per minute, Wallace said. While he hopes to eventually turn out everything in eco-friendly, water-based colors, both water-based and plastic-based printing is currently done. Water-based imprints look

and feel blended into the fabric, Wallace said, while plastic-based images appear stamped on and have a texture all their own. The use of soy in the water-based solution and the absence of harmful chemicals make the finished product eco-friendly, he said.

Water-based imprints feel softer and are generally more expensive. “But it’s all I wear,” Wallace said.

He started out designing his own T-shirts, then grew that hobby into a business.

At first, the company worked with stencils, where ink is rolled on T-shirts and left to dry. Finding it time-consuming, Wallace started printing cards and invitations and that expanded into screen-printing. Examples of his company’s work adorn the walls of the new location.

The other employees are Wallace’s brother, Dustin, and Chris Gundry, who was once a customer. “We’re all self-taught,” Matt Wallace said.

Prince Ink had been located in Hampton’s Phoebus area, but was lured to Granby Street by incentives from the Downtown Norfolk Council’s Vibrant Spaces program.

“This is a great time to be here in Norfolk,” Wallace said. “A lot of new things are going on, with the construction of new apartments, the renovation of old ones, the rebuilding of Waterside.”

Last year, Prince Ink had 800 clients and did about \$250,000 worth of business, he said.

Prince Ink handles consumer orders plus work from other businesses.

Bruce Ebert, ebert.bruce@gmail.com