

Peter Koch: Master Printer & Publisher
Collection CAE2403

Introduction/Abstract

The archive *Peter Koch: Master Printer & Publisher* includes letterpress printed ephemera from Peter Koch under the press names of Black Stone Press, Peter Koch Printers, and the CODEX Foundation.

Biographical Note: Peter Rutledge Koch

Peter Rutledge Koch is an American letterpress master printer, artists' book maker and publisher, typographer, educator, author and book designer. Koch is internationally known for his fine press artists' books. Over the years he has published under a variety of imprints, including *Black Stone Press*; *Peter and the Wolf Editions*; *Editions Koch*; *Hormone Derange Editions*; and *Peter Koch Printer*⁽⁴⁾ and *The REAL LEAD Saloon*.

Koch founded Black Stone Press and *Montana Gothic: A Journal of Poetry, Literature & Graphics*, in 1974 in Missoula, Montana. In 1978, Koch moved Black Stone Press to San Francisco and embarked on a one-year apprenticeship with book designer Adrian Wilson at his renowned press in Tuscany Alley. *Black Stone Press* was dissolved by 1983, and the press was renamed *Peter Rutledge Koch, Typographic Design*. In January 1990, following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, Koch changed his press name to *Peter Koch Printers* and moved the location to Berkeley, California.

Koch has extensive knowledge on typography, paper making, printmaking, bookbinding, and the design of books. From 1991 to 2011, he taught the history of the book and printing, "The Hand-produced Book in Its Historical Context," at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley). In 2005, Koch and his wife, Susan Filter, founded the *Codex Foundation*, to preserve and promote the art of the book. The *Codex Foundation* has hosted the biennial *CODEX International Book Fair* since 2007.

Koch's books and artworks have been the subject of solo exhibitions at the New York Public Library, San Francisco Public Library, the Widener Library at Harvard University, Museum, and the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. The Cecil H. Green Library at Stanford University hosted the exhibition *Peter Koch Printer: A Forty-year Retrospective* (2017). The Grolier Club⁽⁸⁾ presented the exhibition *Peter Koch Printer Retrospective* (2019). A three-volume catalogue raisonné, *Peter Koch Printer a Descriptive Bibliography*, was published by Stanford University Libraries to accompany Koch's 45-year retrospective at Stanford University Libraries (2017) and at the Grolier Club (2019). The Black Stone Press archives (from 1974 to 1982) are housed at the University of Delaware Library Archives and Special Collections. The Stanford University Libraries house his archives from 1984 to the present.

Scope and Content

This archive is comprised principally of one of eleven copies of the "Peter Rutledge Koch design study collections" and represents 50 years of graphic design practice and letterpress printing in the rarified world of bibliophilic arts & letters. Koch's work during the first half of his career was printed from foundry and monotype lead types and, midway, began including digital design and polymer plate technology, utilizing current desktop and emerging graphic arts technologies. The press, first established in Missoula, Montana in 1974, specialized in the then nearly extinct letterpress tradition, and subsequently captured a five-year segment of the city's literary, arts & crafts, and small business printing needs—all custom designed and hand-printed letterpress by Peter Koch and Shelley Hoyt. From late 1978 to the closing of Black Stone Press in 1984 the press resided in the city of San Francisco. Following the closing of Black Stone Press, Koch moved to the East Bay and

continued working under the imprint of Peter Koch Printers — first in Oakland (until the 1989 earthquake) and then Berkeley until 2023 when Koch retired the presses which were subsequently moved to join The CODEX Foundation’s Logan Book Arts Center as a laboratory and teaching press and an academic book arts press at the University of Montana in Missoula.

Koch’s typographic design work was deeply influenced by European Renaissance printers (Aldus Manutius et al.) as well as his San Francisco mentors, William Everson, Adrian Wilson, and Jack Stauffacher. His design work has been characterized as “cutting-edge classical” and earned prestigious awards from the American Institute of Graphic Design (AIGA), Western Book Awards, and various bibliophilic fellowships, including solo exhibitions at The Grolier Club, Stanford University, New York Public Library, etc.

There is also the wild and inventive “Maverick Poets and Cowboy Surrealists” art practice side of the press, covering Koch’s ephemera and publications related to the mythic and sometimes disturbingly surreal American West.

Starting in 1974, Koch kept multiple copies of his design and printed work ranging from business cards and bookplates to large typographic prints and posters. In late 2022 after closing his 4th Street studio in Berkeley, he carefully collected the remaining printed matter to create 11 sets of surviving flat (non-book) work to be designated as study collections for educational programs in institutions and collections interested in American graphic design and literary/arts culture.

Materials include letterpress-printed ephemera and typographic prints including literary, bibliophile, and art exhibition announcements, broadsides, bookplates, party invitations, postcards, coasters and posters, keepsakes for poetry readings, rare book symposium announcements, antiquarian and arts & crafts business identity designs, letterheads, and trade cards.

This archive is currently in process.