

A Moving Story

Simon Trewin (10884)

➔ I recently did something really stressful and something that made me question aspects of my personality best left unprobed. I didn't jump out of a perfectly good aeroplane for charity or take up a dangerous sport at my increasingly advanced age. No, I did something way more daring, I decided to move studios. Moving studios is something, like marriage, that one should only do once in a lifetime but this year's move (from urban Brixton to leafy Dulwich) was my third in four years and, as I stand here in The Garage Press looking across at the 18th century manor house, I feel determined that this is going to be my last(ish).

The first move was from my back sitting-room when a casual one Adana hobby started to morph into a two-Adana-and-how-much-can-I-hide-under-the-sofa-before-my-wife-gets-cross habit. Being an Edwardian semi-detached we didn't have a garage and my wife Helen Adie's purpose-built artist print studio occupied the end of the garden, so I had to go off-site. I managed for a while to squeeze two Adanas and a lot of small typesets into a rented garage a mile away alongside 'Bean', a 1972 MGB Roadster, but every time I wanted to do any printing I had to reverse 'Bean' out. And then every time it started to rain I had to quickly pack the Adanas away and drive 'Bean' back in. Not conducive to anything other than endless frustration with the British weather. But I muddled on...

Until that is, I went on a brilliant Adana course run by the lovely Vicky and Chrissie, aka @HarringtonSquires, in Kentish Town and I ended up accidentally buying 'Gloria' - their beautiful Cropper treadle printing press. It seemed rude not to. A call or three to Giles at AMR and he dismantled this ¾ tonne sexy beast and drove it south to my garage. He installed her, resplendent, on a pallet throne next

to my rather nose-out-of-joint Adanas as I, in some kind of heritage hostage swap, simultaneously drove 'Bean' to a parking space under my then office in Central London. On my return, I turned the garage into a semi-permanent set-up and so *The Garage Press* was born. I did no planning whatsoever because the garage was significantly bigger than the back sitting-room so I just dragged everything in there, got some trestle legs and a couple of old doors, and I was all set. I even installed a rubber floor which warmed the place up a bit and deadened the sound. I felt I was set for life until...

Harrington Squires then introduced me to the original Gloria (after whom they named the press)





and I accidentally bought the entire contents of her old Unite & Type print shop on the Portobello Road. It seemed rude not to. I panicked at the thought of getting it all into The Garage Press so I made my first big mistake – I rented a storage unit. A large yellow coloured one actually. And then some rough men moved all of Unite & Type into it and I went to visit it and I came out in a cold sweat – there was SO MUCH STUFF. Tiny type (6pt Palace Script anyone? ANYONE???), more furniture than IKEA, and more rules than the EU. And tins and tins of pied type and lock-ups for village fetes that had taken place when some of the villages were still hamlets. There was no way I needed half of this stuff so I made a few calls and I sold a bit to Urbanfox, a lot to an art dealer friend of mine, gave away a bunch of type and furniture to Solent University via Katherine Antoney, and made a lot of trips to the local dump to pour kilos of Plantin and random italic stuff into the metal recycling zone when ‘The Man’ wasn’t looking. Finally, I had reduced the storage unit to a small enough quantity to fit into The Garage Press. And so I developed my highly revolutionary *First Theory of Successful Moving*, get rid of stuff you don’t want first and then move. Not

the other way round. Anyway, I digress. It was time to stop paying the now very high monthly bills to the large yellow people and unite my printing stuff. I looked into the inky money-pit and decided that there was no way I was hiring more rough men. I thought I could do it myself, no problem. I mean, how hard could it be?! Well, actually, not so bad. I made about five trips up a very steep hill with teetering piles of full typescases behind me and that was good. But I did lose my sense of humour dramatically when I had to dismantle three randoms with a crappy screwdriver in a car park, to fit them inside a Vauxhall Astra only to then have to rebuild them two miles up the hill with a better screwdriver. Second big mistake was actually moving the full typescases first and then the randoms. Working in a tiny space I had to move all the typescases out of the garage, rebuild and fit the randoms and then move the bloody typescases back in again. And so I developed the highly revolutionary *Second Theory of Successful Moving*, work out the fewest number of times possible to move the heaviest items. You will not regret this. Everything involved in letterpress printing is so bleeding heavy. This stood me in good stead.

And then all seemed good. I settled in nicely. I had a tidy space (randoms to the right of me, presses to the left, etc.), a friendly non-urban fox who came to visit on a Sunday morning on his way to church, and the many squirrels who peeked in at the clanking and swearing then swiftly ran away. The space was big enough to print in, but not so big that I could amass too much more without really thinking about needs and necessities. I worked through blistering heat where the ink was too runny, and a winter where I was struck down with flu, and the garage was so cold that I had to heat the tubes of ink with a craft gun for five minutes before even attempting to squeeze anything out. Even then, the ink sat on the ink disc looking like recalcitrant raisins until eventually it deigned to soften. All good fun but on the down side there was no natural light at all when the doors were shut, and there was also that time when I truly came a cropper and got my index finger trapped in 'Gloria', and had visions of my skeleton being discovered weeks later. Luckily, I managed to escape with a debossed digit and I soon grew a new fingernail. Nature is good like that. I think I managed to focus my needs even more at one point, and got rid of some more stuff to Katherine and her students, and to people on eBay. But then obviously I kept happily buying more awesome stuff from Roger and Jezza so the garage got a little bit more full. So I then rented another garage for an extra £100 a month, and hid some stuff in there. I think there might still be some stuff in there actually, good point, must check.

Then something happened that I hadn't planned for. I met my USA boss in the foyer of the lovely



“Harrington Squires then introduced me to the original Gloria (after whom they named the press) and I accidentally bought the entire contents of her old Unite & Type print shop in the Portobello Road. It seemed rude not to.”

Bloomsbury Hotel for a cup of tea and a catch-up. She told me the exciting news that I was going to be 'transitioning' from my highly paid executive jet setting job to an exciting home based new future as a sole trader. Wow, lucky me! I love surprises. My immediate thought wasn't connected with client retention, pensions, financial security, or loss of an

office overlooking London, but that the two classic cars in the basement would need to come home to the garages. Yikes! By the way, I think at some point in the narrative I accidentally imported a wreck of a 1960 TR3a from the US, and restored it, before it was kidnapped by crooks and then eventually re-captured, but that doesn't matter right now. All you need to know is that there were two cars at my office. Please keep up. Thanks. Now, even with my most optimistic imagination I knew that I wasn't going to be able to fit a 1972 MGB Roadster and a 1960 TR3a into two garages with an 1875 Cropper treadle press, two randoms, the paired-down contents of the Unite & Type shop, and all the stuff I had bought from Roger and Jezza. Not to mention about a million books and crates of framed art that would soon be leaving my former office and coming home with me. Goodness knows why I hadn't thought this all through before deciding to make this new transition. Clearly my mind was on other things. And the clock was ticking...very loudly (well it was American) and very fast...

So I made the brave decision to pretend I was an artist and start shopping for a proper studio space. Obviously I started with visions of me in a tree lined Chelsea Street at the top of a flat fronted Georgian building, with Audrey Hepburn popping in to borrow a cup of Lyme Bay Press thermo powder, but the reality ended up being the second floor of a converted dole office in South London. There was indeed lots of space, but the only access was via a small passenger lift which necessitated Giles from AMR again dismantling 'Gloria'. He then pump-trucked her across three lanes of traffic and a bus lane as I stood watching nervously trying to smile at the traffic wardens. We then crammed all this very heavy equipment into the lift and endured many nervous moments of clanking and rumbling as we stress-tested the lift to the edge of its limits. And

then I hired more rough men and a dodgy van and we made four trips from SE26 to SW12 to take all the randoms, typecases and stuff. In a very orderly fashion actually, apart from the fact we didn't have any proper trolleys at all, and had to improvise by using a small piece of mdf with three and a half wheels on it. And each journey from van to studio involved the tiny lift, 7 sets of double doors, and a corridor so long that even Usain Bolt would only give it a cursory look before wandering off to call an Uber. On Moving Day 1 I walked 10km, mainly inside. And so I developed my highly revolutionary *Third Theory of Successful Moving* – always have trolleys,



pump trucks and dollies. Especially if you have a bad back and/or slightly bemused/cross removal men who don't understand why you chose letterpress printing over, say, needlework.

But I was in and I planned it all on the hoof. I wanted 'Gloria' in one corner and then I just stood there and pointed at various walls and corners as stuff was carried in. It all fitted and moving from the garage to the studio felt like upgrading from a Lada to a Hummer SUV. One downside though was that there was no natural light in the studio and, on reflection, this was a bad choice. I would suggest anyone moving really thinks about things like fresh air, aspect and general surroundings too. I need to be happy and feel healthy to be creative, not like I am locked in a cupboard. I really felt I would be part of a community of artists in Brixton but that didn't turn out to be the case. Most doors stayed shut or were pasted over with brown paper, and I was a letterpress island in the corner. The good and ultimately bad thing though, was that I had lots of unallocated space to drag more and more letterpress 'stuff' into my secret world and plan world domination, one inky print at a time.

For all my misgivings about the building, I truly loved disappearing into the studio and emerging hours later having learned a tiny bit more about the craft and the benefits of patience. My rule of thumb was to earn as much from selling stuff to pay for the cost of production. When the rent was £350 a month that was just about fine, but when ultimately the rent

went to £520 a month I thought enough was enough. Especially when factoring in the inevitable two parking tickets a month and the £15 a day to park streets away. Adding to this the hassle from trying to load equipment into my car for external workshop events, all via the tiny lift, and all down the endless corridors would take me a day. Enough was enough.

So I found a lovely new ground floor studio in Dulwich Village, very near the Picture Gallery, in Bell House a beautiful 18th century building. It was built in the 1770s for Sir Thomas Wright, Lord Mayor of London, Freeman of The Company of Stationers and Holborn printer made good. It now houses an astonishing educational trust providing access to knowledge, crafts, support and friendship to a wide community in South London. They wanted me and my inkiness and I loved the idea of being part of their family. The space offered was in the former stables, later coach house, and the building had been restyled by the great Lutyens in 1914/15. Stunning, and with double doors that I could reverse up to at any time with not a traffic warden in sight. And as most of my workshops were going to be taking place across the courtyard in the main house, I could just drag stuff across there as and when I needed it, on the trolley I now owned!

But obviously I now had to plan and execute a big move whilst staying sane. I measured up and realised slightly to my horror that the square footage available was a tiny bit smaller than the Brixton studio, so I knew that I really needed to plan, plan,



plan. Everything in Dulwich was going to be hidden in plain sight and there were no dark corners to co-opt. It was a big rectangular concrete floor and brick walled coach house. Simple. I knew if I moved everything in at once and then decided where to put it, that I would be stuffed. This had to be ship-in-a-bottle time. And so I developed my highly revolutionary *Fourth Theory of Successful Moving*, suggested to me by the very well organised Theo Miller. I got some graph paper, drew a ground plan and then cut out little bits of paper the right size to designate, say, my randoms, my presses, and any floor-standing units. And then I just started moving them around to see how it felt. I went back to the new space and chalked out the ground plan onto the actual floor. I even got a lot of cardboard boxes from Sainsbury's and a few planks of wood and some chairs and mocked up what various aspects of the space could look like when the real stuff finally arrived. It is amazing what a difference that makes, space looks bigger or smaller depending what is in it. Once I was reasonably happy with that I went digital and downloaded an app that enabled me to create a 3D 'walk through' version of the studio and even 'paint' the walls various colours. Armed with my own digital version of The Garage Press I made even more changes, especially to the height of shelves and where the randoms and galley racks would go. Barely a day went by without my tinkering with the design. It was coming together in my head, day and night.

I had the huge advantage of having both of the Brixton and Dulwich premises simultaneously. Once I was set on the designs, I found a brilliant carpenter who made me some big leg frames which I used to build a wraparound 'kitchen counter', topped by thick MDF. I started putting shelves up before anything arrived so that I didn't have to deal with brick dust which is not a perfect partner for print ephemera! Then I covered all the work surfaces with some very economical A1 cutting mats I found on eBay. They were so cheap, I bought...ahem...twelve of them. Looking back I wish I had painted the floor then, but that was one error I can't undo. My boy Jack helped me put a huge noticeboard up across the whole of the back wall and I bought some industrial steel units which I put on wheels and used to create the

central island. It felt that having as much on wheels as possible would be useful when I needed to move stuff out and get visitors in.

Then I started to bring over an Adana or two and all the small typecases, and I made a few more adjustments to my layout. Then, deep breath, I booked Mike from LPS three weekends away to move 'Gloria' and most of my other presses. On the first two weekends I employed two or three student friends of family and I hired an Enterprise tail lift van and we spent four long days moving the randoms and the typecases (in that order!), followed by the paper and other stuff! I have to say that the charity shop below the Brixton studio received back from me most of the random things I had bought from them over the previous three years and seemed remarkably unconcerned about that. Although clearly they were wondering why I had bought most of the stuff in the first place. Ho hum.

So as each load arrived at Dulwich, I unpacked it in order, and put it away in the designated space as per the layout plan and, without exception, the planning paid off. Everything fitted and everything ended up accessible and I was thrilled, especially when the largest random fitted under the worktop with a clearance of perhaps 5 mm.

Four months later there is a lot that needs sorting, and a lot that I want to shift around a little. The paper storage, for instance, is a shambles but I will get there eventually. I am also getting to the level of sifting through 'stuff' where I am finding some glorious things that either I definitely don't remember ever acquiring, or have probably forgotten buying. Every day is like Christmas to be honest. But without the Brussel sprouts.

So, in conclusion, I would say that the Top Tips are:

- ✿ Chuck or re-home unwanted stuff before moving, not afterwards.
- ✿ Make lots of to-do lists.
- ✿ Measure everything at least three times.
- ✿ Move everything in the correct order.
- ✿ Enjoy making the perfect home for your inky passions to thrive.

Simon Trewin, The Garage Press, Bell House, Dulwich Village, London SE21. Instagram: @thegaragepress