

The search for a great print

Finding herself without a printer of her own **Elizabeth Roberts** investigates one of London's most innovative print services, theprintspace, to find out what they can offer

There has long been an argument about whether a photographer is really a photographer if they have someone else do their printing. In the days of the darkroom, purists printed their own, while others contended that printing, being an entirely different skill, was better farmed out to those who knew how to do it well. Now, in the digital age, we are confronting exactly the same issue. At first it seemed that all you had to do was buy a decent printer, get your screen calibrated and find a paper. Those, like me, who have tried this method, will know that nothing in life is that simple. It's as big a learning curve as ever it was in the darkroom and for those who have the time and commitment, the rewards are just as big. But for those who don't have these attributes, it can be a bitterly frustrating and expensive experience.

Up until recently, I was going down the 'plug on and you'll learn' route and was reasonably happy with what I was producing. But it was a time consuming occupation and one

that, if I'm honest, I wasn't entirely in control of. The printer was the boss, not me. So, when we moved house back in February, and put everything into storage for six months, I decided to investigate

is, you have worked on it in Photoshop or similar software and are happy that what appears on your screen is what you want. A good print service will replicate that exactly. You are not reliant on someone

and scanning booths – all of which are very spacious and modern. I was also shown their framing department and introduced to their framer Mark Fisher who has a long, and very prestigious, background in framing.

While I wanted to see if they could come up with the kind of print I generally go for, I was also interested in experimenting a bit. I decided that while doing my standard A4 and A3 prints on some nice Hahnemuhle paper, I would also try some large C-type prints. This was a bit scary.

While waiting for the prints to come through I chatted to Mark about how I might frame the new, experimental images. Again, I wanted to break away from my conventional black-frame, ivory mount into something more modern. Instead of starting off by making a number of suggestions, he began by questioning me very closely about my lifestyle! This took me rather by surprise but, as we're still in the process of moving and designing our new place, I was enthusiastic with my answers. On the basis of this Mike came up



Framer Mark Fisher questions Elizabeth about her lifestyle in order to find the right framing 'look' for her

print services. I put it down to circumstances, but I think really I'd had enough of battling with a piece of machinery.

Now, the first thing I need to point out is this: handing over your file to a print service like theprintspace in London is not like handing over a neg to a printer. You prepare your file so that it is print-ready – that

else's interpretation of your picture as you would be if you were handing over a neg.

First experience

I first visited theprintspace at the invitation of Geri Tuneva, their marketing person. I was warmly welcomed and shown around the gallery space, print terminals, retouching



You can bring your print-ready images into the printspace, and drop them into the print queue via a terminal – the process takes about five minutes



Technician David Moycomp shows Elizabeth the retouching booth with calibrated screen and colour neutral environment

with several specific ideas. He suggested that, while I like modern design, there's a bit of me that lingers with the retro. Spot on. What we finally decided on was a delightful cross between the two. Later when the framed images came by post, I was delighted at the quality and finesse of the

framing and felt it perfectly suited the new-style images.

On-line printing

The quality of the prints made for me that day was superb but, because I'd done so much experimenting, they didn't feel like 'me'. It was time to try some on-line printing – firstly

to see if I could find the kind of paper and printing style that tied in with my photographic identity, and secondly to see if the service was really as good as it seemed. This time I plumped for Harman Gloss Warmtone, knowing that it was much nearer than a C-type to the kind of print I like.

The printspace website is remarkably easy to use with plenty of information on how to use it. I had a little trouble downloading my images (which turned out to be a problem my end) so I phoned up and was given good (and friendly) advice. Turnaround was very quick, and when the prints ▶

HOW PRINTSPACE WORKS

You can either prepare your files at home or you can use a retouching booth to work on them. This service costs £12 an hour and has a calibrated screen in a colour neutral environment.

Once your files are print ready, you simply drag and drop them into the box for printing. If you arrive at the printspace with print-ready files, all you do is go to a terminal and drag and drop. It takes less than five minutes!

On-line ordering is user

friendly with plenty of information about print types. You can download print profiles (although for b&w printing they recommend that you don't use profiles).

Turnaround time is fast with your work joining the print queue as soon as you drop it into the box. Prints are generally ready within two hours – unless you have a big

order – whether you order on-line or in house.

Customer service is friendly and easy to access by phone, email, fax and even Facebook and Twitter!



It was time to experiment with a large C-type print



With experimenting over, I'm back to my classic style – the combination of a warmtone paper with really good printing has produced prints I'm very satisfied with

◀ arrived I was thrilled to pieces.

Since then I have continued to use theprintspace, both going up to their premises in East London and on-line. I actually prefer to go there only because it's rather fun and you get the chance to chat to other photographers while you're waiting for your prints – there's even a kitchen where you can help yourself

to tea and biscuits.

The cost per print is working out around £7 for an A4 and £8.50 for A3 – not far off what it costs to print at home, taking all things into account. Print quality is the best I've ever had and all the unpredictability of printing has gone. Fantastic.

In the coming months we'll be trying out other print services – watch this space!

To complete the relaxed and friendly in-house environment, theprintspace also has a gallery to show client's work. Private views are open to all clients and it's a great party atmosphere!



**PAPERS
AVAILABLE**

C-TYPES:

Fuji Matt
Fuji Gloss
Kodak Metallic
Fuji-Flex

INKJET / GICLÉE

Epson Semi-Gloss
Hahnemuhle German
Etching
Hahnemuhle Photorag
Hahnemuhle Pearl
Harman Gloss FB
Harman Gloss Warmtone

CONTACT

For more information about theprintspace go to www.theprintspace.co.uk or visit them at 74 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DL. They are open Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm. Call 020 7739 1060 or email info@theprintspace.co.uk

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