

# Woodblock Shimbun

Brought to you by the Mokuhankan print shop in Asakusa, Tokyo

All the print news that fits!

Featured print in this issue:

## Shinjuku

by Toshi Yoshida (1911~1995)

Designed: 1938

Size: 28.5cm x 20.5cm

Edition: current printing from original block set

Printer: Shinkichi Numabe

Price: 24,000 yen

Toshi Yoshida is the 'middle' figure in the three-generation group of Yoshida family woodblock print designers. His father **Hiroshi** (1876~1950) began the family printmaking tradition, and his son **Tsukasa** (1949~) is continuing it.

The image is from Yoshida's 'Tokyo Nights' series, and depicts a Shinjuku that disappeared in the post war period, when the alleyways and bars were cleared away for massive urban development. (We have two other 'Tokyo Nights' designs available - see the back page of this leaflet).

A bit of historical background: by the early 1920s the



old *ukiyo-e* printmaking tradition was no longer a relevant part of society. The imagery was passé, and the method of production - with the work being done by hired craftsmen - was no longer acceptable to some artists. They felt it was important that they do everything on their own from start to finish.

But **Shozaburo Watanabe**, who ran a large print shop in Tokyo, felt there was still great value in the traditional concept of making prints with a division of labour - with the publishing, designing, carving and printing all being handled by highly skilled professionals, as in the days of the old *ukiyo-e*, and he commissioned work from a few designers to make his point.

The prints they collectively created under Watanabe's direction became known over time as the *shin hanga* (literally 'new prints'), with Charles Bartlett, Hiroshi Yoshida, Kawase Hasui, and Tsuchiya Koitsu being the most well-known names in the field. Building on the technical foundations of the *ukiyo-e* - transparent



and toning to many areas of the print at the same time.

The Shinjuku print requires 57 impressions, taken from a set of seven carved blocks. Each block is carved on both sides, and they are all used multiple times, with different shades of pigment brushed on using gradations to create varied effects.

Most viewers are surprised when they see the key block for the print.

pigments pressed into washi from a cherryblock matrix - they created an entirely new world of imagery.

Hiroshi Yoshida didn't stay long with the Watanabe Company, but struck out on his own, and by his late 40s, was running his own studio, hiring carvers and printers to produce work under his supervision. His son Toshi followed him in the work, and the print featured here is a classic example of the type of work the family became famous for.

Where a typical ukiyo-e print would be a dozen or so impressions, most shin-hanga prints run to thirty or so at least, and it is not unusual to approach twice that. A common feature of the Yoshida prints is the use of the *nezumi-ban* ('grey block'), which adds shading

Unlike the other blocks in the set, it is made from a zinc plate (fastened down to a cherryblock for stability). There are a couple of considerations behind the use of a metal key block. Foremost in the Yoshidas' thinking is the fact that metal blocks are created photographically from their original line work drawing, and it was important for them not to have their work subjected to the 'interpretation' of a carver. It's also undeniable that the keyblock would be far and away the most expensive of the blocks if cut by hand, but there is still another factor in play: Yoshida prints are created with so many multiple overlays, with so many 'vague' and misty colours, that the actual key lines eventually become buried and blurred under it all. 'Beautiful' lines created by a master carver - the hallmark of the ukiyo-e - are simply not required here.



We know the name of the Yoshida staff printer who did the job when this image was first created back in 1938, **Mr. Heihachi Ko-**

The blocks - although well used over the years - are still capable of making many more beautiful prints ...



The printer works from the set of test proof sheets carefully preserved since 1938 ...

**matsu**. He is still with us, although no longer active. The set of proof sheets that he created, working of course with Toshi-sensei (and almost certainly under the sharp eye of Hiroshi-san) are still preserved carefully in the studio, and whenever a new edition of these prints is needed, they are brought out for reference.

Our current stock of the Shinjuku design was printed by **Shinkichi Numabe**, who works at the same bench occupied by Komatsu-san before his retirement. The prints are made on the famous *Echizen washi* made by the same people who have been supplying the Yoshidas for many decades, the **Yamaguchi Kazuo** family of O-taki machi in Fukui Prefecture.

None of the Yoshida prints are 'editioned', as the family policy is to maintain an open and non-exclusive approach to the work - keep the prices as reasonable as possible, and let as many people as possible enjoy the results. When Toshi-san was still alive, he always signed each print in pencil, but the prints these days are 'stamped' with his signature, after inspection by his son Tsukasa-san.

We here at Mokuhankan are very happy to be able to stock these Yoshida prints, and it is always a great pleasure to us when people come into our

Asakusa shop and see them for the first time in person.

We hope you might consider adding **Shinjuku** to your collection (or perhaps one of the other Toshi Yoshida designs featured on the next page.)

Thank you for your interest!

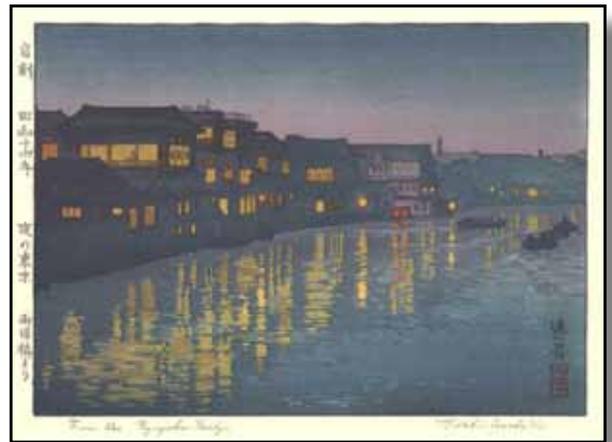




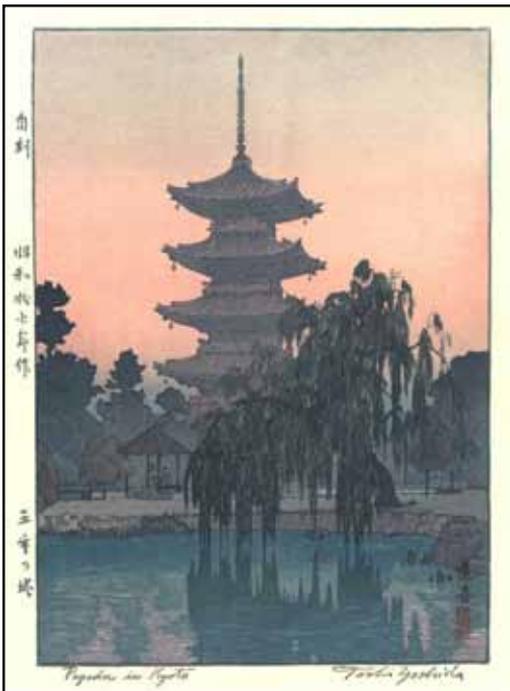
Sacred Grove - 1941



Linnoji Garden - 1941



From the Ryogoku Bridge - 1939



Pagoda in Kyoto - 1942



Supper Waggon - 1938

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