

From the Washington Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2017/11/27/book-arts-maker-of-gifts-for-kings-and-chancellors.html>

Book Arts, maker of gifts for kings and chancellors, seeks new D.C. home

Nov 27, 2017, 5:00am EST | Updated: Nov 27, 2017, 1:07pm EST

Book Arts, the D.C. company that has put hand-tooled leather volumes into the hands of hundreds of heads of state — not to mention, most recently, Pope Francis — is looking for a new home.

The high-end bookbinder and printing operation has lived for the past 10 years at the corner of 19th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW, in the sole retail space on the ground floor of the International Monetary Fund. But now, that entity is reconfiguring its lobby, and there will no longer be space for the 15-year-old stationer.



Employees of the IMG or others who work along Pennsylvania Avenue near Foggy Bottom have surely passed Book Arts hundreds of times. At night, in particular, the high-end bookbinder's showroom gives off a warm glow, with Persian rugs on the floor and brightly colored leather pieces and hand-painted paper hanging over ladder shelves.

Out of that showroom and in others before, owners Steve Vanilio and John Paul Greenwalt have met with representatives of the current president and the last four who preceded him, taking orders for one-of-a-kind, 23-plus-carat-gold embellished leather goods: books, journals, special boxes to hold keepsakes. There was the box holding an artifact from WWII for German Chancellor Angela Merkel, or in May, the elaborate leather and gold embellished box for Pope Francis that houses a first-edition set of Martin Luther King Jr.'s

writings, along with a piece of granite from the D.C. memorial to the civil rights leader.

Book Arts' work spans political changes and administrations, something that its owners take very seriously.

"We work for the office. We represent the people of America when we make these head of state gifts," Vanilio said. "So we want to make each thing as beautiful as it can be."

One entire shelf in the showroom is devoted to the photos of these gifts and their famous recipients: Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Charles of England, Pope Benedict XVI — too many to count. In other displays, one finds the kind of gifts that don't go on Black Friday or Cyber Monday sale: \$375, hand-tooled leather journals meant to last a lifetime, albums that can become luxury baby or wedding books.

Greenwalt, the firm's principal artist, supervises the manufacture of all these items at a Darnestown facility. Yes, he is often found hand-tooling 23-plus-carat gold leaf onto items. But the Darnestown facility also combines new manufacturing methods with centuries-old techniques to create items that combine the modern with the classic, he said.

"If you want it done the way it was done in 1764, we can do that. But we can also do it in a more efficient manner, really unique to book arts, that allows us to do things to a scale that isn't done very often," Greenwalt said.

They also do hundreds of items for corporate clients, including real estate firms and advertising agencies. And they don't have trouble paying the rent; though he declined to disclose exact revenue, Vanilio said the company's annual sales are in the seven figures.

For their new showroom, Vanilia and Greenwalt are looking for some similarly visible space that suits its high-end customer. (Case in point: Greenwalt recently hand-delivered a funeral guest book to a customer who needed his Social Security number, because she lives on the same street as the Obamas.) They are looking for between 1,000 and 1,500 square feet of retail space in either a downtown or Georgetown location. The Book Arts team is represented in its search by Miller Walker Retail Real Estate.

Rebecca Cooper

Senior Staff Reporter

Washington Business Journal

