

## Reduction Block Printing: Victorian House Walkthrough

By Dana Driscoll

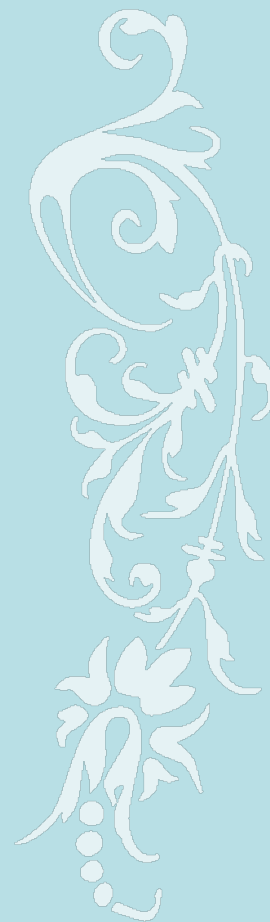
I've always loved block printing, and have found many new uses for it in mail art. When I'm entered in a large swap that requires me to make 15 or 20 pages, a block print is a great way to create backgrounds, foregrounds, and other unique effects without an enormous expenditure of time or resources. Just as importantly, block printing gives a very unique and distinct look impossible to get otherwise.

The technique described in this article is called a reduction block print, a print where block itself is carved back as the print stages progress. This article will walk you through my reduction block print process for a house swap hosted at [www.mailartworld.com](http://www.mailartworld.com).

### Materials

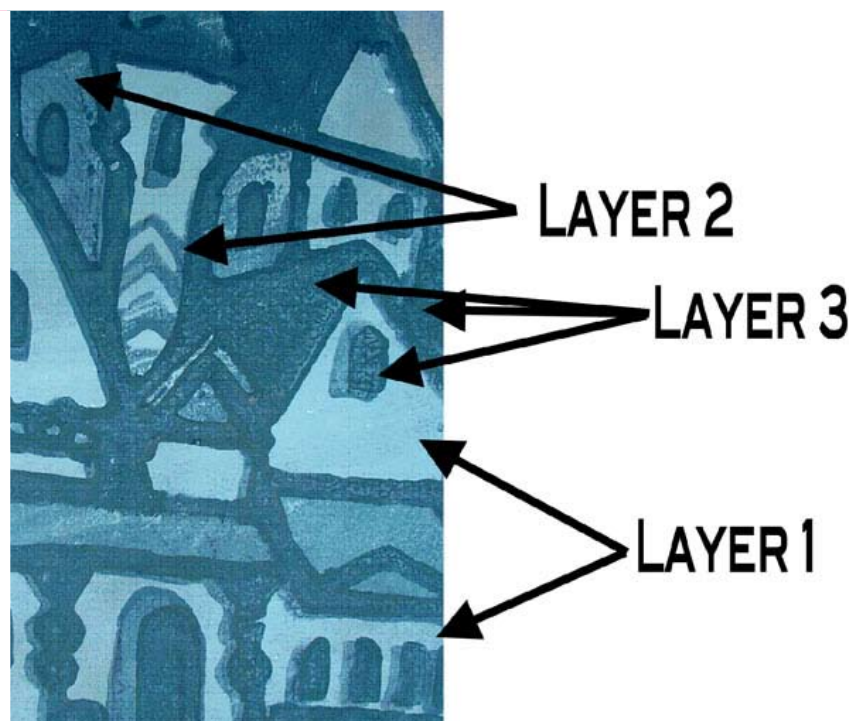
- Linoleum or rubber block, large enough for the size of art you are working
- Block printing ink or acrylic paint\*
- Ink roller
- 90 degree angle tool, several inches high (I built a 90" angle with Lego blocks that was several inches wide on each side; a wooden frame also works fine.)
- Paper for printing – I used Stonehenge all-media 90lb smooth paper
- Glass plate for rolling out plate – a sheet of glass works, or, in a pinch, one of your dinner plates
- Pen or pencil (regular pen, not pen and ink)

\*A note about block printing inks. I've found that some brands of block printing inks take a very long time to dry, so I prefer to use standard acrylic paints. As long as you work quickly, they work perfectly and then you don't need to purchase another set of media specific to block printing. Adding in some stamping medium to regular acrylics helps as well.



### The Process

Reduction block prints work in stages, so you need to work background to foreground, and generally light to dark (depending on what kind of media you are printing with). You should begin by deciding what you'd like to have your final piece to look like—how many stages do you want? My block print ended up being three stages—with each stage, I carved back more of the linoleum block and added a darker layer of paint. The image <right> provides a detailed example of the layers of printing. The first layer is the lightest layer—that was printed first. The second layer was medium blue, and the last layer was dark blue. I actually carved a fourth and final layer, but after printing one house decided that I liked the print with only three layers.



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Another aspect of reduction block printing that is important to know is that this is a limited print run. Because you are carving back the block after each print, you must print however many you need before carving back, as it is nearly impossible to recreate that same block again. Additionally, you should always print more than you need - for this swap I needed 12 houses, so I started with 20 prints, knowing that several would not come out as planned. This means that for each segment of the printing process, I printed out 20 sheets, then carved down further, then printed on the 20 sheets again, and so forth. This will be explained in detail below.

### The Steps

1. Begin by sketching out your piece. Remember that with all block printing or stamping, the image that you carve will be reversed. For my piece, I chose a Victorian/haunted house that measured X" by X" (the requirements of the swap). I found it helpful to sketch on paper and then make my sketch on the block. I made my lines dark so that I would not lose them as the printing process progressed. (Figure 1)

2. For my first stage of printing, I cut out only the silhouette of the block and then printed in a light blue. For printing, take your roller and your paint/ink and roll it out on the plate, then roll it on the block. Press the print firmly into the paper (using a press, your own weight, etc) and then pull it off in a swift motion. Let it sit to dry. After you have printed all that you want, make sure you wash off your block and dry before continuing on. (Figure 2)

3. After each printing stage, I redrew the overall image so that I could decide what areas I wanted to carve out at each stage. I decided to make the fronts of the house areas the medium blue. The image (Figure 3) is the second stage of the printing process.

4. When you print after stage one, it is good to have a 90-degree angle raised area - a wooden frame, box, even Legos work for this purpose. Then you can line up the image exactly for the next print segment so that the image is printed exactly at the same place through each print. The next image is after a stage 2 print. (Figure 4)



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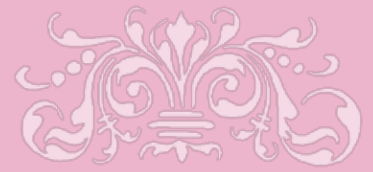


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5. I continued to carve back and print, shifting to a darker shade of paint after each print. Here is my block after carving stage three. (Figure 5)

6. Here is the final print of all three stages. (Figure 6)

7. I decided that I wanted to add some additional ink layers (gel pen and India ink) to define it further. (Figure 7)

Reduction block printing is only one of many types of block printing techniques that can be applied to mail art with ease. Try it today and experiment!

