

TATTOO MASTER

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**NG'S AVENUE
TATTOO**
*ie Rubendall and
Massapequa Mecca*

Shagbuilt
Who Wants a Shag?

TUTORIAL
*at Hunt makes a
was spectacular*

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Shaw**
Scab Vendor

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New Wave Tattoo

**Alla
Prima**
*A Revolution
in Colour*

**JAPANESE
WAVES**
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of revered
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KING'S AVENUE

From the outside, King's Avenue looks to be just another low building in another small strip of retail space in suburban Massapequa, Long Island. But it's here, in his hometown, that Mike Rubendall has gathered the incredibly talented crew of Grez, Justin Weatherholtz, Matt Beckerich and Brian Paul.

Patrick Sullivan King's Avenue Tattooists & Chris Montgomery

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The shop alone is almost worth the visit. The place is immaculate and aside from the individual tattoo rooms there's also a small backyard area and private drawing room. Setting foot inside is almost like visiting a cathedral or temple. It's shrine-like and you're instantly humbled, calmed, inspired. As you walk past the brown leather couches, mammoth front desk and individual tattoo rooms, there's no need to look for the names on instantly recognisable artwork: Ed Hardy, Chris Conn, Steve Boltz. A couple large-scale dragons painted by Chris Garver; a samurai by Chris Trevino; various wooden Japanese masks hung inconspicuously; an unfurled, delicately painted scroll.

It's a place where trade secrets are still closely guarded, where respect for the craft is almost tangible. The shop exudes tradition and you know every tattooer that picks up a machine here wouldn't be picking up a machine if he did not respect that tradition. It's a place where an interviewer would want to tread lightly and not push too much with the technical questions...

A photograph of a hallway with a polished wooden floor. On the right wall, a large, ornate, dark-colored picture frame is mounted. Inside the frame is a group photo of six men, presumably tattoo artists, posing in front of a wall with several small framed tattoo designs. Above the frame, a black banner with white text is attached to the wall. The hallway leads into a darker area in the background.

**SETTING FOOT INSIDE IS ALMOST LIKE VISITING
A CATHEDRAL OR TEMPLE. IT'S SHRINE-LIKE AND
YOU'RE INSTANTLY HUMBLLED, CALMED, INSPIRED.**

MIKE RUBENDALL



The continuing story of Mike Rubendall is one of both hard work and humility. Though Rubendall has become one of the best known and most highly regarded contemporary American tattooers, he gets a little sheepish if you bring up his success and is almost dismissive when it comes to his talent. Good thing we're here to champion his work for him. Renowned for his seamless integration of western elements into Japanese-style tattoos, it seems that Rubendall has created a legacy all his own, even if he doesn't think he's doing much of anything special.

"WITHOUT THE HARD WORK, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET ANY RESULTS."

LET'S START WITH THE INITIAL DRAW, THOSE FIRST FEW YEARS OF GETTING INTO IT AT DAVINCI TATTOO.

Well, when I first started, I wasn't positive I wanted to tattoo. I was actually really apprehensive and nervous. I knew I was always interested but I didn't know if I had what it took to be a tattoo artist or if I had the commitment to do it. I knew nothing about it.

So I went [to DaVinci Tattoo] and I remember my first day. I was so overwhelmed and intimidated. I said, "I don't even know if I want tattoos, I don't know if this is right for me." But I was 17 years old and I figured at that point, I was so young that if this wasn't the path I chose, there were plenty of other things to do. But I started to feel passionate about it and as weeks and months went on, I fell in love with it. It was more than just a job and I didn't get into it to make money. Even back then, you didn't make

crazy money, or do well at all.

I did an apprenticeship for a year and a half, without making any money, working for free. Cleaning toilets, doing whatever it took to learn how to tattoo. I was willing to do anything, so I went through a lot but that's part of the deal.

AND YOU WENT TO GO SEE FILIP LEU EARLY ON TO GET TATTOOED, RIGHT?

I think it was '97 I went over there to Switzerland. I communicated with him through letters because back then he didn't have a telephone or anything so you really had to work to get tattooed by him. We corresponded through letters and it was a weird thing because I was very young and there were only a handful of good tattooers in New York that the "who's who" would get tattooed by. And I would look through the magazines and see Filip's work and thought, "Why can't I just fly to Switzerland and get tattooed?" Which I finally did. I started a sleeve in '97 and then went back in '98, so by the age of 19 or 20, I had two full sleeves—well, a sleeve and a half, because I'd had the other half done by a tattooer from New York, Mike Ledger. But I learned a great deal from Filip, watching him tattoo my forearms.

HOW WAS THAT?

It was unbelievable. It was a little too advanced at that time, because I wasn't tattooing very long and didn't really understand tattooing, as it was. I still feel tattooing is tremendously difficult. And [as a tattooer] you gotta be an artist, you gotta be a psychologist to deal with all the people, you gotta be a doctor, in a way, with the cleanliness and hygiene. Over all,

it's just a very difficult thing. He was so beyond everyone else so I just felt it was a little too advanced. I couldn't wrap my head around it at the time. But it did show me how tattoos could look, how tattoos could be, so it set a higher standard for tattooing and gave me a goal to reach.

Basically, I knew the end result. I couldn't articulate what he did, I just saw what I saw: bodysuit after bodysuit drawings everywhere. He's another guy that lives and breathes it. I went to his house and it was just tattooing and art everywhere. And I've noticed through the years that the people that would get tattooed by him, other tattooers, they pick up a lot from him, too. He's very influential. It's hard for him not to rub off on people so I think he influenced the tattoo world all over. You look through magazines, and even now, tattooers are so good you can't really remember sometimes who did [the tattoo]. But I think he's had a very big influence on the industry as a whole.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK. IS THERE SOMETHING YOU ALWAYS TRY TO ACHIEVE IN A TATTOO?

There are so many aspects to tattoos. We're almost like a filter, we're like cameras, we're trying to translate [the client's] ideas into pictures. I try to get many ideas from the client and translate them into my own work on paper. Then composition, colour, detail, there's a lot involved. But first and foremost I try to



the client happy and get a nice
so for my portfolio.

**WHAT'S YOUR DESIGN
PROCESS LIKE?**

I have a consultation with the person
usually about a half hour or so. You
get the craziest ideas; it's like a yard sale
sometimes. They want everything in one
piece (laughs).

**YOU GET REALLY SPECIFIC
JAPANESE PIECES, WITH
TERMS, ETC?**

It's stuff I'm a little loose with. The
terms don't always work with it. They
put flowers on the kimono because
they represent their child, so they
always want to put their two cents in.
It's stuff that I'm not overly concerned
about but I do try to follow the tradition.

**YOU TALK ABOUT SUCCESS FOR
A MINUTE. YOU'RE THE KIND OF
PERSON SUCCESSFUL THAT NOT MANY
TOO EASY TO ACHIEVE. WHAT KIND
OF IMPACT DO YOU THINK THAT'S
HAD ON YOU AND YOUR WORK?**

I don't feel like I'm high profile or
anything. I try to not even think about
it because that's not what I got into it.
Filip even said at one point, "You're
into it at whatever you're interested
in and if you really love what you're
doing, then the fame and fortune come
naturally." That was good advice.

**WHAT'S MISSING FROM TATTOOING?
IS IT KIND OF A BIG QUESTION.**

It is a big question. It just seems like
the whole industry changed quite a bit.
I haven't been tattooing forever but I
could even say in the last ten years it's
changed quite a bit, the integrity of a lot
of tattooers. I don't know, I don't feel like
I build men the way they used to-- or
Japans, the way they used to. I think
overall, the whole world has changed.
The quality of people is different.

I like the new tattoo generation is
a generation of entitlement. Like
they're entitled to things and they don't
need to work for things. In some ways I
think they don't have to work for things
because everything is found on the
Internet. Information is traded all the
time and there are no trade secrets. There
are still secrets I hold close to my chest
from the years that I'm sure aren't secrets
anymore, but I still want to stay true to
the game. But a lot of newer tattooers
don't see why you should respect the
age of that.

**WHAT EFFECT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE
HAVING ON TATTOOING?**

I honestly don't think I'm having any
effect because I don't see that I'm
doing anything different. I think I do



**MIKE ON
HOMEWORK**

There's a lot of
homework and that's the
killer with the job. You
want to research it. And
especially nowadays, I
try to find a story, find
the correct way to do it
to respect the tradition
and the aesthetics of it. I
want to do it the correct
way. But the thing with
Japanese, a lot of the
books we have are all
written in Japanese
so obviously we can't
tell all the stories. But
nowadays they're coming
out with more and more
information on different
designs and stories.

**THE QUALITY OF PEOPLE IS DIFFERENT. I FEEL LIKE
THE NEW TATTOO GENERATION IS LIKE A GENERATION
OF ENTITLEMENT. LIKE THEY'RE ENTITLED TO THINGS
AND THEY DON'T NEED TO WORK FOR THINGS.**

good, quality tattoos that are clean
and hopefully they'll withstand the
test of time. I don't think it's anything
exceptional, I think I've just taken what
everybody else does and do it my way.
**HERE'S THE EPIC QUESTION NOW.
WHAT'S THE ONE BIGGEST THING
YOU'VE LEARNED FROM TATTOOING?**
I wish I could think of something for this

one! I've learned a ton of life lessons. I
met some of the greatest people I could
ever imagine meeting. People I consider
my family, being able to travel around
the world. I cherish the art, the trade.
There's no substitute for hard work and
the consistency of that is crucial. Without
the hard work you're not going to get any
results. And that's it, short and simple. 🐉

BRIAN PAUL



Even though he's the newest member to the King's Avenue team, Brian Paul doesn't seem to have missed a beat. He's adept at nearly any style and his tattoos carry a distinct and delicate look. As a testament to his work, a client was waiting outside the shop before it opened to keep his appointment with Brian. He had just made the six-hour drive from Virginia -- for a consultation.

"BOTTOM LINE, I WANT IT TO BE FUN."

SO ARE YOU SUPER BOOKED OUT LIKE THESE OTHER GUYS?

No, I'm not; I'm the newest one here, so not as far as these guys. I started here last November.

CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW YOU STARTED?

I learned to tattoo in Oregon, that's where I grew up. After about four years there I moved to New York and had the

opportunity to work at another shop on Long Island through some people that I worked with in Portland. Worked at that shop for three years and then came in here one night and was talkin' to Mike. He asked, "You know anybody that's looking for a job from outta state?"

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK. YOU SEEM TO HAVE A LITTLE BIT MORE OF A DELICATE TOUCH.

Yeah, I see that. It's not rough and rugged, it's thought about quite a bit.

IS THAT A STYLE YOU TRY TO CULTIVATE?

No, just trying to switch it up a little. I don't know, it's hard to explain.

SO WHAT'S YOUR DESIGN PROCESS ARE YOU AGONISING OVER IT, DO YOU DRAW IT UP DAY OF?

No, I try to get things drawn way in advance at least a week. I don't like to wait till the last minute.

WHAT'RE YOUR INFLUENCES NOW?

I look at tonnes of things. I could say I'm influenced a lot by the people that work here because it's stuff I see on a daily basis and everyone's trying their hardest. But as far as other tattooers, I try to not necessarily use tattooing as reference just because I want to try to bring my own flair into it. I've got lots of books...I do a lot of book shopping.

WELL, IT'S HARD WITH THE INTERNET. YOU SEE TRENDS AND WHAT USED TO BE MAYBE REGIONAL STYLES OR AN INDIVIDUAL STYLE, EVERYONE WILL START DOING THE SAME THING.

Yeah, everyone does it. Which I mean, is cool, and tattooing has progressed and people are doing crazy things now. But it's good to not use other tattoos as a reference. I want to use the original source that people are pulling their reference from; I don't wanna use another tattooer. But on the



nd, you see so many tattoos and to say, "Oh, I really like the way is, maybe I wanna throw my r into it."

DO YOU LIKE TO TATTOO?
EVERYTHING.

line, I want it to be fun. So I try to fun in any sort of design, whether wanting a flower on her ankle or e wanting a backpiece. Everything, most part, can be done in a way es it fun and creative and doesn't work.

KIND OF MACHINES
YOU USING?

s been Seth Ciferri machines, Scott achines. It depends on what I'm depends on what I want to use.

YOU TRIED OUT THE AIR
LESSOR SETUPS?

rather just stick with what I know it I use works for me. If it's not broke, it.

IS IMPORTANT TO YOU
TOOING?

ition of tattooing. I mean, a orward apprenticeship, the design f tattooing. What we do is not easy work our asses off. We research ly and it's not just to be handed ery person that says, "I wanna be r." There's got to be some level of or tattoo code, if you wanna call it. or everybody.

ENTIONED PRESERVING THE
ASPECT OF TATTOOING.

got to be simple. I don't even know ord it. It's gotta work as a tattoo. It need to be an oil painting, it doesn't be some sort of airbrushed-looking feel like over the years people areed out what works for tattooing it doesn't work. It's just a matter of within those guidelines and rules s taught in tattooing. Make a nice it do any of that no outline stuff. A hat holds. Do smooth colour fades, ack.

HERE ANY TATTOOERS
RE BLOWING YOU AWAY
NOW?

e a lot of people killing it right now. I appointment with Chris O'Donnell nth, he's tattooing the top of my hink he's at the top of his game right Francisco tattooers, Grime, Scott ff Rassier, all those Black Heart ough he doesn't tattoo anymore, nn, Dan Higgs, all those guys. definitely an influence.

HANY DAYS A WORK DO
EEK....? WAIT....WEEK DO
ORK?

), I week five days a work.

SO I TRY TO FIND THE FUN IN ANY SORT OF DESIGN, WHETHER IT'S A GIRL WANTING A FLOWER ON HER ANKLE OR SOMEONE WANTING A BACKPIECE.



A LOT OF TATTOOERS DON'T
WORK THAT MUCH.

I used to do four days a week, which was awesome.

I IMAGINE IT WON'T ALWAYS BE LIKE
THIS. WE'RE RIDING SUCH A WAVE
OF TATTOOING RIGHT NOW.

Hopefully, we stay strong. I hope we're just as busy as we are now. Who knows? Hopefully the people that shouldn't be tattooing aren't tattooing anymore, aren't scratching and fucking people up, that

they're out of business.

BUT YOU'LL ALWAYS HAVE PLACES
THAT'LL SELL TO PEOPLE.

Yeah, that's something that we won't be able to get rid of. But, hopefully the clientele will be educated more on what a good tattoo is.

WELL, THEY ALREADY ARE, IN
A WAY.

They are. A lot. And maybe you can even say TV helps in that sense. But I just hope that in the future I'm still tattooing and making a living off what I love to do. 🐾

BRIAN ON
CRAFTING
TATTOOS

Most of the time I get into what I'm doing, I'm focused and I don't really talk too much. I'm not a very talkative or social person, some would say I'm socially retarded (laughs). So a lot of the time I just keep my head down and work and try to focus on what I'm doing and not necessarily have blasting music in the background. A little small talk here and there with the customer is always good, obviously you've got to build a relationship, especially when you're seeing them multiple times. And as you tattoo somebody more, obviously that relationship grows and you become more comfortable, both the client with me and me with the client.



GREZ



The first pre-interview note I made on Grez was the phrase "bold as balls." Not that it makes a tonne of sense but the instant you see a Grez tattoo, you'll get the idea. It's not often that a tattooer excels at multiple styles and it's even more rare to find a tattooer that completely nails each one. If it's a traditional western-style tattoo, it's bold, simple, rugged. If it happens to be Japanese, it's saturated and wonderfully composed. His black and grey is tough and it makes no apologies, and if Grez gets to incorporate different styles, all the better.

**"I FEEL LIKE
EVERYTHING
SHOULD
CHALLENGE ME."**

LET'S START WITH A LITTLE BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

The first tattoo I ever did was February 1st, 2000. I have a photo with a little digital imprint and I use that as my marker. I started in Syracuse, NY, my hometown. I was in college and graduated in '99. About halfway through college, two of my best friends opened up a shop in Syracuse called Halo Tattoo. I was there for the opening and was constantly there during breaks, like for Christmas break I would be there all day every day because they were hardcore kids I knew from the music scene that just happened to be tattooers.

I met Mike at a convention in probably 2003. It's pretty random how I ended up here but I feel like it was destiny, because he and I get along so well.

He was tattooing my best friend. He was doing a sleeve on him, and I call my best friend who was living in Queens to tell him my wife and I were moving to New York and he just happened to be with Mike. And Mike got on the phone and said, "Hey, you wanna work for me?" And I said "Absolutely." I came out and hung out with him for a day or two, shook his hand, and moved here a few months later.

YOUR TATTOOS HAVE SUCH A GREAT LOOK TO THEM, NO MATTER WHAT IT IS. HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR STYLE'S EVOLVED SINCE YOU STARTED?

Starting at Halo, those guys did a lot of traditional work and that was what I was more drawn to as far as tattoos go. By starting off with traditional, it just gave me the perfect foundation to learn. You hear it a lot, but American traditional is just the best

formula to learn. It's clean lines, solid colour and shading. It's usually a third black, a third colour and a third skin. It's such a great recipe to build a tattoo that lasts. That's what I feel my foundation was but when I look at my old work... You know, when you sit there and you're drawing and an apprentice, I would sit there and I knew I had so much to learn. Looking back, I feel like my older work wasn't really traditional because it didn't

have any kind of weight to it.

I think a lot of that comes with having confidence in your work. I didn't have confidence putting in huge fields of black and colour, or to use heavier lines. But as I became more confident with the machine and my own work, starting to work with other artists from out of town, like from some of the guys from Jinx Proof and Adam Barton came from California. We hit it off





Chris Conn. Those guys have the same balance as Ed: a new twist with a classic look. Chris and Dan, their work is so far apart. Dan's work is so simple and so heavy, and so broken down. And Chris's is a lot fancier but it has this simplistic, powerful quality to it.

ANY TATTOOER YOU WISH YOU COULD'VE GOTTEN WORK OFF OF?

I'd push it back to Greg Irons; I would've loved to have gotten something from him, and Sailor Jerry too. I feel like every time I look through a Jerry flash book I see new stuff. There's this beautiful simplicity that's so hard to capture. It's so hard to simplify something and keep it beautiful at the same time. It's the ultimate pain in the ass. It's the ultimate goal for tattooers. It's so easy to add all the frosting but the way that he strips stuff down, same with Dan [Higgs], his stuff is so simple, I feel like he breaks things down into shapes and I still strive for something like that. I'm always trying to grow in that

direction, always trying to simplify. Trying to find a perfect recipe.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST THING YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO TAKE AWAY FROM TATTOOING?

Wow. That's a good one. I feel like I learn off of other people. I sit back and watch and listen a lot. I don't try to give my opinion, necessarily. Knowing your place and sitting back. When I was learning how to tattoo and getting tattooed by guys, I wasn't sitting there and asking a lot of questions like, "What kind of ink are you using, what kind of needle do you use?" I would sit back and watch them work and I feel like I came leaps and bounds by getting tattooed. And I still do. Seeing the way another person works. I wasn't necessarily given that advice because I've always been that guy. I've always kind of been in the back of class, listening.

SO BASICALLY BACK TO THAT PHRASE, "TWO EARS, ONE MOUTH."

Two ears, one mouth. That's important. 🐶

GREZ ON STYLING

I feel like there are three different styles I really enjoy doing, but I'd say ultimately, I like to tattoo good ideas. There's a guy that came in who I am doing a Japanese monster sleeve on and it's pretty heavy. It looks like it's got a very American approach to it. But he came to me with all these monsters that I didn't know anything about. And they're really interesting stories, so I thought his idea and approach and his ideas of how he saw his arm going, how he wanted to lay it out, was very inspirational. People come in with great ideas and it inspires me. Sometimes I do more research on the idea, or just try to do some digging, especially in Japanese tattooing, try to get to know the story so you're not just throwing a bunch of filler in there that doesn't make sense. I'd say I like any great idea.

actually connected more through an we did through tattoos. But with him, painting flash together, it took my work forward.

huge steps forward because when I was putting a lot of black in my work I realised I wasn't really putting any. Now powerful his work was with the amount of weight and all the black. That was a pinpoint in my career that showed me that I was going in the direction but not doing anything right. I wasn't doing adult-looking tattoos, was I? I was kind of dancing around doing too many fades, trying to make it so fancy, when all I needed to do was everything down more.

ABOUT TATTOOERS THAT INSPIRE YOU?

From my co-workers, I'd say the one answer is Ed Hardy. I've been inspired by Ed before and watching the work was unbelievable. It was something I still can't believe how fast he works. Fascinating because you realise the work came from, he was doing acetate with powder, the graphite transfer, teaching him outline things you realise the element is wasted. He'd go right into the next into the next so the work would never stop, just what would work in the angle. And you realise a lot of that is what he learned. He has the perfect balance between having things classic and a new twist. His work is timeless and it takes risks. Any artist that takes a risk is inspiring. Whether it works or not, I respect it as being very ballsy..

From my co-workers, the three influences are Ed, Dan Higgs and

I FEEL LIKE EVERY TIME I LOOK THROUGH A JERRY FLASH BOOK I SEE NEW STUFF. THERE'S THIS BEAUTIFUL SIMPLICITY THAT'S SO HARD TO CAPTURE. IT'S SO HARD TO SIMPLIFY SOMETHING AND KEEP IT BEAUTIFUL AT THE SAME TIME.



JUSTIN WEATHERHOLTZ

Justin Weatherholtz's tattoos match his personality: bright, exciting, honest. Tattooing for ten years, Weatherholtz seems to have gained ground in record time since making the move to King's Avenue. He may be most well known for maintaining a rich new school thread running through his work but his skill in other styles is instantly apparent. And all this from a guy who's never been to art school.

"WHAT'S HARD FOR ME, ONE OF THE BIG THINGS I'VE LEARNED, IS TO SIMPLIFY."

LET'S START WITH THE BASICS.

Originally, I'm from a small town in Pennsylvania. I just say Reading, Pennsylvania, because it's easier. I grew up there and started my tattoo career at a shop called Wizard's World — yes, Wizard's World — fucking cool, goes along with the music choice, right? (Laughs). The guy who gave me my first tattoo, I ended up bugging him and got an apprenticeship. I had a pretty formal apprenticeship so for the first year, no tattooing, just to make sure I was going to be a proper tattooer.

I learned all the basics and did my whole career at Wizard's World, did a lot of travelling and conventions and all that for about seven and a half years before I moved here. So this is only the second shop I've ever worked at.

WHEN DID YOU START AT KING'S AVE?

September of 2007, so about two and a half years.

HOW DID YOU GET HOOKED UP WITH MIKE?

I just made an appointment with him and got tattooed by him. He did my ribs and it's a pretty big piece so I was coming up here pretty often, got to know all the guys. He knew I was looking to relocate and do something different. I was gonna go maybe West Coast, maybe be somewhere like that, somewhere warmer and right as I was really starting to make moves to do something, I got a phone call one day. I jumped on it and the same day he asked me, I said yeah. I was pretty psyched when I got that call.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE ART SCHOOL CROWD IS AFFECTING THE TATTOO INDUSTRY?

Having an art background isn't going to hurt you. The more information you have



in your head, the more you're going to be able to apply all that to tattooing. But as far as now, it seems more people consider tattooing an option as far as career-wise, and that's going to be good and bad.

THAT'S A GOOD POINT.

Well, it's one of those things where everyone has to start in their career somehow. I'm really hesitant, like a lot of people are, to say "Don't get into it." I mean, I got into it. But in the same breath, most people aren't going to give the industry the respect it deserves, as opposed to just, "I'll give it a shot, fuck it, whatever." But if you have information you can use, it's not going to hurt you. But I know guys that can draw their asses off that suck at tattooing, so who knows.

DO YOU THINK WORKING AT KING'S AVE. HAS HELPED YOU AS AN ARTIST?

I feel like I've had three different careers in



ten years (laughs)! When I first started, I was really into big, wet-looking eyes and all the new school stuff. Looking back on it, I cringe a little bit. And I'm not saying I hate my old stuff, because I don't. But like any artist, as time goes on, you're going to change. It's funny, because when I started, if you would've told me I'd be doing portraits, I would've said, "Yeah, I have absolutely no interest in doing that." And now I'm the portrait guy here, it's kind of funny. It's just where [tattooing] has led me.

HAVE YOU WORKED WITH TATTOOER SEAN HERMAN?

Yeah, Sean's my boy! I worked with him at a tonne of conventions and I did a guest spot at All or Nothing. A lot of people thought I worked there, actually. He's a great friend. When he visits he stays with me and that's one of the great things about being a tattooer, that I've met so many great people along the way. He's super down to earth, such a nice guy, he's really hungry to learn and he's just a super good dude.

WHO ARE YOUR INFLUENCES?

That's so tough. Horiyoshi III, learning his stuff is so good. That's the big one with the Japanese style, obviously. Then a lot of the names you're going to hear a lot, like Grime. I'm really into the George Campbell stuff. Biggest influence since I've moved to New York is definitely Chris Conn, learning his art. I didn't really know about him until I moved here, he was one of those under the radar guys that I was fortunate to know about. Once again, getting back to the idea of simplifying and he just nails it so much, it's amazing. Chris O'Donnell, amazing. Timothy Hoyer...

ANY OLDER INFLUENCES?

When I talk about this, I always feel like I'm such a bad tattooer guy. But I



JUSTIN ON THE CRAFT

I love my job, I get to draw all day, I get to hang out with some of the best people in the world. I work at one of the best shops in the world, I travel a tonne, I get to listen to music all day. Keep it simple, you know. For myself, I work really hard and I enjoy it. It's a lot of work and I've never been around more guys that all have the same work ethic. We work here for ten hours a day and most of us are going to go home and draw for three. It's a tonne of work but it's nice to be in this environment where everyone does that. Everyone puts the extra everything into every tattoo and I love that.

it because where I come from, I was really pushed on me, until I was 18. A lot of guys like Mike and Jerry, Ed Hardy. I've got a new understanding of why it's as good as it is. Where I come from, my dad taught me, he just kind of showed me the industry in a different way. I was aware of those people but it was a different way, just from a different perspective. I was never really into it, but now I'm like, "Oh, I get it."

YOU THINK ABOUT THE TATTOO INDUSTRY IS, AND WHAT IT'S GOING TO BE LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

I don't want to bring up the huge industry, I'd feel hypocritical if I brought it into it, because I got into it and I gotta start somewhere. You've got people who have been tattooing for five years, they've got their own apprentices. It's really unacceptable. I feel like it's a hard-earned thing. And people that come into it aren't putting the amount

of work that should be put into it. They're opening shops it's gone so crazy. They don't have the respect for the industry and people taking time to understand where it comes from and why they need to chill the fuck out on...everything!

WHAT'S YOUR PLACE IN THAT? IS IT ON YOU TO CARRY ON THAT TRADITION?

Absolutely. That's just my own personal thing and I don't really talk about it much. Now, if someone's asking me that's just getting into it, I'll tell them the same thing that was said to me: "Sit down, draw and shut your mouth." Do everything as it's supposed to come.

For me, I just want to keep improving and doing it in the right way, which I feel like I have been. It's nice because, for me, I have no qualms about it. I can talk to anyone about it that I respect and not feel weird about anything I've done because I've felt like I've done it the best way from the start.

SINGLE GREATEST THING YOU'VE

I'LL TELL THEM THE SAME THING THAT WAS SAID TO ME: "SIT DOWN, DRAW AND SHUT YOUR MOUTH." DO EVERYTHING AS IT'S SUPPOSED TO COME.

LEARNED FROM TATTOOING?

That's tough! It's my life, you know? It's been my life since I've gotten my first one, it's always on my mind, it's just changed its level, the angle from which I've been looking at it. In a sense, what you put into it is what you get out of it.

I've put so much work into it and I feel really great about where I'm at, in my life, what I've experienced so far, people I work with, people I'm around. I feel like that's somehow related to how much work I've put into tattooing. Is that a good answer? (Laughs).

ABSOLUTELY. I THINK YOU'VE BESTED MIKE ON THAT ONE.

Because I answered! (Laughs). ➤

MATT BECKERICH

If there was ever an example of a quiet, nose-to-the-grindstone tattooer, it's Matt Beckerich. He's extremely talented and he lets his work do all the talking: from full-size back pieces and sleeves, to nice and clean little one-offs, it's impossible to find a bad tattoo in his portfolio.

"I THINK IT'S COOL TO TAKE FROM ONE STYLE AND REALLY MAKE IT DIFFERENT. IT ALMOST MAKES IT EASIER TO BE ORIGINAL."

GIVE US AN INTRODUCTION HERE, TELL THE FOLKS WHERE YOU COME FROM.

I've been tattooing for a little over ten years. I grew up on Long Island, moved down to North Carolina, which is where I started tattooing. I worked down there for six years and been here for four.

SO YOU'LL ACTUALLY BE ABLE TO TELL ME ABOUT LONG ISLAND.

A little bit, I guess. I love it, man. It's got its little quirks but it's definitely a cool place, it's got a little bit of everything.

WHAT'S YOUR SCHEDULE LIKE?

I'd say I'm usually booked for two months or so. It's enough for me. As long as I'm booked every day, it doesn't really matter whether it's a month, a week, or a year. As long as I'm working every day, I'm happy.

WHAT'S THE DESIGN PROCESS LIKE FOR YOU?

I do a lot of homework. Pretty much, people come in and I trace out the area and then all the work is at home. I usually draw in the mornings, so I wake up early, drink coffee, go up in the little study I have and get to work. Look through reference and put a lot of hours in beforehand every day.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON COLOURS?

I never have really gotten into doing colour studies. Sometimes I feel like I should, but it's always just kind of as I'm tattooing I'm figuring it out. A lot of the bigger stuff, too, you have a lot of time to look and think about it, talk about it, figure it out as you go.

IT SEEMS LIKE IN YOUR TATTOOS YOU COMBINE HINTS OR ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL AMERICAN WITH JAPANESE TOGETHER. THAT SEEMS ALMOST LIKE IT'S A KING'S AVE. THING. DO YOU THINK JAPANESE AND AMERICAN STYLES CAN INFORM

ONE ANOTHER?

Definitely. They definitely feed off each other. I'm obviously American so there's always going to be that feel to the Japanese stuff and I love the Japanese style, so if I do American style, there's always going to be that influence on that one.

WHAT KIND OF SETUP ARE YOU USING?

For machines I use mostly Seth Ciferri or Juan Puente. The one I was using tonight was a Juan Puente. I guess mostly just because those guys come through here and we know them. The biggest needle I use and probably the most common would be thirteen. I don't really have that many open fields of grey or colour, it's a lot of Japanese clouds or fire.



**MAKES A GOOD
O? BLACK.
(HS.) BLACK IN
IGHT SPOTS. RULE
ER ONE, I GUESS.
K A GOOD TATTOO
AN, AS SIMPLE AS
I BE AND STILL
AUTIFUL.**

IN YOUR LIBRARY?

g. I guess I try to have everything because a client could ask for. But also you can draw from. I think it's cool to take from one really make it different. It almost easier to be original. You get sick of it the same stuff all the time, so you start branching out and looking at stuff.

DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHERE SEEN THE TATTOO INDUSTRY THE LAST TEN YEARS?

w, there's so much stuff that I could pretty happy and content in life w. You see a lot of guys come in and st through the door. And I guess dy kind of wants to do that but the I was taught was just to wait your seems like a lot of that is getting lost ys. People put out tattoos that the public like to look at and then that becomes this...not phenomenon, become a successful tattooer and e they don't have to go through the that a lot of us went through at the ng. And it's not just because hey, through this and you didn't so I'm you, but it's changing tattooing. It's ng the people that are involved in it most watering it down more.

E DOES THAT LEAVE YOU?

be the guy that keeps it alive (laughs). s, thinking like that, I even caught and pissed off. Thinking with that ity, you almost have to let go of it. You e so rigid. But I like to try to be the guy eps it going.

MAKES A GOOD TATTOO?

makes a good tattoo? Black. (Laughs.) n the right spots. Rule number guess. I look at tattooing almost like try. I've been doing a lot of carpentry and it's almost the same, the way rpentry is a craft and you have to do a things and abide by certain rules. n't just do whatever and it's not just ng goes. I think a good tattoo is clean, ple as it can be and still be beautiful.

IDS GOOD.

I'll stay with black (laughs). **TM**



MATT ON VARIETY

I like to do stuff that I don't do all the time. But even like a dragon or a tiger or a rose, something like that is really fun. Or a koi, I do a ton of koi and that's the kind of tattoo I could do every day and not get sick of it. I guess when you draw something all the time, you get that repetition and it becomes second nature. You can almost do more with it because you know it inside and out, as opposed to something you don't do all the time. Then you have to do all this homework and research and try to find all this reference and it takes a long time to draw. That's fun, too, in the end. It pays off but I would say just for sheer fun, it would be something basic that I do a lot of because it comes easier than the other stuff.