

Dayton City Paper

Culture & News Weekly



DAYTON INKED

TRACING DAYTON'S TATTOO CULTURE

By Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin // pg. 22

Photo: Bill Franz



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STEWED, SCREWED & TATOOED

DISCOVERING DAYTON'S NOT-SO-SUB TATTOO CULTURE

BY JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN



Truth & Triumph Artist Joe Brenner Sterilizes An Area To Be Inked; Photo: Bill Franz

Dayton's got

ink, and it's not afraid to show it. "Even in big cities, if you're at the beach and you have a lot of tattoos, people look at you weird," says Tommy Nash, tattooer at Truth & Triumph Tattoo's Belmont location. "And I don't get that feeling here [in Dayton]. I think it's because so many people have tattoos here."

As to the primal urges associated with getting a tattoo and tattooing's crossover from fringe to mainstream over the past

few decades, artist Jake Des, also of Truth & Triumph's Belmont location, had this to say:

"There's not that many other ways that you can permanently alter your body. I think that's an innate human want or need, to stand out, to say that you're different from somebody else. Tattooing is like the oldest form of art besides cave painting. The first cave painting was a fucking hand just on the wall. That's just you saying 'I exist. Heck

yeah, I fucking exist.' Tattooing is the same thing. You get a tattoo because you want to be powerful. You want that rite of passage. And something about that rite of passage makes you stronger than you were without it. There's very few things in life that give you both that feeling and a permanent reminder of it and that you have forever and that you can never lose or be stolen."

That said, you may want to go about getting a tattoo in a manner that doesn't cause you deep regret in the future. Josh Wiley, owner and tattoo artist at Modified Skin Tattoos in Moraine, says a large percentage of people he's met have approached tattooing the wrong way the first time.

"Because they just don't have the education," Wiley insists. "They don't know any better."

So, what's the "right" way? Or, rather, what are the steps you can take to get what you want now and that will happily

remain a part of your body for the rest of forever? After talking to several Dayton-area tattooers, we've come up with the following steps:

Full disclosure: I have no tattoos. Now, if I seem like a curious choice to write a story about ink in Dayton, consider it this way—I got to ask all the basic, inane questions that perhaps you yourself have wanted to ask but didn't for fear of judgment or the expectation that you should already know the answers. Use my naiveté to your advantage. Or just look at the pretty pictures.



Josh Wiley, owner of Modified Skin, 4716 S. Dixie Dr.; photo: Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin

photograph to your arm, that amazing," realism, surrealism, traditional (hard outlines, simple color) and neo-traditional (has depth but is not a real image).

Des categorizes more simply: "I think there's two different styles of tattooing—tattoos with lines and tattoos with no lines."

Maybe you've figured out your style, but now you need your image. You may have been thinking about this for years, or you may have been drawn in by a current trend. Just keep in mind, today's infinity symbols, watercolors and transformative birds are tomorrow's tramp stamps, Chinese characters and Tasmanian Devils.

"Just consider that you will be the butt of jokes in five years," Des says on the topic of trendy ink.

Designs that have stood the test of time?

"Portraits forever," Wiley says. "Anything old school.

Sailor Jerry. That stuff will never die."

Even once you have a pretty clear concept of what you want, remember that this is a unique medium, and you will need to trust your artist to translate your idea from your brain to your skin.

"Give your artist control," Wiley advises.

"I think it's best for people to come in with kind of a loose general idea and just understand that there are many more limitations in tattoo design than there are in any other kind of artwork," Des says, also warning against coming in for your first tattoo with too much information to fit into one piece. "Defining what a good tattoo is, is a hard thing to say. ... You've got to consider the lifetime of a tattoo as well."

Meaning that something with fine detail today may look terrible in three years.

"For my personal aesthetic, I prefer a tattoo that's simpler and bolder just because then you don't have that problem and you have a tattoo that has a longer lifetime because it doesn't have those little intricacies that get lost," Des says. "In tattooing, simpler is better across the board. In terms of the amount of lettering you want to get, in terms of the complexity of your image."

Also consider your color choices. Fading will change the look of your ink over time.

"Anything with lots of whites in it, anything with lots of pastels in it, those are the things to go first," Des says.

Placement is another big decision.

"When stuck between two different locations of a tattoo, consider the size and shape of the design," says Jess Brockman (née Oram) and her husband Adam, both of whom tattoo at Cloak and Dagger Tattoo on Wilmington Avenue. "It may fit your body better on one location versus another."

If you are wavering on placement or think you may like to modify or even remove your tattoo one day, keep in mind that darker and denser work is harder to fix and cover up. And think hard about getting ink on public skin. Alexander Cooper of Glenn Scott's Tattoo Team in the Oregon District says if someone came to him with as

STEP 1: FIND YOUR STYLE

"The first thing you want to do is figure out the style that you like, because that's more important than location and price," says Wiley, who suggests using Google to find images that appeal to you. "You can even go to your tattoo artist with pictures of what you like and say, 'What style is this?'"

Wiley breaks it down into several categories: hyper-realism ("looks like someone stapled a

"You get a tattoo because you want to be powerful. You want that rite of passage. And something about that rite of passage makes you stronger than you were without it."

– Jacob Des, Truth & Triumph Tattoo

many tattoos as he has and wanted their face tattooed, okay, no problem. But if he notices the length of their stare at the tattoos on his neck or hands, then he would advise against it.

"I don't want to put anybody through anything that's going to limit their careers or their lifestyle," Cooper says.

Des has a similar sentiment: "You don't get the job-stopper spots until you get all of the other spots filled up."

Now, what about the discomfort that comes with pushing a group of needles through your skin, repeatedly, for hours?

"When it comes to placement or size of the tattoo, focus on the end result, not the pain," Brockman says. "You will be much happier getting the tattoo in the placement and size you want."

"Don't worry about the pain," Wiley echoes. "Pain is temporary. Your pain doesn't matter. It will go away. Your tattoo is permanent. It's on you for the rest of your life."

The rest of my life? I cannot think of one decision that I made 10 (or even five) years ago that wasn't ill-advised. What if I had to look at that decision every day?

"Don't think of it that way," Wiley advises. "If it's like, 'I want art on me, and I don't want to regret it later,' what you do is you think 'timeline.' ... It will remind you of that time in your life, and that's okay."

STEP 2: FIND YOUR ARTIST

"This is a process," Wiley says. "It's almost like getting a job. You've got to know exactly where you want to go and what you want to do. Definitely doing portfolio research is the best way because then you'll find other tattoos they've actually done and tattoos that match your style."

"The biggest thing for me is to not shop for

the tattoo, but to shop for the artist," Cooper says. "I think someone can be an amazing artist if they do realism, but the minute they try to do something that's out of their norm, it's a little iffy. If someone's not comfortable with doing the tattoo and they're not able to point you in the direction [of someone who can], that's a red flag to me."

"Searching local tattoo shops' websites and going deeper onto those websites to look at different artists' portfolios would be a good first step," Nash says. "Then I think the second step would be to go into the shop and see if they're assholes or if they're nice to you, because you want to be in a place that makes you comfortable, especially if it's your first tattoo. You want to be treated with respect. You want to be in a place that's inviting and not scary. And that can give you a sense of whether the tattooing areas are clean. Are things organized? [It can] just give you a little insight into what the shop is all about."

"Make sure you are comfortable with the tattoo shop you are visiting!" Brockman says. "A clean and sterile environment is a requirement for all professional tattoo artists."

STEP 3: FIND YOUR MONEY

While it's tempting to bargain shop for what can be such a pricey endeavor, keep in mind that this is going to be a permanent part of your body, and now is not the time to be frugal.

Brad Darrell, body piercer and shop manager at Glenn Scott's Tattoo Team in the Oregon District, sums it up with the old adage: "Good tattoos aren't cheap, and cheap tattoos aren't good."

"It's the first thing on everybody's brain, and it should be the last thing," Wiley says. "Because you'll always have another dollar. You'll always be able to save up money. Wait six months, save up more money, and go to the artist who is the best for the job. ... You don't price shop a tattoo. You artist shop. You find the best artist for your tattoo, and then you go from there."

Some shops charge by the hour, some by the piece. Glenn Scott's Tattoo Team does a price cap, meaning you come in with the amount of money you can spend, and they do what they can with that amount.

"We want to make things work for people," Cooper says.

STEP 4: FIND THE TIME

Set up your appointment and have realistic expectations of how long it will take to complete your vision. Obviously realism takes much



Jake Des, Truth & Triumph tattoo artist; photo: Bill Franz

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Tommy Nash and Jacob Des, tattooers at Truth & Triumph Tattoo, 613 Watervliet Ave.; photo: Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin

more time to achieve than a simple design with no shading. An arm or leg sleeve will require several sessions to complete.

"Do not be hasty," Brockman warns. "Patience is important. It takes time to tattoo big designs. Some may require multiple sessions, meaning a lot of time and commitment."

As for a little placato in anticipation of your session, Wiley says "no" to a few drinks beforehand.

"Just suffer through it," Wiley assures me. "It's not that bad."

Know what your artist needs from you before you arrive. You will be required to show a photo ID and will be asked to sign a release. Some shops prefer that you shave the area to be tattooed beforehand, while others request that you allow them to shave you in order to avoid stubble and ingrown hairs. Be sure to ask when making your appointment.

When it comes time to pay and tip, think like dining out—add an extra 20 percent to the total for great service.

"Just give them lots of money," Wiley jokes, grinning. But really, "most [tattooers] are super appreciative of whatever you give them. There are a few who get offended if they don't get tipped. This is a service they provide, and most artists only keep 50 to 60 percent of what they charge because the owner takes a cut."

and has a fairly predictable healing routine containing swelling, scabbing and peeling as the skin works to recover," Brockman says. "Good aftercare is an extremely important practice, and is what will make your tattoo look the best it can when it is healed. Poor or no aftercare can cause a 'rough heal.' Rough heals can contain heavy scabbing or possible scarring leading to a tattoo that can look faded or spotty."

Keep it clean with antibacterial soap, avoid abrasive material like washcloths and loofahs, apply fragrance-free hypo-allergenic lotion, no swimming, no tanning, no scratching until everything is healed. Some places, like Modified Skin, take the guesswork out of it for you and apply to your new tattoo a layer of Saniderm, a breathable, skin-like bandage that can be worn for days at a time, conveniently allowing your tattoo to remain moist and protected while it heals.

"Everyone's skin is different and we all heal differently," Brockman says. "Which is why if you have a question about the healing process, or just want to make sure your tattoo looks like it's healing properly, see your artist and they can tell you if your tattoo is healing the way it should."

STEP 5: FIND YOUR PATIENCE

You don't want to itch. You don't want to scar. You don't want to contract a MRSA infection. Do you? Thought not. Taking good care of your tattoo while it heals will help safeguard the color and fine details of your design. Listen to your tattooer and follow the care instructions.

"A well-done tattoo is a light abrasion



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