

Erik on stage at the Ça ira club in 1966, sporting his tie and waistcoat combo



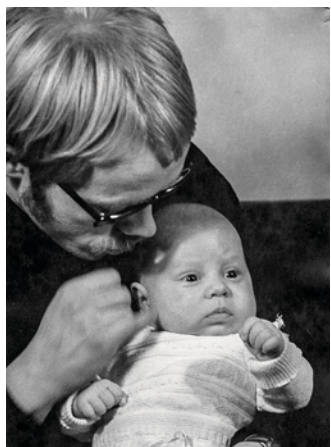
I don't remember money being involved Berlin, 1967 to 1973

Music continued to be an important aspect of his life. In the music club he co-founded, Ça ira, where he regularly performed garbed in his strange-looking English-inspired style of three-piece suit, he met Joan Sargent, coincidentally from Leigh, the first place he had been to in England. She was an au pair for an English journalist couple, and the girlfriend of a friend of Erik's. Erik and Joan soon became a couple, and moved into their first shared apartment shortly after Erik's university-entrance diploma. Two Englishmen lived downstairs who were setting up the German distribution for the British company Personality Posters that sold posters of pop stars and movie stars. Erik helped them from time to time, for instance with getting their posters through customs.

Around this time Erik started to study history of art and English studies, and »liberated« a Boston platen that was standing around unused in the basement of a youth center. He used it to print calling cards, invitations, and private advertisements of all descriptions. Erik began to collect old letterpress machines – the same machines he grew up with, and that the printers were getting rid of due to the rapid rise of offset printing. One day some friends delivered a huge proofing press in a converted hearse right to his front door, saying »We've got a machine for you!«

At that time type cases were literally being thrown out of windows in Kreuzberg, an area full of printing presses. Erik gathered whatever he could use from the streets and took it to his printing press in a rented factory floor in the same building where his brother-in-law, musician Udo Arndt, had his band rehearsal space. Word quickly spread about Erik's passion for collecting. »There's this idiot who collects stuff like that. Before we dump it, let's give him a call. He'll even collect it himself.« A dream come true for Erik, who soon owned a bunch of machines, type cases, and accessories of all kinds.

Erik used these machines to do small jobs as a printer and graphic designer for artists, and musicians in particular. They either knew Erik as a musician, or they knew his brother-in-law. Sometimes they needed a poster in a hurry; some-



Left: Erik and son Dylan, December 1968
Right: The pair seven years later in London



times they needed a record cover. »You can do that sort of thing,« they'd say, so I'd come up with something. In those days there was no such thing as a preliminary design phase or anything like that.« Erik did everything without payment. »I don't remember money ever being involved,« he says today.

In 1968 Joan, who had married Erik five months earlier, gave birth to their son Dylan. One of their English neighbors had said »He looks like a Dylan« when he visited Joan at the hospital, and the name stuck. Joan was convinced throughout her pregnancy that she was carrying a girl, and had not even thought of a boy's name. And so Joan and Erik named their little son... Dylan. A year later their English neighbors suddenly disappeared without a

trace. Joan and Erik were persuaded by the head of Personality Posters to take over the poster distribution. They rented an old butcher's shop from which they delivered British posters to West German shops, crossing East Germany to get there in their Mini Traveller. At the same time Erik designed and printed all kinds of little things on his printing machines, now housed in the cellar underneath the shop.

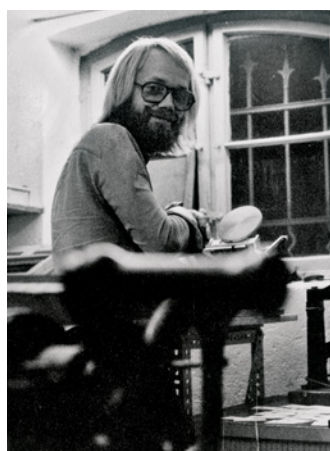
Two years later Erik was selling posters for Objects & Posters. The young family moved into a large rented house in Arno-Holz-Straße, where Erik installed the Erik Spiekermann Hand Press on the first floor, with his little graphic design studio on the second floor. Their lodger was Gert Wiescher, who had himself started designing posters, sometimes together with Erik. At the beginning of 1973 Erik passed the poster distribution to his

friend Hucki Schuppenhauer and Erik's brother Michael, and found steady employment for the first and only time in his life: as the director of pre-press at the Format printing press, for three whole months.

Erik was still enrolled as a student, but as a young father he had little time to study. Nevertheless, he gave workshop talks to English studies students, and – naturally – printed the flyers for it.



Left: The house at 7 Arno-Holz-Straße where Erik, Joan, and Dylan lived from 1970 to 1973. The Erik Spiekermann Hand Press was also housed here.
Right: Erik in the basement printing press, 1971



In 1973 the big house in Arno-Holz-Straße that Joan and Erik loved so much was sold. Since they were in no position to buy it, they decided to move to London. Erik's printing machines stayed in Berlin for the time being.

»Today,« says Erik, »I wonder how we managed to get by financially. Joan and I always did lots of different jobs. We never had a steady income, but neither did we have any debts.«

I was left with no alternative
London and Berlin, 1973 to 1981

In London a music journalist friend got him a position at the London College of Printing. There Erik imparted his practical knowledge of layout to journalists. He confidently managed to cover up the many gaps in his theoretical knowledge, reading up on it in his spare time.

In 1976 Erik returned alone to Berlin. He met Florian Fischer, a graphic designer who had heard of Erik's printing press. They started a design studio together, Fischer & Spiekermann, run from an apartment in Schöneberg. The office was in the front, with its own darkroom; Erik lived in the middle, and his sister Angelika lived in the back for a while.

A year later Erik decided to move back to London. This time he wanted to take all his machines with him, in order to run his own printing press and do ambitious work for artists. In the summer he packed it all into a big truck bound for London. He put the machines in a rented space underneath some railway arches and took the family off to Italy for four weeks. When he returned, nothing was left. Everything had burnt down, destroyed by a fire that broke out from the car repair shop next door. All that remained was a massive lump of lead. »And then I was left with no alternative.«

Erik began working as a typographer for the typesetters Filmcomposition, whom he had known since 1974, introducing typesetting onto positive film, which was still largely unknown outside Germany. Filmcomposition had Berthold phototypesetting machines, and thanks to Erik's good relationship with the world-famous Berlin type production company, the London typesetters could work with all the latest typefaces. Starting in 1978, Erik worked as a freelance con-

sultant for the Wolff Olins agency, where he met Dieter Heil. Together they were responsible for the German clients: Audi, VW, Faber-Castell, and the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft. At the same time Erik started to design typefaces for Bertold, taught at the London College of Printing once again, and worked, as he puts it, as a »typo-freak« on big and little jobs, in addition to co-founding the Type Directors Club, today called the Typographic Circle, of which he is an honorary member for life.

On June 8, 1979 Erik, Dieter Heil, and Florian Fischer founded MetaDesign – the start of something which had really begun much earlier.



In 1979 Spiekermann founded MetaDesign with Dieter Heil and Florian Fischer. The road sign in the background with the two lines that change direction was the symbol of his collaboration with Florian Fischer before MetaDesign. On page 40 Fischer and Spiekermann carry this sign to their new office in Salzburger Straße.