n the fringe of Los Angeles’s Korea town behind a storefront screened by what appears to be giant plastic origami, is the studio and printmaking atelier of illustrator Josh Cochran. Cochran shares this small retreat from the bustling sidewalks and streets surrounding the two-story former video store with four designers—three graphic and one environmental.

A large table in the center of the ground-floor room cleverly converts to a silk-screen surface, handy for the projects in which Cochran silk-screens his images onto vintage paper. A letterpress sits in front of one of the space’s large shop front windows, nicely screened from the street by a thin layer of formed plastic. A “digital cloud” hangs overhead, another fabrication by one of his studio mates; it’s attached to a computer and lights up in rainbow colors. It’s clear that much invention and collaboration happens in this tidy space. “I love sharing this space with people of different disciplines,” he claims. “Sometimes we’ll collaborate; I’ll occasionally work on assignments that require a great deal of graphic design and it’s nice to walk across the room and get some help.”

Cochran lives nearby his studio with his new wife, Jenny, a manager at Progressive Insurance, and their two Boston Terriers, Cody, and the hyperactive Porkchop, who curls at his feet as we speak, calm now after an enthusiastic greeting that sent him flying over backwards. The impression is of order but there are many unusual objects to admire. Collectible toys are displayed in a glass case, not his, Cochran points out, although he knows the makers of these trendy Japanese-produced objects and admires the marketing extension these works give their creators.

The 27-year-old Cochran has an infectious smile and an easy-going nature despite his self-admitted caffeine addiction. Or perhaps the calm is a side effect of his recent honeymoon in Bora-Bora, where he sheepishly admits he did half-heartedly try to retrieve his e-mail once before relaxing into a destination meant for escape.

Exotic locations are not new to Cochran, who considers himself a world citizen, Born to a Chinese mother and Scottish-Irish father—both missionaries—he moved frequently, leaving Taiwan at age eleven and entering fourth grade in the U.S. By then his trajectory had also taken him to Regina, in Canada’s remote Saskatchewan province. Like many children who follow in the wake of their parents’ vocations—
he calculates twenty moves—he spent a lot of time fitting into new schools and cultures. He loved drawing and reading comic books, especially Tin-Tin. "I was really inspired by the simple, iconic figures set against intricate backgrounds," Cochran says, and he began to draw out his own stories, early practice for later publishing ventures with Fantagraphics Books.

Cochran’s client list is impressive and eclectic, ranging from Kiehl's and GQ to Bugaboo and Metropolis, touching on all variety of subjects. Works such as Dead Weight and Too Cars are humorous takes on 21st century life. His graphic approach—Cochran is an excellent draftsman—and cheerful palette take on light and dark topics. He has explored the theme of war in personal work that is deeply detailed and accurate—but imbued with a comic book feel that somehow manages to soften the subject matter.

He has worked in gouache, but usually eschews painting in favor of drawing and printmaking. He will start with a sketch and then scan it into the computer to add color or graphic elements. His technique strikes a happy balance between hand skills and technology.

Rob Clayton, of the Clayton Brothers, was his mentor at Pasadena’s prestigious Art Center College of Design, a sort of father figure to the young illustrator, who also studied film and animation. "He was an amazing student. He was fun to work with because he was open-minded about everything. "He had a nice eye for the quiet moment," Clayton says. "Getting him to harness the natural drawing ability he had was my goal for him at Art Center. Once he discovered the silk-screen thing, he found a way to duplicate it on the computer, and keep his work fresh," he adds.

"When I joined Art Center as chair of the department, Josh was one of the first upper-term students I met," relates illustrator Ann Field. "His quiet, intelligent manner struck me immediately. What a nice guy. And his work was already remarkable, great drawings with a 'punk' sensibility and a '60s sense of composition and color—essentially pioneering a style that has since influenced a generation. He had it all." Taschen North America editor Jim Heimann, a former instructor of Cochran's agrees: "Great talent is easy to spot and Josh in his last term at Art Center clearly was a star on the rise. Focused, but open to experiment, he developed a fluid graphic style with content—not an easy task to accomplish while in school. It was clear that his drive to be original marked him for success."

Indeed, his colorful comic-book inspired prints led to early success. He produced a series of cowboy images that became so popular he quit printing them to avoid becoming known as the guy who drew cowboys. And fresh out of college, he got his first big break from Steven Heller at the New York Times Book Review. "Josh Cochran came straight from school prepared to solve problems in a distinctive conceptual manner," Heller explains. "He blended a kind of '60s David Stone Martin color sense to a '70s Robert Andrew Parker line, yet forged a visual language that reflected the moment. His ability to think-out a solution and render it in an alluring way gave him an early foothold in the field."

Within the borders of a Cochran print there is often frenetic energy, men holding rifles, people tumbling through space, furniture flying. Dangerous looking creatures become benign through color choice: green sharks? "There is something about the ocean that has fascinated me since I was really young," Cochran relates on his blog. "It holds a power both scary and awe inspiring. I used to live sort of near this beach in Taiwan called Eluanbi and all my best memories growing up were of searching for hermit crabs, building sand castles and snorkeling in the lukewarm waters." Sex themes and creatures frequently pop up in his work, including a jellyfish design tote for Urban Outfitters. On his blog, www.joshcochran.net, there’s also a primer on letterpress printing, as well as descriptions of his latest projects.

These days, Cochran is trying to choose where to put his creative energy. "I make the best art when I’m running out of time with my back against the wall and thinking I’m totally going to fail," Cochran says. "I need a certain level of fear and anxiety in order to create the unexpected!" There’s no doubt he’ll be having many opportunities for fear in the future.
Josh Cochran

Left. "Falling Apart, about the hype of Internet marketing. It falls apart as quickly as it's built." Lou Vega, Inc. magazine, art director.

"Close Shavers Squadron. Large-scale posters for Kiehl's stores worldwide, used in window displays for a Father's Day promotion." Victoria Maddocks, Kiehl's, creative director.

"A new facility opening on campus for stem cell research. Scientists collaborating on research to further new discoveries in the curious world of stem cells." Linda Warren, Studio Deluxe, art director; USC Health magazine, client.

This page: "International Relations. Officers are getting additional education, in international relations, at the university." Catherine Gontarek, art director; Pennsylvania Gazette, client.

"For Entertainment Weekly's special year-end issue looking back at noteworthy events." Brian Anstey, art director.

"Silk-screened tote bags produced and distributed by The Outfit to various boutique stores across the States, including Urban Outfitters. This bag was released as a limited-edition, "artist series" tote and included a short bio and two other designs." Howard Chang, The Outfit, creative director.
This page: “Tritons, for a book on mythological creatures. The Tritons would blow on their conch shells and conjure great storms at sea.” Jacob Covey, creative director; Fantagraphics Books, publisher.

“The Wonder of Cloning”: 37 animation short for the new Science Channel. A total of four bumpers advertising ‘smart science’ aired on the Discovery Channel during summer 2007. I did all of the key frames and overall design, while animation, art direction, script, sound design and in-betweens were done by Interspectacular.” Efrain Cintron/Benjamin Lee, animators; Luis Blanco/Michael Uman, directors; Greg Babick, producer; Interspectacular, production company; Discovery Channel, client.

Right: “Moon or Bust”: 17 Science Channel animation short. Luis Blanco/Michael Uman, creative directors; Efrain Cintron/Benjamin Lee, animators; Greg Babick, producer; Interspectacular, production company; Discovery Channel, client.

“Personal project, silk-screen on paper.”

“An accurate map of the southwest corner of Vancouver, drawn for stroller company Bugaboo, to illustrate day trips and routes that moms can take with their strollers.” Stephan Baik, art director; 72andSunny, design firm.