BY BRYN MOOTH

SIDELINES

IN THE GENES

You might call brothers Ryan and Don Clark self-taught graphic designers, but that wouldn't be entirely accurate. In fact, they learned drawing at their grandfather's knee. Alfred Paulsen spent his 30-year career as an illustrator for NASA, and he transferred his talent for line and shading (and, we think, his wit) to his grandsons. No surprise, then, that the Clark boys' Seattle design shop, Invisible Creature, turns out client and personal work with a heavy emphasis on illustration.

The Clarks opened Invisible Creature in 2007, after Don amicably left his partnership with Demetre Arges at Asterik Studio. Ryan has a full-time gig as art director of indie label Tooth & Nail Records, so Don is principal designer and illustrator at Invisible Creature; the two collaborate when projects and timing are right. For a small shop, Invisible Creature boasts a roster of big clients like Target, Nike, Hasbro, The New York Times and Capitol Records.

The brothers bypassed college and went straight from high school to the music biz, touring and recording together in bands. Their dual interests in art and music led down a natural path toward a line of screen-printed posters and T-shirts that's available on the firm's website and on PosterCabaret.com. Invisible Creature's product sales make up just a fraction of the studio's revenue, Don says, but they're OK with that: "We're tried-and-true commercial artists who tend to draw the majority of our paychecks from large corporations. Online sales are icing on the cake."

Still, designing their own merch offers total creative freedom, and those sideline projects help recruit the big-fish clients. "Selling products through our store is a fun way to bring more eyes to our work, and allows us to create satisfying products that we get to art direct and illustrate from beginning to finish," Don says. "In the end, we hope that we're just making things that we'd want to purchase ourselves. Hopefully that resonates with customers (as well as prospective clients) who appreciate that."

Up next? A yet-to-be-named toy to be released at the end of 2010 with pop culture purveyor Super 7. The limited-edition little guy (Don calls it a "he") is part of Super 7's Monster Family series. "We're having a blast calling this a job," Don says. HOW

Bryn Mooth is HOW's editor. HOWdesign.com

INVISIBLE CREATURE SEATTLE www.invisiblecreature.com



GRANDPA ALFRED
Invisible Creatures principal Don Clark calls his grandfather, Alfred Paulsen, a huge influence on both him and brother Ryan. "Having a grandfather who was an illustrator was our inspiration growing up, someone we looked up to quite a bit," he says. (Paulsen's work is below left.)

BIG CLIENTS
Target House is a home away from home for sick kids. It's sponsored by the retailer at the St. Jude Children's Hospital in Memphis, TN. Invisible Creature has designed posters supporting carnival events for the kids. The firm also creates gift cards for Target.



BOYS ARE BOYS
"It's definitely a great blessing and a huge asset to work with Ryan," says Don (above right). "From a creative standpoint, we have very similar tastes. And he's not afraid to tell me when something sucks—and vice versa."



ART FOR SALE
"We sell posters to 16-year-old boys who want to decorate their bedroom as well as 35-year-old moms who want to decorate their baby's nursery. It's a fun and broad niche for us," Don says.



GIG POSTERS
The Clark brothers' years of playing and touring in a band connected them with music industry pros who have turned into clients.

»WEB EXTRA
Read the complete Q&A with Don Clark of Invisible Creature. HOWdesign.com/InvisibleCreature