

Galvanized Copper

BY DAVID MCDONALD



Applying faux finishing techniques to help an unsightly stove pipe fit in with its surroundings

About the author: David and Robin McDonald own and operate Avila Sign & Design, a custom sign shop in Grover Beach, Calif. They may be found on the Internet at www.avilasigndesign.com.

YOU'RE REMODELING a beautiful property on the cliffs overlooking perhaps the most incredible view of the central coast of California. Objective: To open up a new swanky restaurant.

Things seem to be going along pretty well. You've invested a lot of money toward this venture and after the initial construction phase is complete you find that the fireplace that would serve as a warm and welcoming interior statement has a little problem...

The double-sided fireplace, which shares two rooms, looks great. But the venting system of 12' galvanized pipe is there in all its glory for your future patrons to admire, or should I say scratch their heads in wonder as to why it wasn't concealed.

At this point you realize that during the architectural planning this element was overlooked, so what will you do now? Call Avila Sign & Design, I say, and that's what our client did who found they were struggling with the very situation I just described to you.

After viewing the overlooked stovepipe we recommended that it be treated with a faux finish, but which finish would be the right call?

The client told us that the fireplace would be finished in mahogany with slate tile accents on its faces with a wall of windows also trimmed in mahogany, which would further divide the two separate environments yet keep the view of the ocean from being obstructed.

Based on this information we recommended that the entire pipe be leafed with copper, textured and a toning glaze added to blend in with the warmth of the mahogany. It was our opinion that using



No longer an out-of-place, run-of-the-mill stovepipe, the pipe that leaves the fireplace now fits its surroundings. The faux finishing techniques we used here can come in handy on just about any architectural sign job.

the copper was going to be a key player in selling the look to the future patrons of this establishment.

We explained that paint alone would look more like an afterthought (a decoratively painted pipe). We didn't want to hide the pipe and its metal characteristics because the eye would never be fooled to think that it was anything but a stovepipe. Our intentions were to just make it a beautiful stovepipe, lending itself to the rich mahogany surroundings, and this is how we did it...

PREPPING THE SURFACE

Because we needed to be on the move at all times and move quickly around the

pipe, the work was done using two ten-foot folding ladders. A scissors lift or scaffold would have been too stationary and the wall that separated the two sides of the pipe dictated that Robin and I work together at the same time on each side.

To keep the area clean we taped off the top and bottom of the pipe, and the surrounding areas were covered with plastic. Next, we needed to etch the galvanized pipe so the primer would have good adhesion; this was accomplished with vinegar.

The vinegar was applied with a sponge and allowed to eat at the galvanized surface for a few minutes after which it was rinsed off with a good bath of ordinary

tap water. After allowing the pipe to thoroughly dry it was primed with a good metal primer and then painted black with Krylon® spray paint.

HEAVY METAL

When laying heavier metal foils such as copper, aluminum and composition leaf we like to use Wunda® size — it has an aggressive tack necessary for the heavier foils.

We used large sponges to apply the size to the pipe — this step went real quick. After the size had dried completely (about 20 minutes) surgical-type gloves were worn as we laid the copper leaf directly from the book.

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After being etched, primed and painted, we use large sponges to size the stovepipe.



Working from 10' folding ladders, Robin and I work on opposing sides of the dividing wall. When working with copper leaf be sure to wear gloves — oil from your fingers will tarnish the copper.



Using a foam brush, copper leaf is stomped into the cracks and joints.



A large household-type sponge is used to do the final rub down on the copper leaf, which leaves a nice shine.



Working in sections, a glaze is rolled on and allowed to set up to the point where it will hold a pattern. The glaze is rag-rolled to create the pattern and mask some of the copper appearance.



The completed texture glaze. We were amazed at how the texture would vanish in the areas that were well lit by the sun, yet were very dramatic in the darker areas, creating movement when we would change our position (pretty cool).



A toning glaze (color) is applied over the dry texture glaze. All color is removed from the coupling joints then clear coated, adding contrast and interest to the finished stovepipe.

Gloves are important when working with copper leaf. The oils from your hands cause the copper to tarnish and turn dark, even after applying a clear coat.

When we finished laying the copper, a foam brush was used to stomp the copper in all of the joints and crevices. Next, we rubbed off all the loose leaf with a foam brush, and using a large sponge like the ones used for applying the size, a final rubbing was done to eliminate any wrinkles and to polish or burnish the copper.

We had copper floating around all over that room; it looked as if it was snowing copper, but it didn't take us long to collect the run-away copper and contain it in the trash.

RAGS TO RICHES

For the next step we applied a glaze to the finished copper and used some removal techniques to create a texture. We wanted to achieve two things with this process...

First, to kill the fire of the copper just enough to melt it into the background of the pipe, and second, to add a soft edge texture that would create lots of depth to the finished pipe.

The glaze was mixed using 1 Shot® finishing clear with a little boiled oil added to slow down the drying time. Black and brown enamel was added to shade the mixture. This was applied to the pipe and allowed to set up to the point where it would hold a pattern (about 15 minutes).

A removal technique, referred to as rag rolling, was then executed on the section. This was accomplished by wadding a lint-free cotton rag and presenting this to the glazed section, rolling continuously with light pressure in one direction and lifting away from the glaze only to do a new area.

A new section was glazed and the previous steps repeated until the entire pipe was completely covered with the texture and allowed to dry overnight.

For the last step a toning glaze was applied to the entire pipe. Mixing 1 Shot finishing clear with red, green and black enamel created this glaze. The glaze was rolled on top of the texture glaze using a 3" short nap roller.

To add a contrasting effect, we removed the toning glaze from the coupling joints of each section of pipe, clear coating the joints to seal any possible exposed copper finished the job.

As an extra touch we used our Gerber router to 3D-carve the logo into two pieces of slate, which were then treated with copper leaf. The slate was attached to both faces of the fireplace.

Because the fireplace wasn't finished while we were doing our work, we had to use our imagination as to the final outcome. After the mahogany and slate was finished we were very pleased with the final results. SB



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Use FAST #133

The Value of Vehicles

BY DAVID MCDONALD



Every business depends on your expertise and understands the value of your work, but often times they won't get it until you educate them!

About the author: David and Robin McDonald own and operate Avila Sign & Design, a custom sign shop in Grover Beach, Calif. They may be found on the Internet at www.avilasigndesign.com.

I WAS JUST a young fella when I lettered my first vehicle about 20 years ago. It was a powder blue van and a few years old at the time but it had a fresh new coat of paint.

I met with the owner of the van at his apartment where we discussed the job. When I knocked on the door I heard a distant voice telling me to come in. After entering I saw a man sitting at a card table covered with envelopes piled high. He was licking and stuffing envelopes as I stood there.

I noticed that he didn't have any furniture in the apartment — nothing except that card table and a phone at his feet with a thin cord that made its way to the plug on the empty wall. It looked as if he still had at least a few hundred more to lick and stick.

He told me that the mailers he was stuffing were part of his business plan to get his carpet cleaning business off the ground and that my work was also going to be a big part of that business equation.

I just stood there listening, still trying to adjust to the emptiness of the room. This guy was serious as heck about getting his business off the ground and he had no problem with the \$350 that I was asking for the job.

He said that he would be willing to give me a little more if I could do a little something extra to add to his advertising value, and of course I was willing to oblige.

I think I learned a little something about advertising value that day. I don't know if that experience made me a better businessperson, but in some way I came away the better for it.

I was just getting my feet wet in the business of sign painting, and quite frankly I didn't have a clue as to what I was doing on the business end of things. It sure seemed like a great way to make a few bucks and I could express myself with what I enjoyed... art! By the way, I made \$400 on that powder blue van.

MIRROR, MIRROR

The financial market has shown us that the cost of goods will quadruple every 20 years. That may be true for a loaf of bread but I can't say the same has happened with the price of signs.

We need to step up to the plate and take some responsibility for being paid accordingly for the value we give. During those early days of my career you could say that I fell into the category of the "kid down the road". You know what I mean... like the customer that has a nephew who can probably do it for less money. We've all experienced that type of client.

A lot of us have come up through the business as *that kid*. Some have done well and some have dropped off the map com-

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With this truck we used the Gerber Edge® and printed on gold reflective vinyl. A contour cut was applied to the image, which was then weeded and installed on the truck doors. We designed this job knowing that there would be a large quantity of vehicles to do quickly as they arrived from the dealership lot. This is where we put digital printing to work, allowing us to get the truck out quickly on demand yet still offer a custom product.



On a custom job like this I like to work with paint and a brush. Working from a pattern, this truck was all hand painted with lettering enamel. Vinyl was used on the cab doors and the stripe at the bottom of the bed. We used some hand blending techniques to create the split-blended shades on the lettering. We designed the logo for them at the time that they opened up their business about seven years ago.



This vehicle is like a moving billboard. It is a fully self contained plumbing truck with all the parts and tools a plumber could possibly need while on the job (it's pretty neat inside). The vehicle will sit in neighborhoods on jobs all day long and the client wanted to be sure that everyone would see him. I have done several vans for this client with the logo larger, overwhelming the sides like a super graphic. He wanted more emphasis on the phone numbers and added more secondary copy, so the logo was made smaller to accommodate his request.



"Bandurraga" is a long name so I thought it might be a good use of space to put it on an arc. He wanted to have his backhoe in the design and I thought it would serve best as a center focus. The panels were used to hold everything together and create depth. Some lines were pulled around the cab and bed of the truck along with some graphics done with a sponge. It was important to the client to let everyone know that he works with laser equipment so I added a little graphic in the mix to illustrate just that. The lettering for "Bandurraga's" and the illustration of the backhoe were printed on our Edge. Using paint alone on this job would require too many hours of labor and would put the job over budget. This is a good example where we can mix vinyl, paint and digital printing to keep the vehicle affordable.



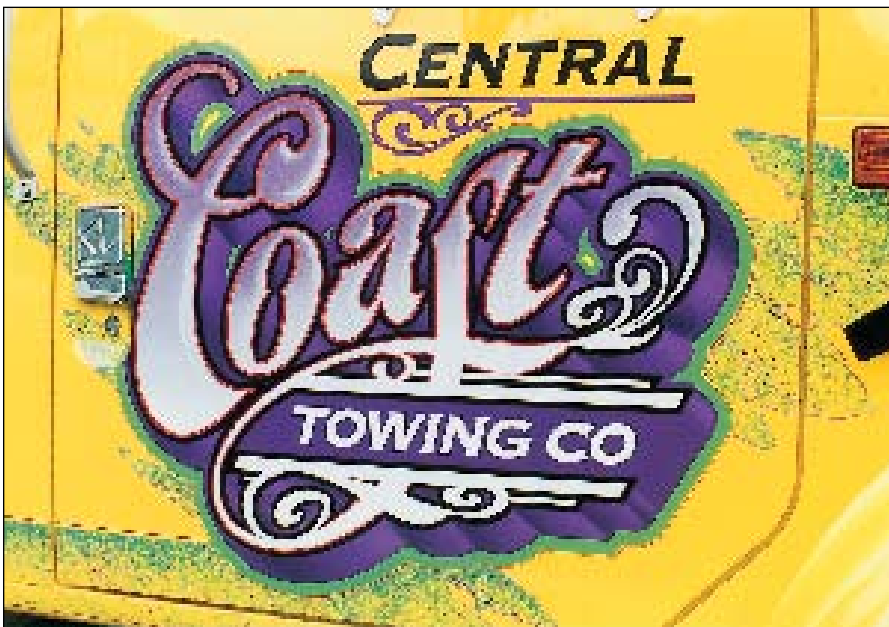
This is an old job; a red, white and blue All-American boy, but I've always liked this one. I think we had just purchased our first computer around the time when we did this vehicle. I remember being pretty excited to be able to paint the little red squares knowing that I could follow up with the white vinyl letters (what a time saver). "Bradshaw" was textured with plastic wrap, airbrushed, outlined and given a split shade. The graphic was spattered with an acid brush and then pinstriped.



Bob knows water! From reverse osmosis to water softening systems, Bob also knows what to put on his vehicle. Less is more, in my opinion, and his. We designed a clean logo to be painted in enamel. Clean, simple and easy to read!



This truck was designed and executed by Chuck Davis, a talented fellow who worked with us for a while. Chuck did an outstanding job on this design, giving the customer a look and image he can be proud of. A nice hand script that shifts in color a bit is enough to make this design jump. Vinyl was used on the secondary copy as well as the phone number.



Well here is a graphic statement! I borrowed the "s" from a design I saw of David Butler's, and it seemed to be just the ticket here. I held a piece of card stock at an angle and airbrushed the shade on the letters. The graphic was masked off and sponged, spattered, shadowed and pinstriped.

pletely. I know one thing for sure — there will always be another kid down the road who will be blamed for undercutting prices and as some would say, "Not allow us to get a respectable price for the job."

But I say give the kid a break! If we want to blame low prices and under cutting on anybody maybe we can blame the sign painters of the old days who traveled from town to town lettering a wall for gas money or maybe a sandwich and a room for the night.

The point I'm trying to make here is that the business of signmaking has probably been overshadowed by the creative side of signmaking from the first brush stroke ever painted.

The franchise shops springing up in the last 10 or so years have been the latest target blamed for under-cutting prices. However, I see the franchises as people with a good business plan and good business sense.

Sound business practices are the catalyst that will eventually lead to an elevated value in the eyes of the buying public. The next time we want to blame somebody for not getting enough money for our work, maybe we should look in the mirror and ask ourselves how we're doing business. Maybe it's our own darn fault! Ouch! I think I just stubbed my toe getting off of this soapbox!

Some of us will never be good at business and will have to hire someone who is. I'm very lucky because I have a partner in the business and in marriage who does an excellent job with the business side of things for us.

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This one is a little too busy for me! I went a little nuts with the use of techniques here. There is engine-turned 23-karat gold and copper in the crown, the stars are aluminum leaf burnished at a 45-degree angle. The banner is airbrushed and the phone number is vinyl. You gotta love working over all those rivets. I usually plan on outlining the graphic when lots of rivets are involved. I will lay a mask, hand cut with a knife, roll out a base color and then airbrush. If you use a rag with a little thinner the runs can be cleaned up before outlining. I'm thinking that if the gray panel were softer in value this design wouldn't appear quite as busy.



This guy had a logo already established but wanted to freshen up his look, so he hired us to design a new logo. He wanted to keep his dolphin (he's a Dolphins fan) so I added some panels with color and implied water at the base of the dolphin. I brushed a bevel in the letters to bring them forward. I had him do some painting at my house and I can tell you "when quality matters" he's the man!

If the business part of your daily duties gets you down then maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to hire someone to take on that responsibility.

We've had countless testimonies from our customers on the return they've seen from the advertising value of the vehicle graphics we have produced for them.

In one case the return was reported to be as high as a 30 percent increase in sales after having their vehicle marked with a good design to communicate their services. Those numbers add a lot to the bottom line for the vehicle owner and reinforce the value of vehicle lettering as an advertising medium.

When we price vehicle work, the first thing we do is evaluate the advertising value of the vehicle, based on what type of company is using it and what it will be used for. It may be used for the personal

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expression of the client (graphics or striping), legal identification, general sales or for a hard sale where a super graphic is used to grab the attention of everyone.

The more advertising someone needs, the more labor will be required, therefore simple identification takes less time and effort and is obviously priced lower.

We use three criteria to price the job — shop time, design time and material cost. We figure our shop rate based on total overhead and what percentage profit, over and above that, we need to make. We reevaluate this at the end of each year. We also mark up materials 50 percent, and charge a fee to bring a vehicle into the shop.

For this article I've gathered together some photos of vehicles that I lettered — nothing fancy, just some good old-fashioned advertising value. Follow along in the photos as I share a little about each of them...

SB

Calendar

JUNE

The B.I.G. Show — Best In Graphics, Broomfield, Colo., offers the best of sign, environmental/architectural, P.O.P./display, engraved, vehicle/fleet, wide-format, exhibit, retail, outdoor advertising and screen-printed graphics, all in one venue, in Columbus, Ohio, June 8-10. For details, call the QuickFax InfoLine at (800) 894-1774. Make your selections from the menu and the information will be faxed to you in minutes. If you don't have a fax machine, call (303) 469-0424, or check out our website at www.nbm.com/bigshow.

Advantage Sign Supply, Grand Rapids, Mich., offers four classes at *Advantage's Hands-On Training* June 19-22, held at the Advantage Training Center in Grand Rapids. For more information call (800) 522-3698 or visit www.advantagesignsupply.com.

The Texas Sign Association (TSA), North Richland Hills, Texas, celebrates its 47th anniversary during the annual convention June 22-25 in Amarillo, Texas. A preliminary schedule includes educational programming and a tour to historic Route 66 for shopping. For more information, contact the TSA at (817) 498-8601, or check out www.txsigns.org.

JULY

Master Photoshop with Katrin Eismann will be July 2-8 in Santa Fe, N.M. Sponsored by **Santa Fe Workshops**, the class is a hands-on digital workshop designed for creative imaging professionals, artists, educators, web designers and film producers. For additional information call (505) 983-1400, e-mail workshop@sffworkshop.com or visit www.santafeworkshops.com

Letterheads 2000, will be held at the Boise Convention Center, Boise, Idaho, July 13-16, 2000. Proposed classes include everything from Airbrush to Zen; other class suggestions are welcome. For updated information, contact Noel B. Weber, 412 South Sixth St., Boise, Idaho 83702; Fax: (208) 344-8285; e-mail: classic@micron.net; www.primenet.com/~signguy.

PrintImage 2000 Conference and Exhibition will be held July 20-23 at the Rosemont Convention Center and adjoining Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Chicago. Event activities include a working operation, from prepress to bindery; a computer lab which will enable attendees to gain hands-on software training; and on-the-floor discounts. (312) 726-8015 or (800) 234-0040 or visit www.printimage.org.

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AUGUST

The B.I.G. Show — Best In Graphics, Broomfield, Colo., offers the best of sign, environmental/architectural, P.O.P./display, engraved, vehicle/fleet, wide-format, exhibit, retail, outdoor advertising and screen-printed graphics, all in one venue, in Anaheim, Calif., Aug. 10-12. For details, call the QuickFax InfoLine at (800) 894-1780. Make your selections from the menu and the information will be faxed to you in minutes. If you don't have a fax machine, call (303) 469-0424, or check out our website at www.nbm.com/bigshow.

Signs Now will hold its annual international convention, *Rally 2000*, Aug. 9-12 at Wyndham Palace in Orlando, Fla. The Rally will include a kick-party, exhibits, presentations and workshops, and a golf tournament. For more information regarding booth availability, cost and reservations, call (727) 548-7200, or fax (727) 546-1956.

Plan ahead for the next *Letterhead Meet* from Aug. 18-20 at **Jill's Custom Signs** in Butler, Pa. The theme is KRAZY 8 and will include a mural painting, panel jam and pinstripping. The fee is \$25. For information call Jill Welsh at (724) 586-6923.

Sign-A-Rama, West Palm Beach, Fla., is sponsoring its annual *Expo 2000*, Aug. 19-20 in Las Vegas. The event will include a vendor appreciation dinner. It will be held at the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas. For more information call (610) 278-4060.

SEPTEMBER

The **UK Letterheads** first meeting of the new millenium will be Sept. 15-17 at Terry Colley's Bull & Brush in Cheshire, England. Projects are on the drawing board and any ideas are welcome. For more information, contact Terry at (011 441) 614 945 089.

OCTOBER

Awards and Recognition Association, Glenview, Ill., is holding its annual *Eastern Awards Show of the Awards and Recognition Association*, Oct. 6-7 at the Atlantic City Convention Center in Atlantic City, N.J. For more information call (800) 344-2148 or visit www.ara.org.

Color Management with Andrew Rodney will be held Oct. 16-20 in Santa Fe, N.M. Sponsored by **Santa Fe Workshops**, the class is a hands-on digital workshop designed for creative imaging professionals, artists, educators, web designers and film producers. For additional information call (505) 983-1400, e-mail workshop@sffworkshop.com or visit www.santafeworkshops.com

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