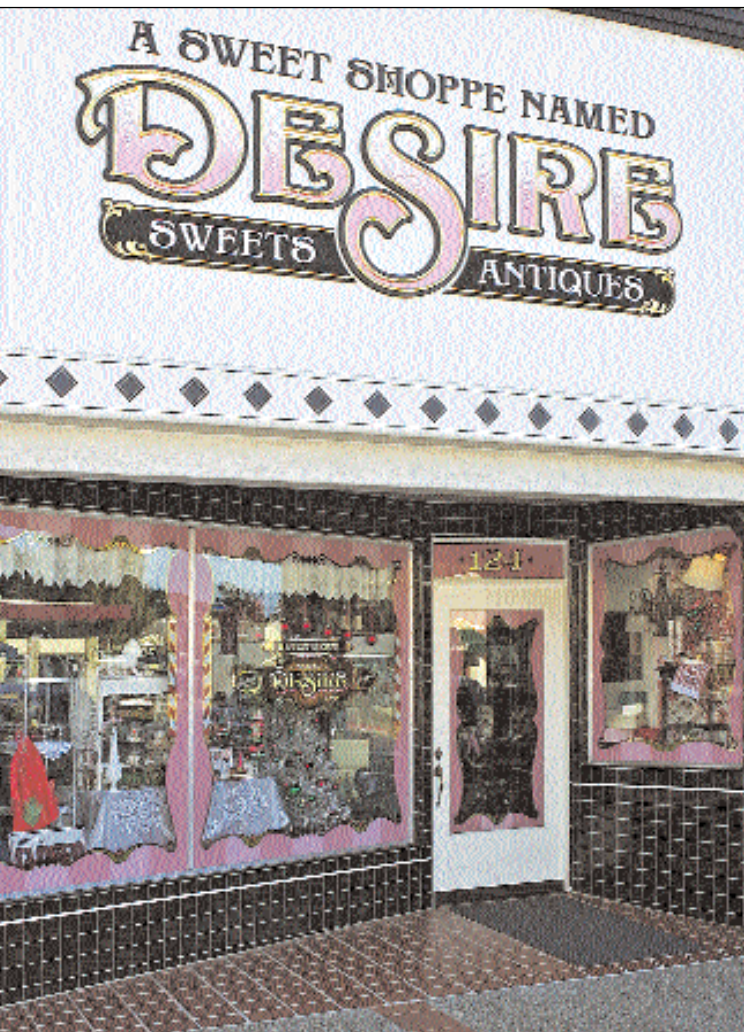


Sweet Labor of Love

BY DAVID MCDONALD



(Above) The store front. (Below) Detail of the gold leaf logo.



Advanced gold leaf techniques dress up a candy store window.



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.

"Nothing conveys as much impact on a window as gold leaf. Gold leaf has dignity and richness and, in addition, it changes subtly as a person passes by or as it catches the movement of traffic. As a result, gold catches the eye as no other material does."

THE ABOVE WRITING is an excerpt from the book *Gold Leaf Techniques*, by Raymond Leblanc, revised by Kent H. Smith and Arthur Sarti and published by ST publications. Although the sign industry has undergone many changes through the years those words are still as true today as they were so many years ago.

In this writer's opinion a gilded window is still the king of all signs and is also one of the most effective means of advertising there is. The skills that one must master to accomplish an elaborately gilded window will not come at a cheap price. In fact, many years of dedication will be required to build the confidence needed as well as a mastery of these skills to consistently produce these tedious and labor intensive works of art. Therein lies the difference between doing a project panel and creating or executing a nice gold leaf job for a paying customer.

A SMALL PIECE OF THE PIE

I do not want to imply that I do a lot of this kind of work; gold leaf on glass work for us would probably fall short of making up one percent of our total sales.



We had the luxury of working on the two large glass pieces in the shop. We are assembling the frame to hold the main piece of glass. The frame consists of dadoed 2x4 lumber, metal corner brackets and plywood legs to hold the glass vertical.



The pattern is registered, the first gold is laid where needed and the back-up paint is silk-screened. John Studden is removing the unwanted gold leaf.

But we sometimes step in to the right situation where the client either appreciates or understands the value of this kind of advertising or they simply want gold leaf on their window and price is no object.

In the case here with the Desire job the former related more so because the city would be picking up half of the costs due to a city improvement fund. I mention this because the assumption on my part is that without the financial help of the local government on this job the gold leaf (or at least the intensity of the windows) would have been undermined considerably due to the lack of budget.

The owner of A Sweet Shop Named Desire wanted us to create a very nice dimensional sign for the front wall of the candy shop. She also wanted her windows done in gold leaf to identify and advertise the business as well. We were able to work within her budget by suggesting a more simple approach on the wall and leverage more of the budget toward a nice gold leaf project on the windows below. It seems to me that people are not lining up to buy this type or style of work. Clients who are willing to invest the kind of money necessary to dress their windows with an elaborate gold leaf job make up a very small piece of the buying public pie.

BECOME A PRACTITIONER?

Technology has moved the sign industry in a direction that allows us as craftspersons to spend most of our time and labor sitting in front of a computer screen after which the job is simply

CONTINUED



The second silk-screen is registered and the black outlines are printed. A little touch up is sometimes necessary.



More 23-karat gold is applied with water size for the main copy.



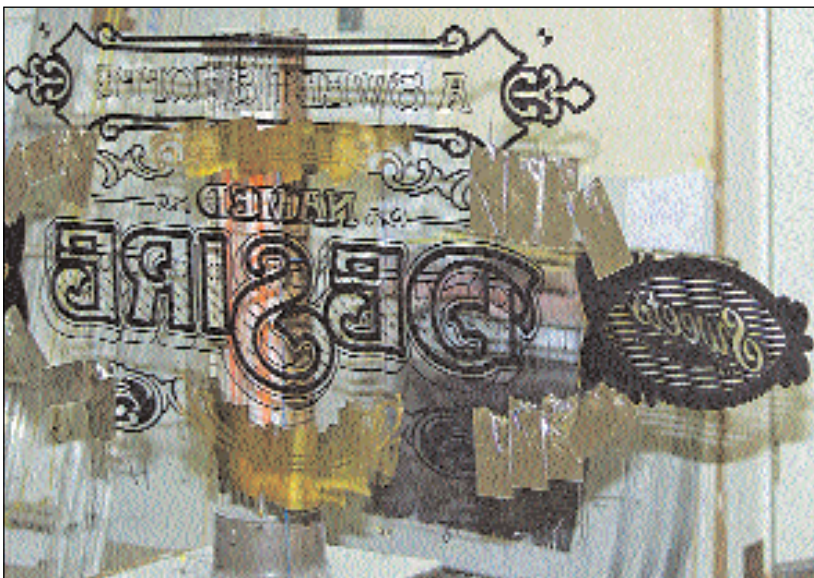
Before removing the excess gold, I painted a texture in the lower section of the letters.



The main border would be blended from 23-karat gold in the center to 18-karat and then 13.25-karat white gold at the outside edges. Here we can see the 23-karat in the center area of the border. The outside "eyeballs" are gilded while the 23-karat gold was in hand.



John is scratching away the hard edge of the 23-karat gold. The glass brush is made up of tiny glass hairs or rods and does a great job of removing areas of the gold leaf.



Here we see the 23-karat (in the center) and 13.25-karat (outside perimeter). 18-karat gold will be applied in between these two karats creating a smooth transition of color from white gold to a deep 23-karat.

output to a given device and then installed to a substrate.

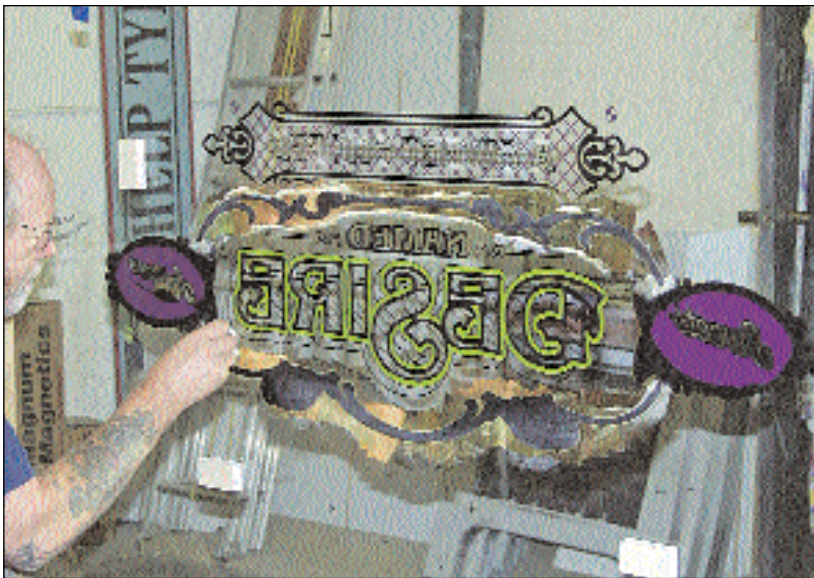
Working in this fashion has given us the ability to get more out the door and for some of us, make more profits due to the sheer volume of sales. In many ways this is a good advancement but at the same time we must weigh the disadvantages if we are not responsible to this advancement of technology.

What I mean by this is that the value of the advertising created or purchased should be upheld or the profits as men-

tioned will be vanishing right before your creative eyes.

Does this explain the shortage of customers willing to spend the extra money for a nice gold leaf job on their window or could it also be that the availability of qualified craftsman in this arena are dwindling? I am connected to a lot of people in my industry, many of whom are multi-talented, yet I don't think I would need to use the fingers on both hands to count the number of *practitioners* with regard to gold leaf on glass. When I say practitioner I am suggesting that one would exercise these techniques within their daily or at least weekly regiment. Is this a sign of the times with regard to the available technology and the push thereof or is it just a phase of the industry whereas a resurgence of these techniques

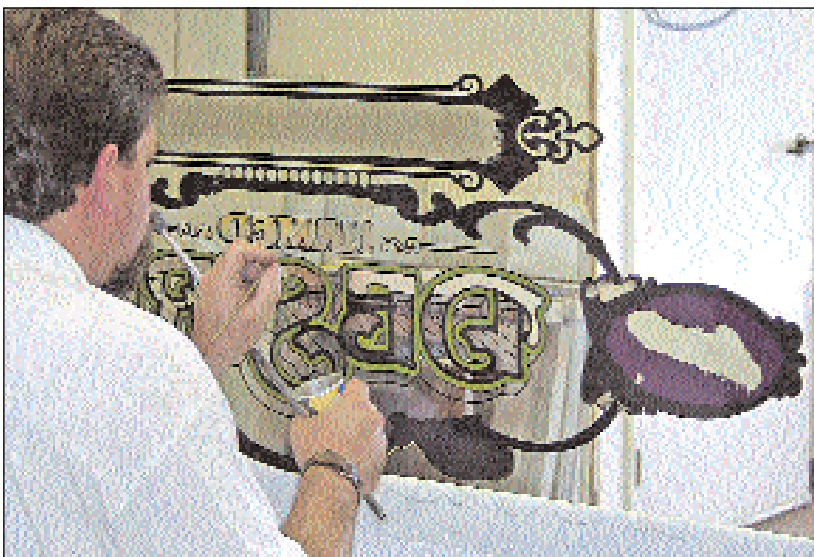
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The blended gold has been backed-up and the excess gold is being removed. Note also that the purple cross-hatching has been silk-screened, the eyes have been painted in with the same purple paint and the green outline has been painted here as well.



A shot looking from the front of the glass. At this point the foundation for the job has been set. The 'Sweet Shoppe' letters get an 18-karat matte center and then the entire panel is back painted with black.



Using spar varnish mixed with a little black for shading. The word 'Desire' and the border receive a one-stroke shadow that will optically drop the background panel.

could possibly be in demand somewhere in the future? It's hard to say. We don't have a crystal ball and only time will tell—but it is something to think about.

I am under no circumstances trying to discourage the apprentice sign maker from learning the art and skills required to produce beautiful gold leaf work on glass and in fact I would like to suggest the opposite and encourage these young apprentices!

Look through the back issues of *Sign Business* magazine and the other trade magazines as well. Take a class where the subject might be offered and attend Letterhead events where gold leaf techniques are always being shared. I have felt no greater pleasure in this industry than to pass by a gold leaf window I have accomplished and I would wish for you to experience this for yourself.

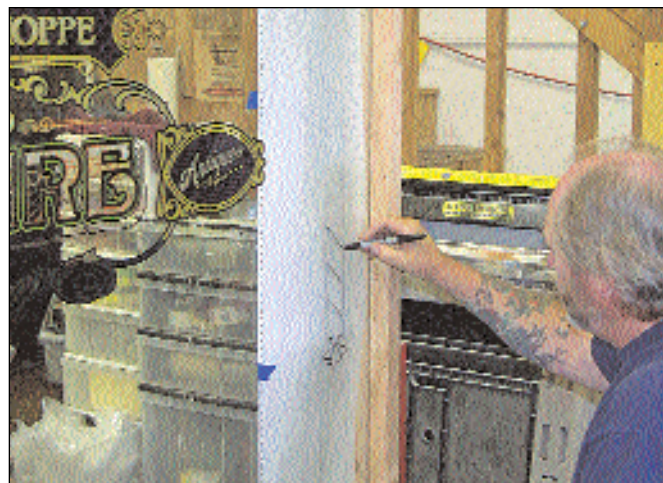
*Until next time..
Thanks for listening!*

CONTINUED

The word 'NAMED' is treated with a blend of gold color from 13.25-karat to 18-karat and finished at the top with 23-karat. The top portion of the word 'DESIRE' and the 'Sweets' and 'Antiques' copy is gilded with 12-karat. These areas are then backed-up and protected with imitation silver paint (aluminum powders).



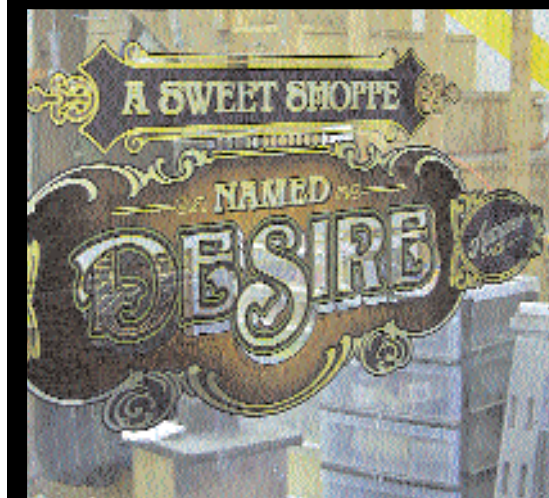
This photo shows the other panel of glass in the shop. The panel will receive the border treatment only. This will consist of 23-karat bright lines. The outside areas will be painted with lettering enamel just like the main panel.



Using the pounced pattern on the front of the glass, John draws out the areas for the candy canes and borders.



Using transparent gold the background is stippled to create texture as well as to give the background a caramel candy effect. I had to be careful not to get any color in the open areas of the logo.



The background was finished off with a sponge. Lettering enamel was used blending from dark to light in value. Viewing from the front you can see the deep effect of the transparent gold in the background.



John finishes off the 23-karat bright lines at the bottom of this border. This is one advantage of doing the work in the shop instead of on location—he can stretch out and have room to move about.



I'm blending the enamel colors in the design. I have placed a mirror on the front side of the glass to aid in viewing this step.



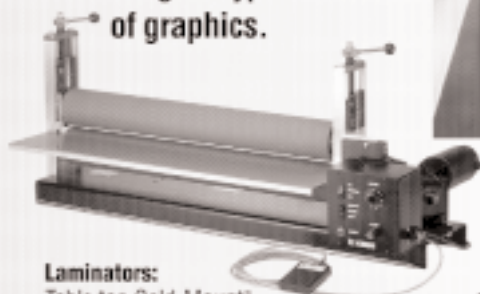
Using clear varnish mixed with a pinch of blue and black enamel I airbrushed a faint shadow to imply the rounded surface of the candy canes. I back painted them with the white and red enamel.

CONTINUED

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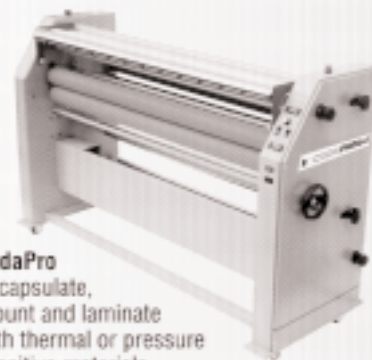
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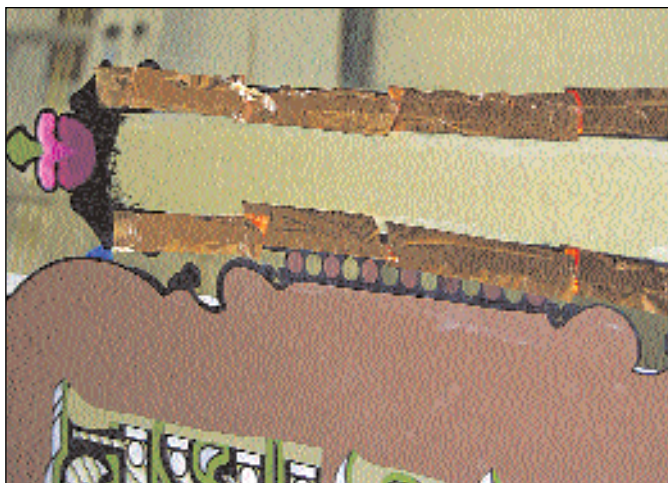
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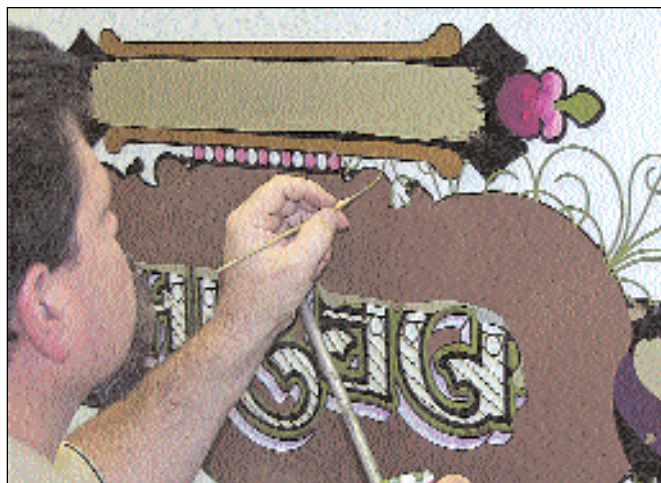
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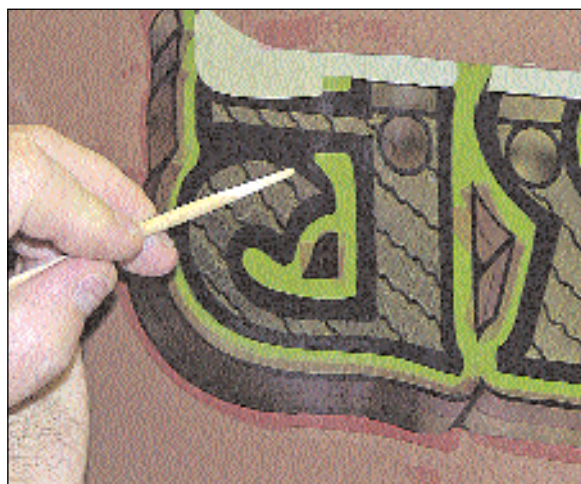
To create a blend of copper color, I painted a mixture of varnish and asphaltum in the open areas. For a darker appearance toward the ends I built up a few more layers of this mixture. The copper leaf was laid using quick oil size.



Transparent red was applied to every other circle on the zipper below the 'Sweet Shoppe' panel. Mother of pearl is glued behind the circles. The inner darker value of color for the split shade on the word 'Desire' has been applied also. I then re-registered the pattern and painted the green lace pattern with a liner brush.



A mixture of equal parts damar varnish, quick rubbing varnish and Resin-gel were mixed together and brushed on to the bottom portion of the word 'Desire'. The heavy mixture will set up and I will create an embossed texture within it. The lighter value of pink for the split-blended shade is quickly brushed on in one-stroke fashion to eliminate any brush strokes.



Using a wooden tool I create the embossed texture within the damar varnish mixture—a wavy pattern seems to work here. The damar can be tooled when it will hold a pattern well without leaving behind too hard or sharp of an edge, usually about 5 to 10 minutes depending on varnish volume and room temperature.

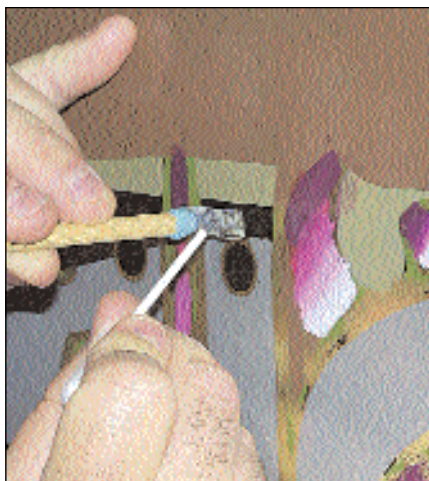


Painting a dark to light value of colors behind the transparent color creates the split-blended shade. Here I am using dark red to white. The colors are then gently stippled together to soften the edges making for a smooth candy appearance.

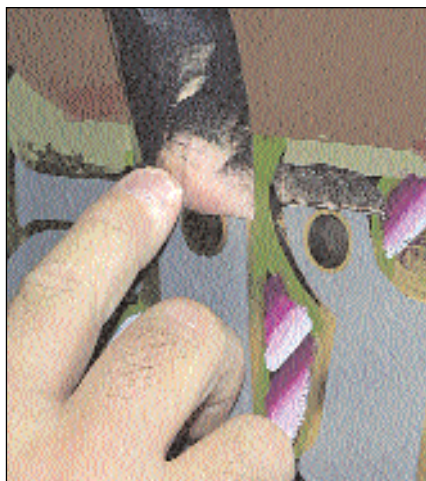


The damar varnish is water sized and gilt with 18k gold leaf. The gold is then back painted and protected with imitation silver enamel.

CONTINUED



Abalone shell is scored and cut to size with a knife. Using a wooden dowel fitted with gum I use cyanoacrylate glue to attach the shell. A drop is placed onto the shell and with mild pressure and good aim the shell is pressed to the glass. The dowel is twisted and removed cleanly.



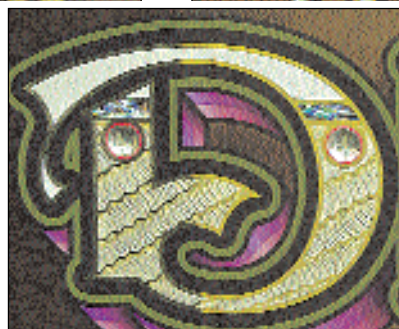
The abalone is backed-up with aluminum leaf. I like to do this as the aluminum keeps the shells iridescent qualities visible and bright.



The outside border is painted with pink, red, green and black. In finishing the panel, I decided to outline the inside edge of the gold border with arterial red transparent color—very fitting for this candy store!



I used double-stick tape and some wooden hole plugs to hold the watch crystals during the water gilding process. Once gilded and backed-up with black enamel the watch crystals are affixed to the glass surface with spar varnish. For added strength, a few more coats of varnish are applied to the watch crystals' edges.



A few close-ups of the finished piece showing some of the finer details.

Visible History

BY DAVID MCDONALD



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.

Work flow in the sign shop: making signage that helps create awareness for the local Historical Society.

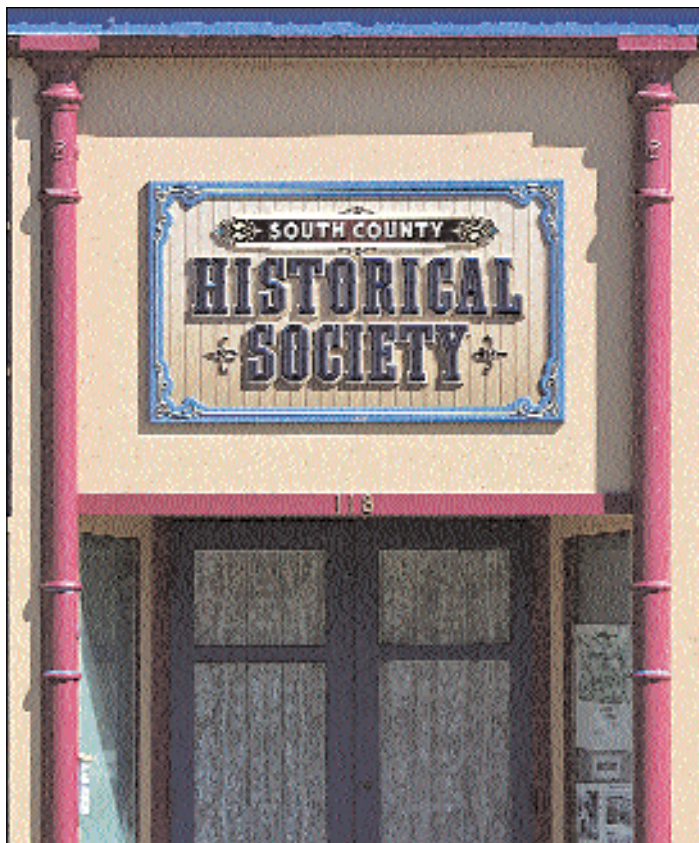
IN RECENT YEARS our local Historical Society here in Arroyo Grande, California has been making itself more visible to the public and much of this new awareness has been achieved through signage. We have been very fortunate to be involved with this proactive effort and through signage we have been able to make a difference. It can be said that prior to making the first museum sign, the public as a whole was not aware of the historical references that exist in our small city.

To identify these gems of historic value has been for us an ongoing means of personal fulfillment. We have produced many signs in the past to identify

buildings and landmarks of importance and recently we helped the South County Historical Society with a new project and facility known as *The Barn*, where we designed and produced two new signs to mark and identify it accordingly.

The Barn is a new museum that houses various equipment and farming tools from days gone by, such as tractors, plows, tackle, etc. We created a dimensional sign to be installed at its entrance. This fascia style sign incorporated router-cut Sign Foam with a traditional black smaltz background with a 23-karat gilded letter outline and embellishments. The appliquéd letters were also router cut as inlays and treated with a blended mica powder finish giving the sign a very traditional and historical appearance. On the side of The Barn we created a completely different design to hang high on the exterior wall for passersby to view. The design was printed using the Gerber Edge and then applied to a cutout Dibond panel.

Another recent project we were involved in for the South County Historical Society is located on the main street of the Arroyo Grande village. This building is not open to the public but identifying the location with signage serves as an advertising vehicle to ele-



This 3' x 5' dimensional Sign Foam sign was shaped and cut on the Gerber router. The blue letters were cut and finished separately and then applied to the inlays of the sign face with silicone adhesive. The burgundy panel at the top was printed on the Gerber Edge.

vate the awareness of the local historical landmarks and facilities. In the old days the main street location was used as a meat locker for the local butcher shop and now serves as a safe place to store historical matter and archives. I designed the Historical Society sign to be output as a raster image printed on the Gerber EDGE but I was not paying very good attention as my partner and wife (the boss) informed me that it was supposed to be a dimensional sign! It was not a problem for me to back-peddle and get the design ready for the router because of the way that I perform my workflow in the shop. This particular way of working has saved me time and time again—but still, one would think that I would become a better listener!

THE WORK FLOW

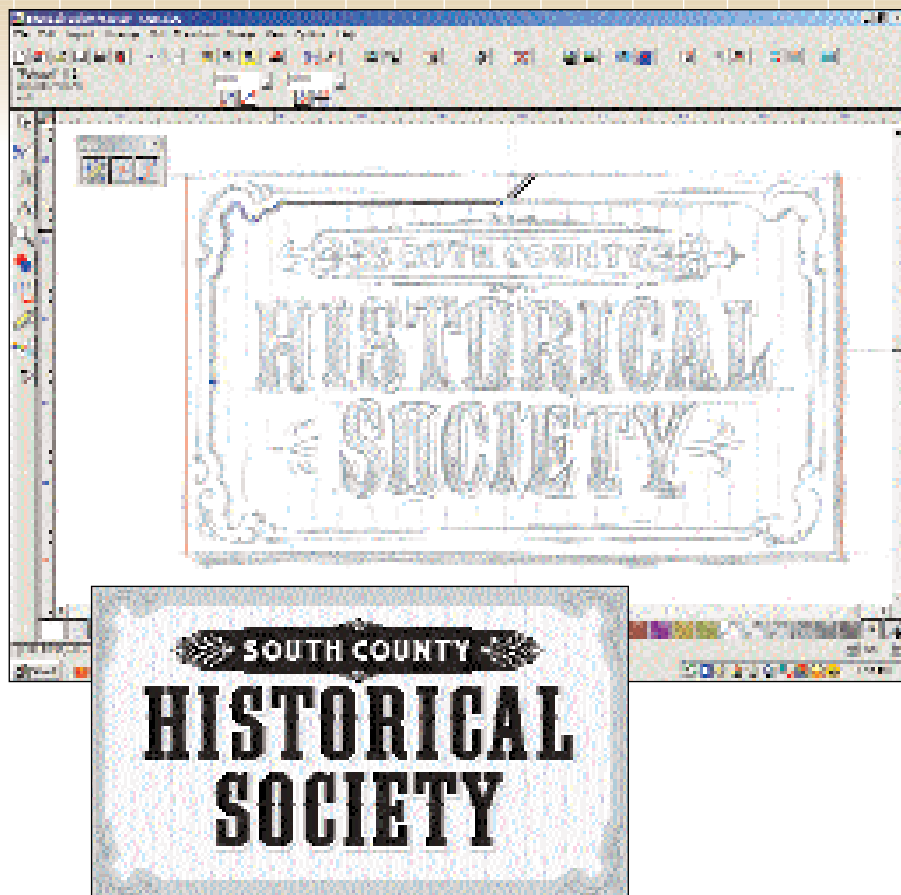
Work flow: "The flow or progress of work done by a company, industry, department, or person."

For me I like to start with a thumbnail sketch, this can be done in one minute or can sometimes take weeks depending on the time constraints for a given project and the importance thereof.

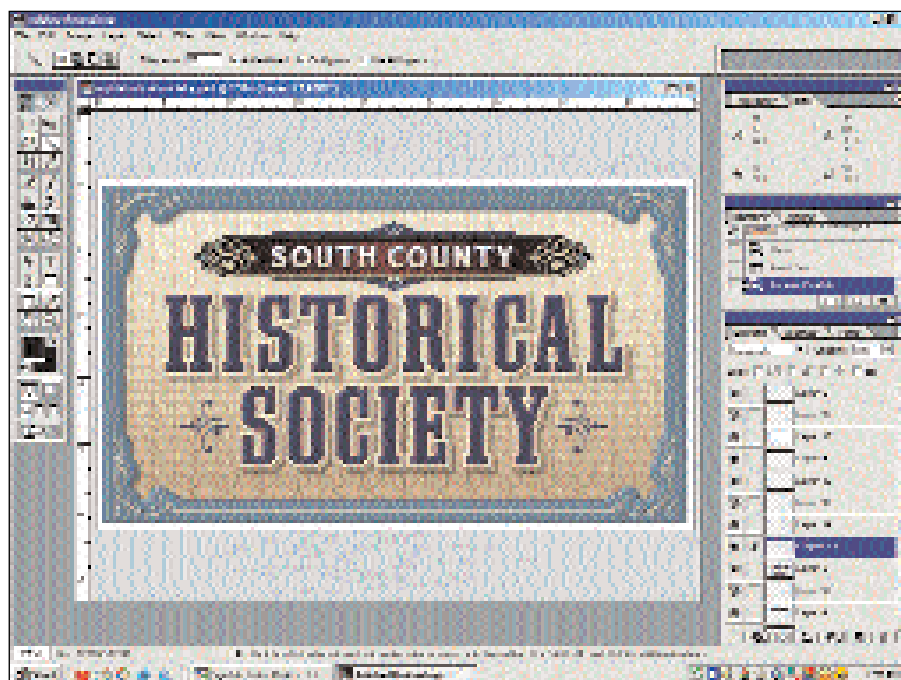
The thumbnail sketch serves as the road map that will lead me to my destination, which is a nice eye appealing design. (I will sometimes not touch a pencil to paper as the thumbnail or picture, if it is clear enough "in my mind's eye", if you will.) Next I generate the vectored lines in Signlab, my sign making software, using the thumbnail sketch as a reference. Most of the time I can generate the vector lines by using the powerful tools that Signlab offers, working strictly from the mouse and transferring what I envision to the monitor.

When I have a detailed project and/or a fairly clean thumbnail sketch I might choose to scan the thumbnail and simply trace over the sketch using one of the tracing tools provided in Signlab. The vectored lines serve as the foundation or framing; from there I can either gen-

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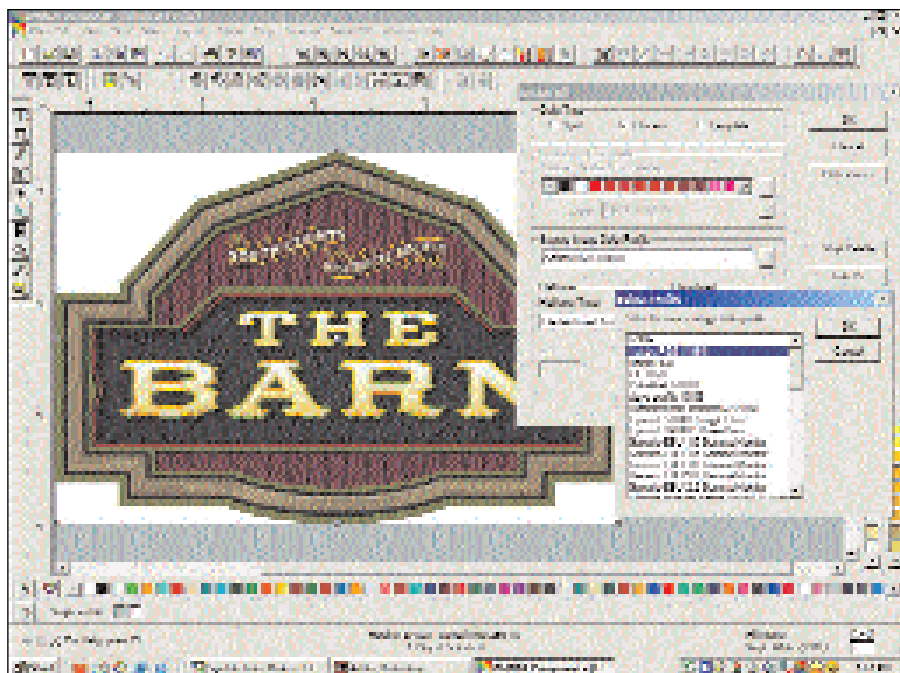


Starting with a thumbnail sketch serves as a road map. Here I chose to scan the rough drawing and trace over the important lines, creating the vectored artwork. The finished vectors can be sent to the router software and paths can be generated. If I want to render the drawing with shifting colors and dimension it would be at this stage that the drawing would be exported to Adobe PhotoShop.



When doing a color rendering in Adobe PhotoShop it's a wise choice to execute your work on different layers as I did here (see layers in the lower right hand corner). Working in layers allows the artist to refine or eliminate the work on each layer as needed. This particular sign became a dimensional sign so the intense rendering was not necessary but even still I find that working from a good study will help speed the production end of the job.

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The JPEG rendering is imported into Gerber's Omega software. Before I send the job to the printer I assign the appropriate color profile to the print—the same profile that I worked in while creating the rendering in Adobe Photoshop. The job can then be sent to the printer and we should get a pretty good color match.



This sign was printed on the Gerber Edge and applied to a 4mm-cutout Dibond panel. Four tiles were necessary to facilitate this 4' x 5' print.



This long fascia style sign is 1' x 13' and features a black smaltz ground with appliquéd letters. I really like this sign for its historical appearance.

erate the work for print or I can send the job as is to the router and assign router paths to the vectors.

When the job is going to be printed on the Gerber Edge I will usually create a four-color process print from the artwork and this makes up about 80 percent of my prints. If the job is a one-color print, of course I can just cut vinyl and with two colors, where there might be an outline on some lettering, I will paint it by hand with a brush. I have found that doing a fade on a letter with the Gerber Edge is a time saver and it might include an outline making up a two-color print job. Any more than two colors and I will usually just generate a full blown four-color process print where I can give the design some dimension and character.

VECTORS TO PIXELS

To render the vectors I will export the vectors into Adobe Photoshop and work in the adobe RGB 1998 color profile. This is where I will generate gradients, shadows and other specialty treatments that can be output on the Edge. Most treatments will be rendered on a separate layer within Photoshop, which allows me to make any changes very easily without disturbing the integrity of the original imported artwork. The rendered Photoshop file is saved as a jpeg with a very high quality setting into my "prints" folder and the color space is saved with the file. Although jpeg is a ~~lossy~~ file format, meaning that some data might be interpolated and re-mapped, I find that for the size prints that I make it is not critical. The jpeg file format saves me lots of hard drive space, as it is not uncommon to end up with a 200 meg file rather quickly.

PRINTING THE JOB

Remember I have the vectors in Signlab so the contour cut line already exists there, as it is the outermost line that makes up the silhouette of the design. While in Signlab the vectored line is selected and exported to Gerber's Omega software where it is opened and assigned a "no fill" as spot color, creating a cut-only shape. Next I go to my "prints" folder and import the saved jpeg file of the color rendered design, which is auto-

matically placed in the center of the cut-only shape. Making note of the pre-sized cut-only shape I select the jpeg image and resize it accordingly. Be sure that the "from center radio" button is selected.

Using this method will place the image spot onto the cut-only shape. At this time I can give the cut-only shape a slight outline or an inline to trap the print when cut. To keep the printed colors accurate while in the Omega software I select the image and tag it with the adobe RGB 1998-color profile just as I did in Photoshop. The file is saved and then simply sent to the Edge for printing on high performance vinyl.

*Until next time..thanks
for listening!* 



(Above) The close-up reveals simple but tasteful period embellishments and designs from the turn of the century.



(Left) The letters have a beveled 23-karat gold leaf outline and feature a blended mica powder finish. The mica powder creates a nice pearlescent shimmer to the letter faces.



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