

Tips & Tricks

Timesaving shortcuts from SignCraft readers

Dome lettering with exterior wood glue

Gold leaf always looks great, and it really looks its best on a curved or faceted surface. I “domed” the letters on this 30-by-10-in. sandblasted redwood panel, using wood glue, then gilded them with 23k gold leaf. Doming softens the edges of the lettering and creates highlights that add a lot to the sign.

After blasting and sanding the lettering, I dispense Titebond II, an exterior wood glue onto the surface of the letters, letting



it flow out to the edge. The glue flows out pretty well on its own, but where necessary, I use a toothpick to draw the glue to the edges of the letters and to pop any bubbles.

The glue should cure for at least 24 hours; then it's ready to be painted with acrylic-based paints or primed with water-based primer if you're using alkyd paints. I used acrylic latex paint on this sign and a water-based size from Sepp Leaf Products for gilding.

Michael “Scooter” Marriner, Coyote Signs, Oakland, California

These work tables clamp together in any configuration

A sturdy table is an essential fixture in any shop. Choosing the correct size and height is a personal decision. Being a member of the Experimental Aircraft Association I came across plans for a simple and easy to build shop table. The top surface measures 24-by-60-in.

When building wings for homebuilt aircraft, a craftsman needs a long table. Bob Waldmiller designed this one so that multiple tables could be clamped together in a long row or configured into different arrangements. He said it is easier to



move one small table as opposed to a long or wide one. The same approach works well in a sign shop.

Fastening four of these together provides a nice 4-by-10-ft. surface area. The only change I would make might be to reduce the size from 24-by-60-in. to 24-by-58-in. This would allow for the shelf to measure 24-by-48-in. instead of 24-by-50-in. If you built four tables, all of the shelf pieces could be cut from one 4-by-8-ft. sheet of material with no waste.

Michael James, Apple Signs, Ball, Louisiana

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3 paint tips to increase durability and manage costs

On a vivid LED display, using a jet black coating can increase the durability of LED housings and create an intense backdrop to make the rest of the imagery pop.

Paint can be used to refresh faded pigmented plastic signs (particularly red channel letters with excessive UV exposure). When the color shift starts, a quick recoat with a tinted clearcoat that has automotive pigments can make the sign look new and greatly increase its life span.

Paint allows for greater flexibility in matching multiple colors or gloss levels for one piece, and the same coating can be used on frames, poles and mounts. That helps to keep your process cost effective and lets you manage inventory more effectively.

Dan Szczepanik, Sherwin-Williams Fleet & Mfg. Product Manager

Laser engraving lets you sell products that build a brand

Marketing people know the power of branding—using every opportunity to enhance a company’s image and keep it in front of people. Sign shops can really help a business do that by providing graphics of every type, from signs to promotional items to printed sportswear to engraved interior signage to well, laser-engraved wood hangers.

John Ralph, Quail Run Signs, Hamilton, Virginia, has found a great market for a variety of laser-engraved graphics with his sign clients. Country clubs use bag tags, emblems and yes, even engraved hangers. Restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, resorts and upscale retail businesses are just a few of the businesses that can benefit from pushing their image at every chance.

“It used to be,” says John, “that only huge companies who placed huge orders could get these kind of branded products. The laser lets you do this work for small businesses. You can do small quantities and do it as they need them. These are great marketing tools.”

Many of the clients who come to a sign shop for signs are simply unaware of the opportunities that they have to drive home their image and deliver their message. Some may not realize that they could use it to get a leg up on the competition—or that their competitors are already doing a better job at this. Others would like to do more to build their brand, but don’t quite know where to start.

Sign professionals can help small businesses build their brand by helping them find the products that do this best. The laser engraver lets you turn almost anything into a unique, branded item.

“The Creighton Farms bag tags are oak,” says Jennifer Daniel of Quail Run Signs. “They were engraved on our Epilog laser [www.epiloglaser.com] in two passes to create that burned effect. The second pass burns a deeper outline and makes the image pop even better.”

Laser engraving also has a natural “Wow!” factor. There’s something amazing about a personalized product and the incredible detail that’s possible with a laser. Whether it’s the business name or

simply a logo graphic, it can transform something as simple as a hanger into a unique, image-building product.

“We did some of this work for one golf course,” John says, “and it has led to working for several other courses. Word gets around, and soon you’re doing all the signs and related work for these companies. It’s amazing how business development and relationships work. You solve one little problem for a client, then next thing you know you’re doing the signs for a whole chain of banks. The coat hangers for the golf courses are a perfect example. I would have never imagined that there was such a demand for that, and it’s led to lots of other work.”

More and more small businesses are using this approach to set their business apart. It speaks to the professionalism and quality of the business, and that sends a message to their customers. Laser engraving gives sign shops another product line they can provide to existing clients—which can really drive a shop’s profits.

“Laser work is so easy, too, compared to making signs,” says John. “You send the design to the laser, and you get this beautiful object back in a few minutes. We’re not priming, painting and sanding like we do on a sign. We burn into leather, acrylic, wood—you name it—and there’s usually no finishing, no trimming, no anything.” **SC**

