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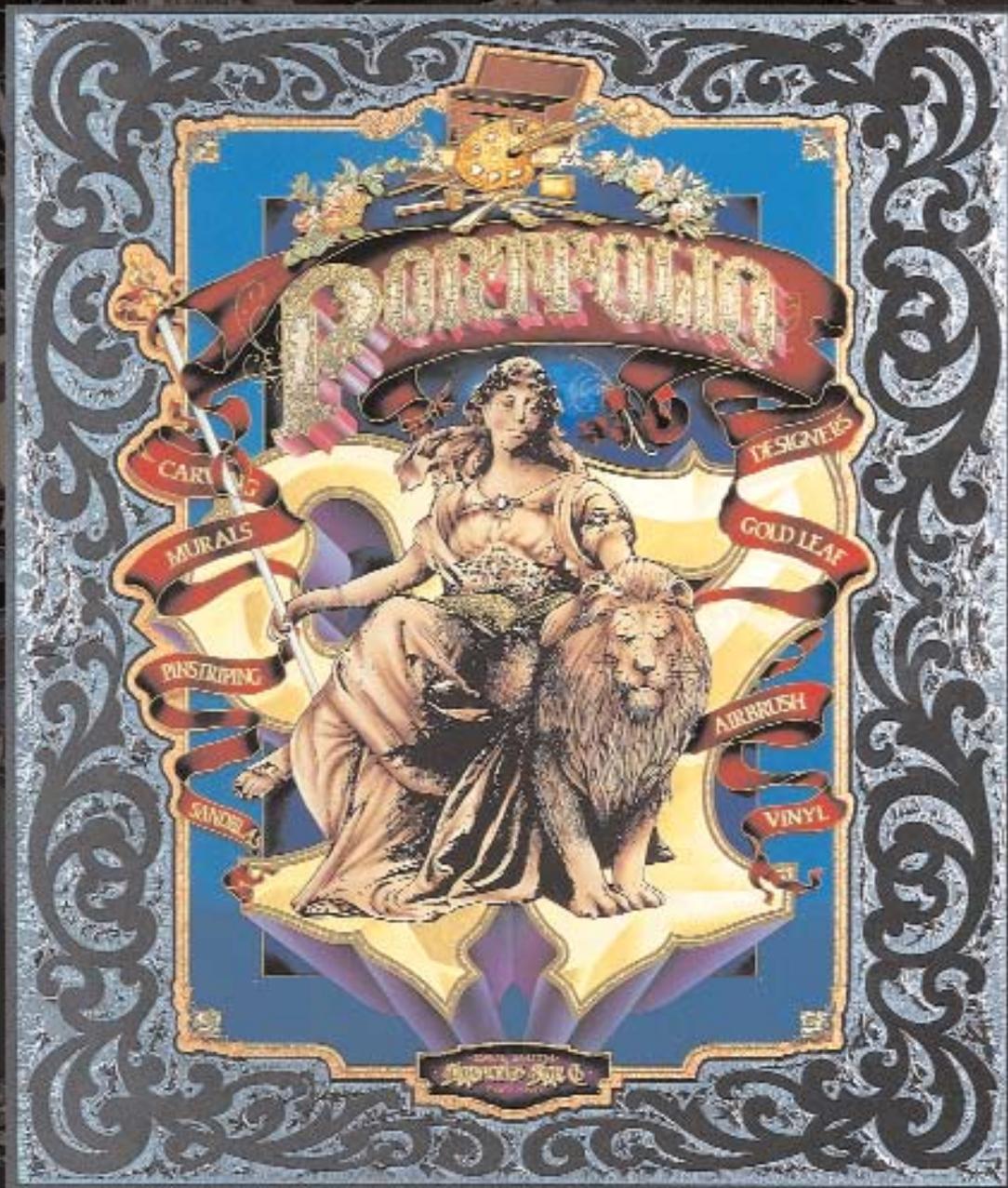
Portfolio '97

Scanning for Digital

The Neon Effect

SIGN

Business



PICTURE PERFECT

BY DAVID MCDONALD

Preparation and the ideal client help create the ultimate sign and storefront project.

About the author: David and Robin McDonald own and operate Avila Sign & Design, a custom sign shop in Grover Beach, Calif.

IT'S A WONDERFUL THING living within walking distance from the Arroyo Grande Village; I appreciate it more and more as days go by. Robin and I purchased a home there about a year ago on Thanksgiving Day, 1996.

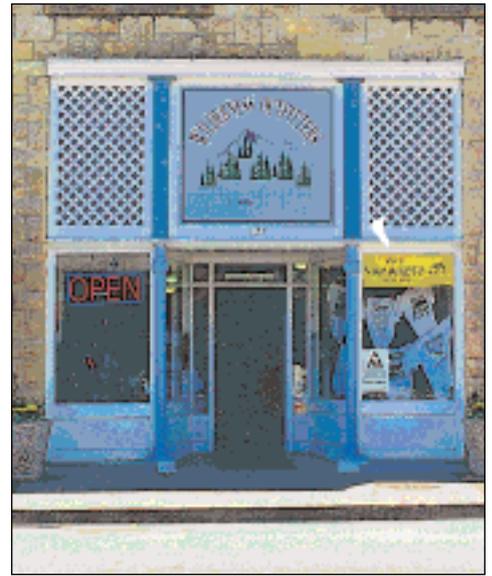
We really like the area and so do our children. The village offers restaurants, a coffee house, an assortment of antique shops and much more.

The village mainly occupies one main street, which is lined with some very nice architecture; some of the buildings date back to the late 1800s and early 1900s.

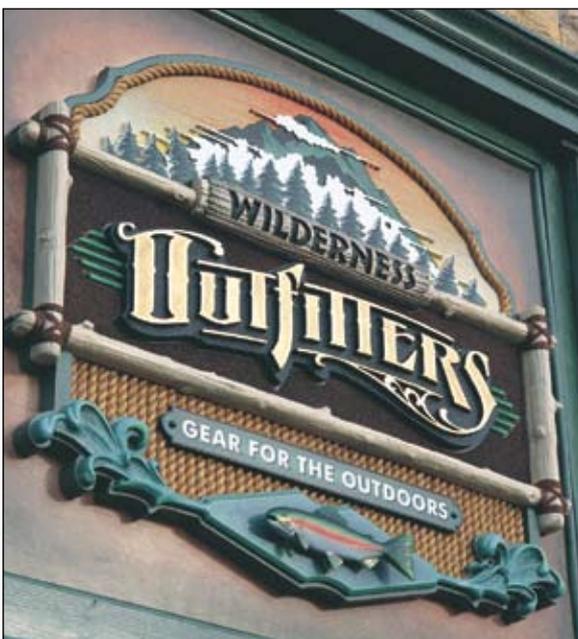
Despite this period of architecture the storefronts of the buildings have, for the most part, a very modern look. Robin (my business partner and wife) and I have always thought it would be nice if the look of the village could be changed back to its roots. We have only done a few signs in the village but we hope to be involved in many more projects in the future.

HOLLYWOOD GOES WEST

I believe the building that Wilderness Outfitters occupies was built in 1904. Next door to it is the Café Andreini Coffee House, for which we did the signs and gilded the windows about a year ago. It was from doing the Café Andreini package that we acquired the Wilderness Outfitters job.



Before and after — making a difference with color and theme.



The owner of Wilderness Outfitters called Robin and explained that they had been running their business at that location for two years, and since we had done the sign next door for the café they could see the difference in traffic generated from that type of quality signage. They were wondering what we could do for them.

The last time the storefront had been remodeled was for a movie production that was shot on location in this area. It was fine for the movie, I guess, but it didn't do the storefront much good, at least not for these new tenants (see the "before" photo).

SHOW ME THE MONEY

The owners of Wilderness Outfitters explained to Robin that they wanted people to see their business while driving or walking by. They felt because the storefront was so small people couldn't find them very easily.

While on-site, Robin listened to the client's needs and offered this suggestion — to treat the whole storefront with a wilderness look, therefore giving them a lot more attention.

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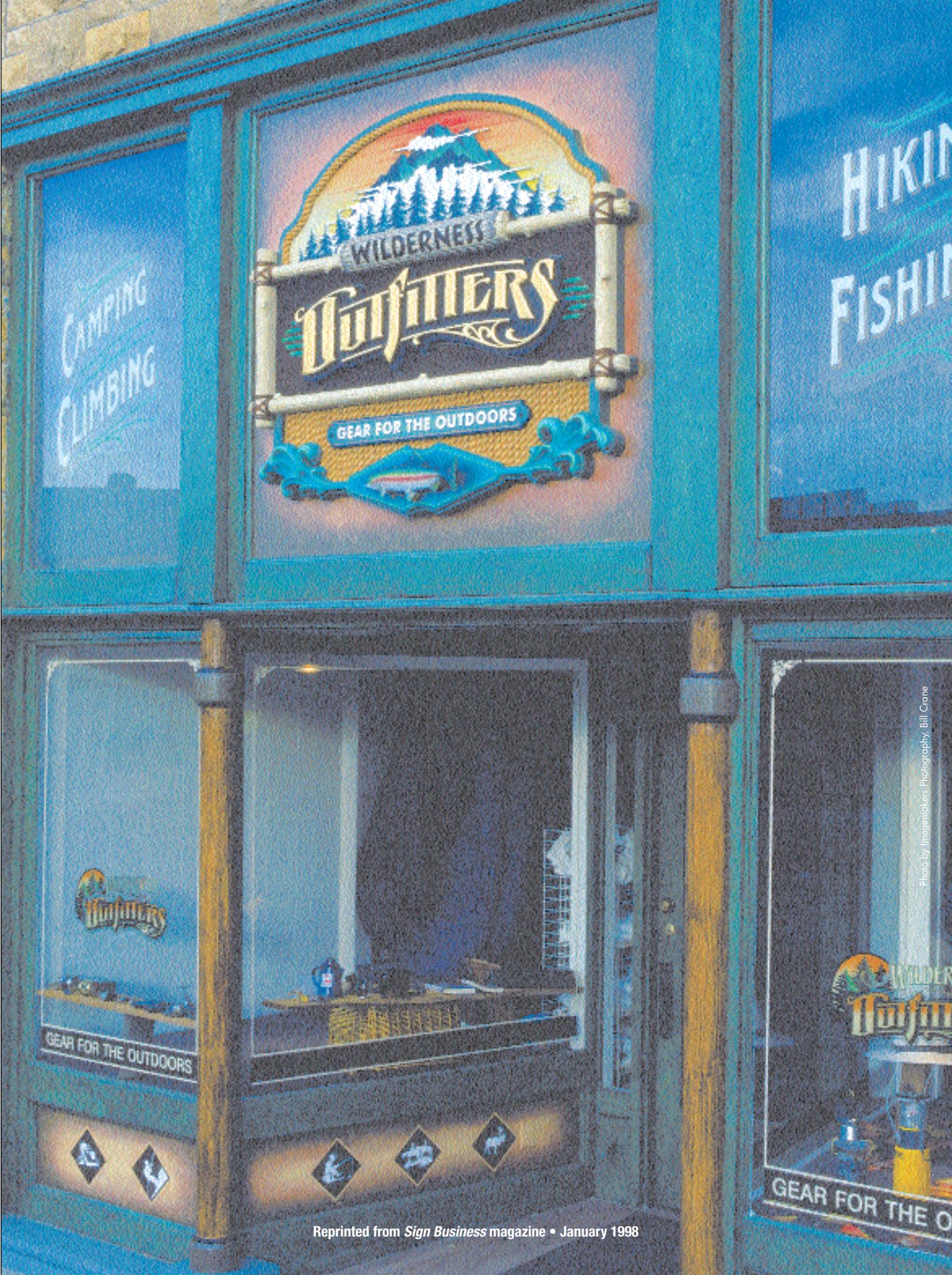


Photo by Imagemakers Photography, Bill Crane



Beginning stages of the main sign. Applying cut-out shapes for added dimension.

The only criteria I was given was to have mountains and the name *Wilderness Outfitters*. From this sign design I could derive a logo, depict color to be incorporated for the new building colors, address the storefront windows and any other embellishments that would follow.

The main sign went together very well. First, I put together the lettering for the word Outfitters. For this I used one of David Butler's letter styles, which seemed to work very nice.

Outfitters was encompassed in a panel of timbers tied with leather straps. The word *Wilderness* was carved in a log and set over this panel to tie the message together.

Next, I designed a panel to be set behind the main message, which is where the mountainscape would be placed.

I needed to come up with something on the bottom half of the sign to fill up the space, but still be appropriate. That's when I came up with a slogan for them,

CONTINUED



The storefront was first painted with the base colors. We would come in later and apply glazes for an aging effect.

"Not once while I was building the sign did they come by and check on our progress, and while we were decorating the front of their building they went on vacation."

Robin told the clients that considering the speed of traffic going by and because the storefront was so small and nestled between other storefronts with large awnings, to just do a nice sign was probably not going to be enough to command the attention they were looking for.

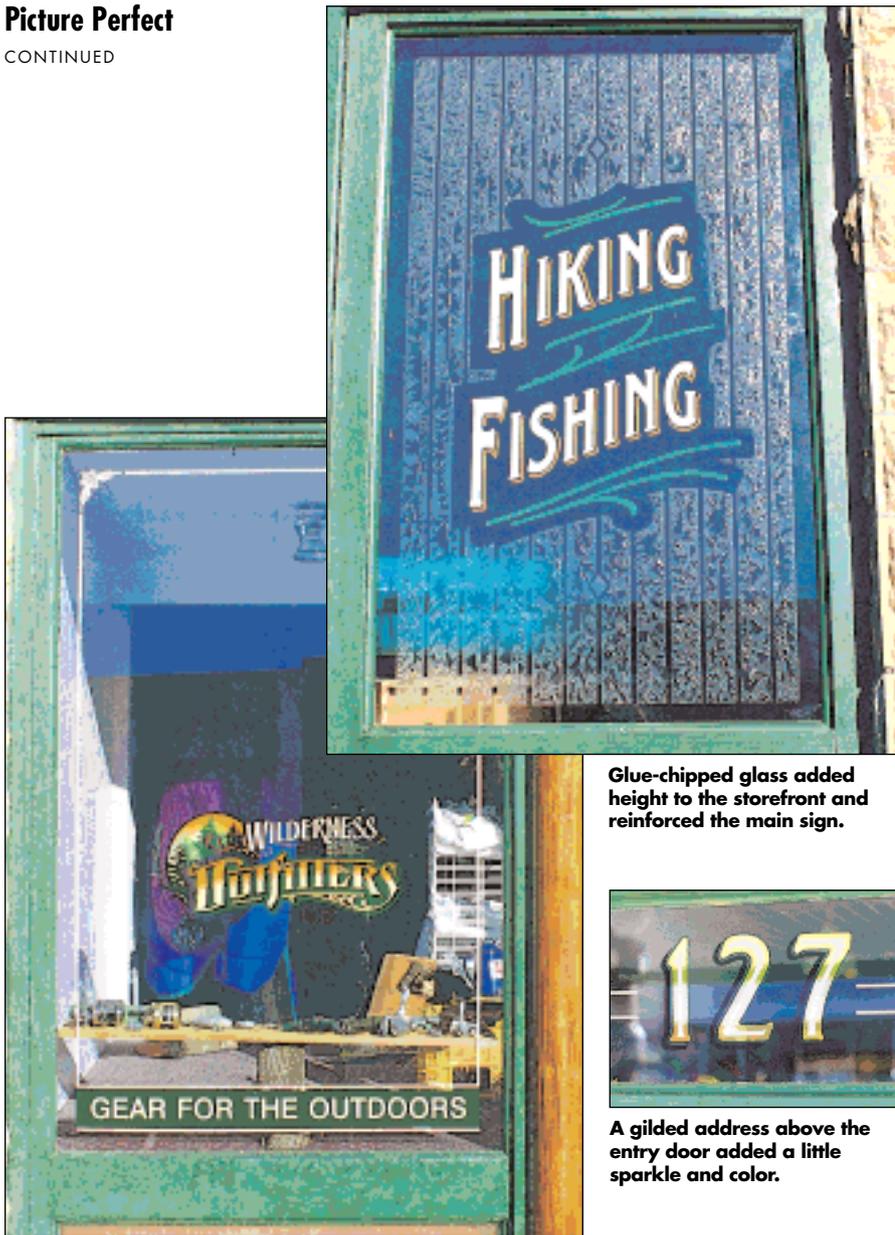
The owners of Wilderness Outfitters could absolutely see the benefits of honoring such an undertaking to better their business. So, with deposit in hand we started the design phase of the project.

A FOREST OF IDEAS

When I'm designing a project like this, I find it easier to start with the main sign. In this case it would fit in a given area of 6' x 6'. It would be very dimensional in character, utilizing Sign Foam® high-density urethane (HDU).

Picture Perfect

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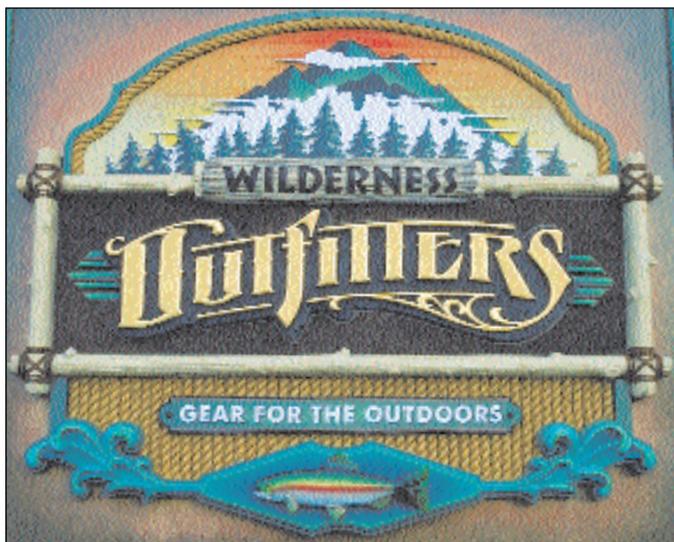
Glue-chipped glass added height to the storefront and reinforced the main sign.



A gilded address above the entry door added a little sparkle and color.

Pinstripes and pinecones were cut in vinyl and applied to the windows for an added embellishment. Wood-graining the poles was an obvious choice with this western theme.

Photo by Imagemakers Photography, Bill Crane.



Brown, rouge and a buff color were blended to complement the green and push the sign forward.

“Gear for the Outdoors” (of course I had this approved).

At this point I was falling short at the bottom part of the sign; it was feeling top-heavy. I had utilized earth, plant and an over-all outdoorsy kind of feel and I realized I was missing the animal part of this formula.

Fishing was a large part of the store focus, so with that in mind the fish was added with a little water embellishment to set it into the format. I chose to fill in the bottom panel with manila (hemp) rope. This would be a nice texture and would stay true to the theme.

SETTING UP CAMP

A scale drawing was done of the storefront, from which copies were made. Then I made copies of my drawing of the sign and pasted the sign to the drawing of the storefront. This way I could make color renderings very easily and discard them if they didn't work.

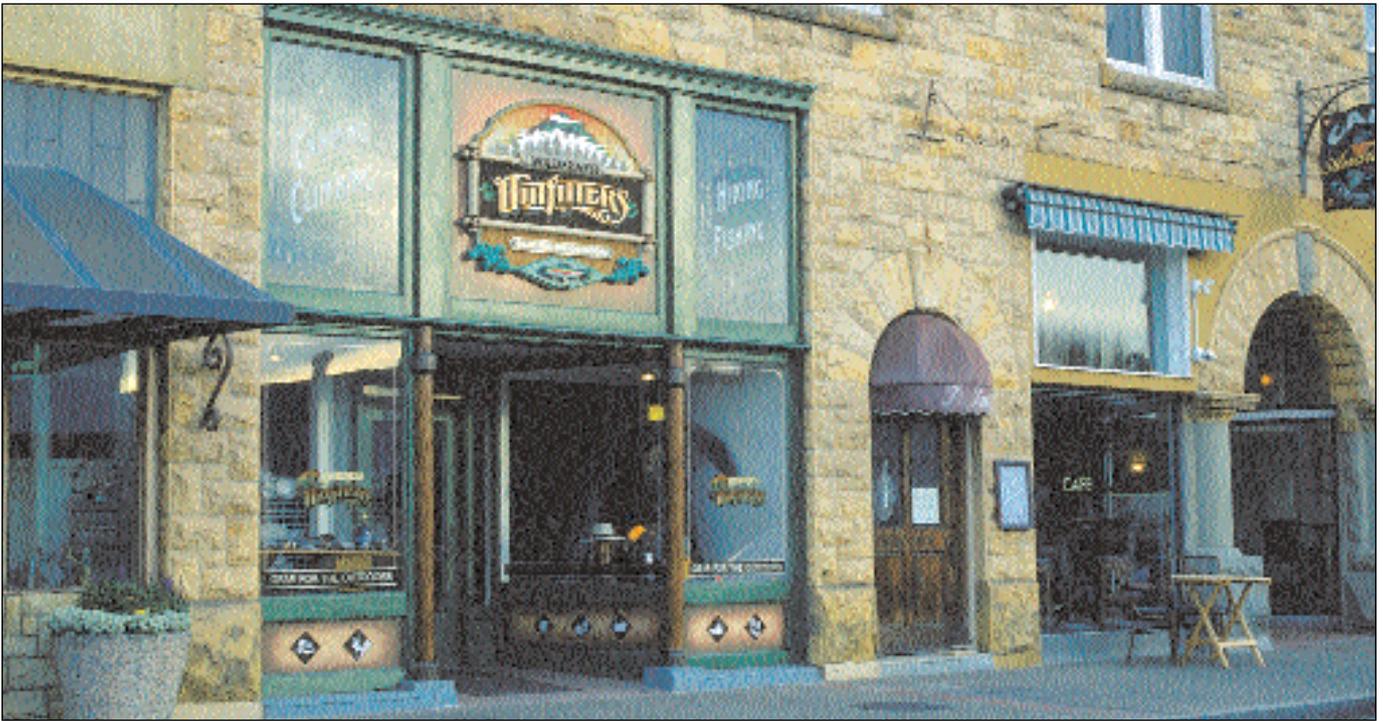
When I was happy with the colors of the sign it became obvious to me the new storefront would be comprised of green with an earthy brown as a complement.

Robin had the idea of replacing the lattice up above with decorative glass; I thought this was perfect. The glass would reinforce the vertical rhythm of the storefront, and stay true to the early 1900s influence. The glass would frame the sign with a little sparkle and add more light to the store. I designed the two glue-chipped glass panes and they were added to the scaled drawing.

The raised panels at the bottom of the building are all original. I designed icons to depict the contents of the business then they were set in geometrical diamonds and pasted onto the scaled drawing. It was obvious to me at this point in the design the two steel columns of the entryway should be wood grained. This would reinforce the Western heritage.

Now all that was left to complete the rendering was the window treatment to catch the attention of the sidewalk traffic. This was easy; I would refine the design that would become the logo. This logo would be placed as mirror images on both sides and would be gilded and

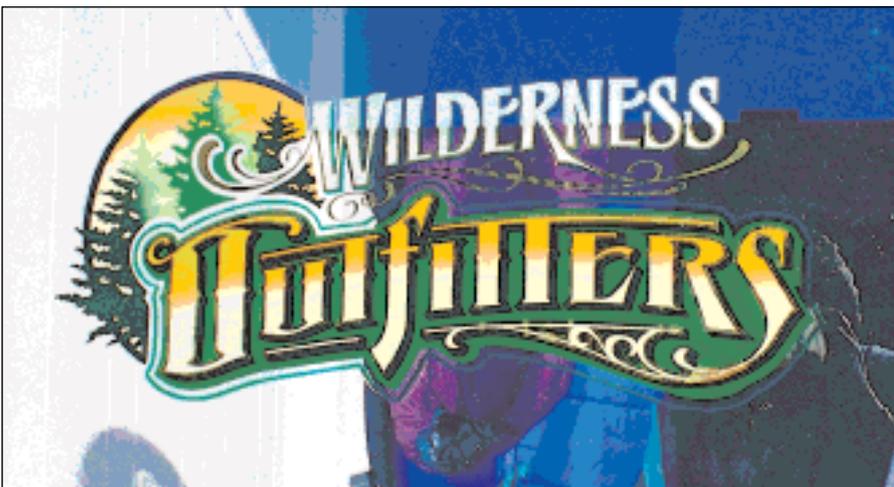
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Clip-art silhouettes cut in vinyl should lead customers to the door.



The fish icon was created with scrap Sign Foam, an aluminum leaf base and air-brushed transparent color glazes to achieve the "wet" look. The fish's spots were spattered on with an old fitch and the point of a liner to create the illusion of random spots.



I gilded and reversed painted two logos as mirror images for the sidewalk traffic.

painted. The slogan, "Gear for the Outdoors," would be placed on a stripe of green vinyl under these logos, which would lead you to the entry door.

The windows would be finished with an almond-colored pinstripe cut in vinyl with decorative pinecones in the corners as added embellishments.

After completing the new rendering of the storefront to work from, a separate print-out was made of some of the smaller details, such as the logos for the lower windows in full color, the striping detail and decorative corners for some windows, the icons that would go around the base of the raised panel and the gilded address to go above the entry door. We were now ready to make a presentation to the client.

CONTINUED



The rendering and a printout of elements to be incorporated on the storefront were all that were necessary to sell this job.

MODEL CLIENTS

After the presentation approval was given to start the project. Not one change was made. I'm not stating that to brag. Quite frankly, I was blown away by this.

In all my years in the sign business I've never experienced clients who were this trusting with such an enormous project.

Usually, there's always some pinstripe the wrong color, a letter style change or they'll say, "Gee, could you make this 10 percent larger?"

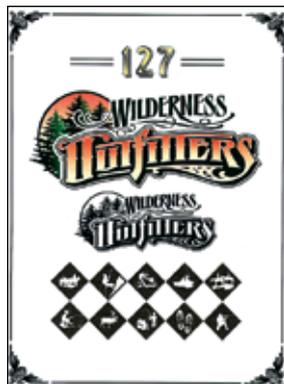
I'm sure you know what I am talking about... Been there, done that, right? Well, it gets better...

Not once while I was building the sign did they come by and check on our progress, and while we were decorating the front of their building they went on vacation. Somebody slap me! I can't be this happy!

These clients, Pete and Suzanne, deserve to be in the Customer Hall of Fame; they were picture perfect.

REAL-WORLD PLANNING

We scheduled the job to be done in this order...



The main sign and the glue-chipped glass would be pre-finished in the shop, ready to install.

I mixed a base coat for the building (green and buff), which the clients would get started on the building. We rented a scissor-lift for two days, in which time we would plan to

glaze over the green color of the building and use removal techniques for an antique appearance.

Over the buff color we could blend a rouge and brown color to age those areas and set the main sign in. While we had the lift the window glazier was scheduled to install the glue-chipped panes of glass and we installed the main sign.

The two columns were glazed and wood-grained, then all the vinyl treatment for the lower windows was completed. The next two days were scheduled for the window signs as well as the address above the entrance door. Everything went very smooth, thanks to a lot of good pre-planning, which takes time, and which pays off in the end. ®

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One Smooth Customer

BY DAVID MCDONALD



Making banners juicier by applying some simple techniques.

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.

WHAT CAN BE ROLLED UP, put away for later use, reused again and again, can fit behind the back seat of a pick up truck, and can be very profitable for both you and your customer? In most areas of the country this type of signage falls into the *temporary* category, usually exempting it from the local sign code!

Do you give up? It's a banner! Yes, that friendly substrate that can be prepared to accept vinyl and paint, as well as a RIPPed, digitally-printed image.

It can be ordered in a lightweight material or heavy weight with lots of choices in between. A banner can be ordered with a hemmed edge and peppered with grommets wherever you

specify. Banners can also be ordered in a multitude of colors.

I've talked to some folks who stock a roll of white banner material and just whack off the length needed (there can be a lot of situations for this type of use).

There was a time when I was doing my fair share of banners at a fair price (for both our shop and the customer). The average price per square foot for banners has been pushed way down in recent years and the competition for selling them has grown (while the price has decreased) by leaps and bounds.

If designed well a banner should give a potential customer a whole lot of bang for the buck and the return of that investment will show itself in a very short time.

SMOOTH COMPOSITION

Fresh fruit smoothies — given this copy and a 3' x 8' format to work with I started off with some quick thumbnail sketches and came to like the formula of splitting the format to hold separate information.

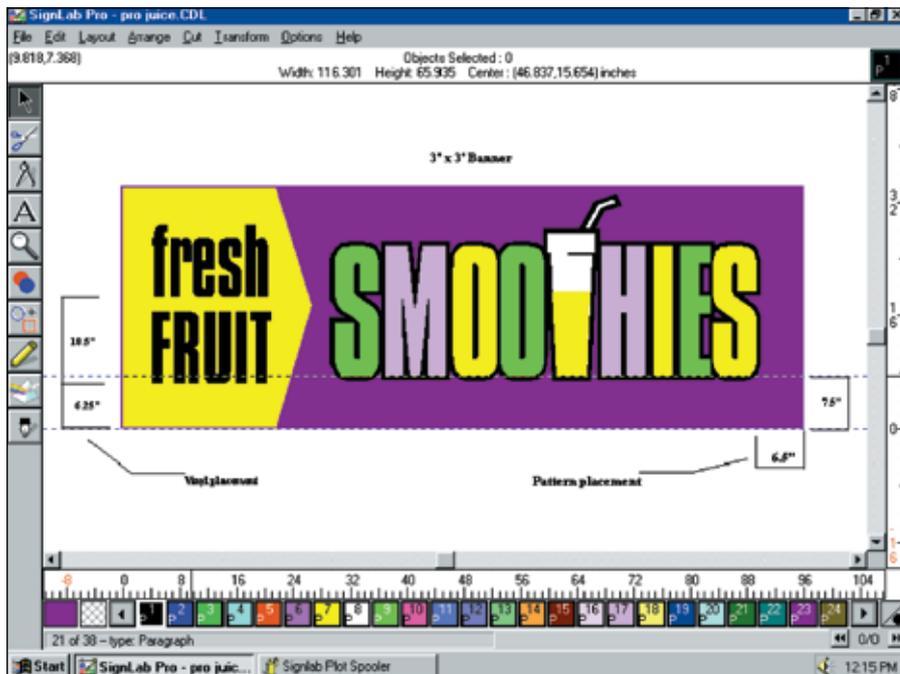
I don't like to break the format exactly in half, because the whole composition tends to look better when you go 60-40 or even 20-80. This is a great opportunity to incorporate the use of other colors, as well as maybe a reverse panel to help break up the monotony of the whole format.

The font I chose for the word *smoothies* was a *stave pipe*-type letter style. This condensed style would allow for a lot of punch and legibility for this banner to draw attention.

The copy *fresh fruit* looked good stacked using the same letter style, this was placed in the panel that was on the left side of the banner.

The *fresh fruit* panel started out as a rectangle on the thumbnail sketch and I eventually turned this into an arrow that pointed to the word *smoothies*; this trick helps lead the eye through the composition.

After being sure this was the direction I was going toward with the design, I



After a few thumbnail sketches it was easy to transfer this idea to the computer where colors and manipulation are much easier (note the use of the dimension tool for registration purposes).



The tools used to make this custom banner.



To achieve a smooth surface to work with, we like to secure our banners with screws.



Taping off the panel to receive paint. (Hint: On banners, do not stretch the tape.)



I used three rollers, one for each color to fill in the pounced lines. Speed was more important here rather than detail.



One Smooth Customer

CONTINUED



For a clean line between yellow and white on the cup I used a brush.



Cleaning out your rollers is a snap with a little paint thinner, air pressure and a contained space. Note Robin's spent smoothie cups — believe me, these were not set up as props.



Brushing a black outline to crisp up the lettering, an irregular edge makes fast work of this step.

could now set it up and choose my colors on the computer much faster.

COLOR ME SMOOTH

To redraw this design in my software was a snap, and within a few minutes I was assigning color. I liked the purple field and the yellow sub-panel. I could have reversed out the lettering on the yellow sub-panel but I liked the commanding contrast between the yellow and black.

At this point I could have put a lot of emphasis into the *ap* that was created from the letter *T*. I chose instead to keep

this element simple and mix some fruity colors throughout the rest of the lettering for the *zip* that was needed.

A black outline around this would tie everything together as well as crisp things up a bit. **Note:** The outline was kept loose to aid in the speed of production and would also lend itself to a more organic look.

SMOOTH PRODUCTION

What I find really useful about sign-making software is that you can print out an exact copy with accurate measurements to work from when doing the

actual production, whether it be applying vinyl or registering a pattern to paint from. In this example we will be doing both.

First, I perforated a pattern with my 15" plotter for the word *smoothies*. Because the lettering was larger than the plotter this needed to be done in two pieces that were then taped down the middle.

The banners we ordered for this job were enamel-coated, hemmed and grommeted, from Best Buy Banner. Then they were secured to our banner board using drywall screws. This helps keep the banners nice and tight while they are being worked on.

Next, the sub-panels were taped off using Finline tape. For this step I referred to the measurements on the print-out, and as I mentioned earlier this makes the process very forgiving and fast.

After applying and pouncing the pattern with white chalk the banners were ready to receive paint. Three colors were mixed with lettering enamel and I would need a roller for each color that was mixed.

I like using the 3" rollers you can buy at your local hardware store; they really work well for this type of work. To eliminate any fuzz and or loose debris, run the roller across the sticky side of some transfer tape.

For a good, quick way to clean them out after they are used we squeeze them out in our thinner bucket till they're fairly clean. Then with an air compressor cranked up on high reach down into a

CONTINUED

One Smooth Customer

CONTINUED



Marking the panel to receive vinyl. Once again, this is where the computer print-out is very helpful.



Applying vinyl is a snap with guidelines marked for proper registration.



The finished banner, installed and ready to do its work.

All I had to do was cut the black vinyl for the words fresh fruit and apply them — job complete!

garbage can and run the air along side of the roller (use a solvent-resistant pair of gloves as well as a respirator). The roller will spin at such a rate you will be surprised at how clean the roller will become. This method is fast and the rollers always seem to work better the second and third time around.

I painted the yellow sub-panel first, then painted the appropriate yellow letters and cup with the 3" roller; this was a very crude and fast application. I continued with the green and lavender colors as well (the white at the top of the cup was cut in with a brush).

After the paint was dry enough I registered the pattern once more and pounced the entire image again. Using a 1" flat brush I outlined the lettering and the cup. Now all I had to do was cut the black vinyl for the words *fresh fruit* and apply them — job complete!

POWER OF SUGGESTION

As I worked on this banner project, my mind focused on the copy and wandered to what you could call fads or the power of suggestion.

As in our case, *Smoothies*. What's up with that? When I was growing up they were called *Slurpies* or *Ices*. Maybe because the ingredients used are, as they say, "Good for you". Would this warrant the use of a new trendy name like Smoothies?

It does all seem to be in the name of good health, or is it? I would put my money on the idea that good health is a matter of balance within your life, including but not limited to, a moderate amount of exercise for your cardiovascular system.

My wife goes to the juice bar most every day and has a shot of wheat grass, which is supposed to be equal to eating two and a half pounds of green vegetables. I tried it once and it was like drinking a bale of hay.

So what does this have to do with making banners. Not a darn thing. I say be happy, enjoy life and strike that balance that you find comfortable. You will probably live to enjoy Smoothies into your golden years (if they aren't found to cause cancer or something by then). SB

Awnings for Everyone

BY STEVE ATKINS

Simple steps for building and fabricating awnings.

About the author: Steve Atkins is the owner of Sign-Corp in Greenville, N.C., and has been active in the sign industry since 1964. He has written hundreds of articles on sign-related topics.

tool you may need is an air-powered stapler. Even if you don't have those tools, some advertisers boast that all you need to assemble one of their kits is a screwdriver and a pair of pliers.

There are other tools that you could buy, like a tubing bender, but you could improvise here until you made enough money to invest in one.

EXTRUSION SHAPES

Although there are many extruded awning shapes on the market, the two basic shapes that I use are shown in **Figure 1**. With these, I can build almost any awning that I want.

The main ribs are formed from **Shape A** in **Figure 1**. The bottom of the awning is formed from **Shape B** if the bottom is to be shielded with a plastic egg-crate diffusion lens.

I don't have a tubing bender, so I had to come up with a way to bend the ribs of the awning. **Figure 2** shows a jig that I made that makes 18" radius bends.

The extrusion (I use the Milliken Profile, which is licensed to several distributors) is placed in the jig and manually bent around the form slightly beyond the 90-degree mark so it will spring back to the proper angle.

A little trial and error will perfect the process. Using one of the ribs as a pattern, multiple ribs can be bent to match the first one.

The bottom rails are a little more difficult because of the flange on the extrusion. A series of notches will enable you to make radius bend with that.

Figure 3 shows a cross-section of a typical awning, utilizing the egg-crate diffusion panel. The egg-crate panels can be bought at most building supply companies.

ASSEMBLY

I usually start the awning by cutting the flanged extrusion to length for the

I HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED with the sign business for over 34 years; most of those years have been spent in the electric sign industry. A few years back, awnings were awnings and signs were signs, and the two industries were distinct and different.

However, with the advent of new synthetic materials, someone discovered that awnings, light and signage made a good combination. For that reason, some awning companies have ventured into the sign business and vice-versa.

Awnings can be divided into two major categories — traditional and backlit.

Traditional awnings are usually non-lighted and produced using a canvas-like material as a covering. These are usually sewn together, and stretched relatively loosely over a round tubing frame.

Backlit awnings are commonly constructed using an extruded aluminum frame that is either welded together, or assembled using a number of fastening systems. I have found that backlit awnings can be a major enhancement to the bottom line of a sign company's profit-and-loss statement.

Your involvement can be as little as simply installing an awning that you had a wholesaler build, to getting completely immersed in the entire manufacturing process.

IMPROVISE

Getting started in almost any phase of the electric sign business can be a major undertaking. Most of the equipment, like sheet metal brakes and welders, can add up to big bucks.

However, if you're already set up to build electric signs, the only additional

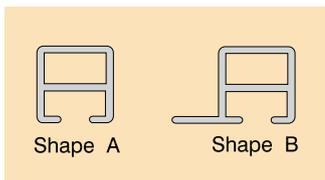


Figure 1: Basic awning shapes for the staple system.

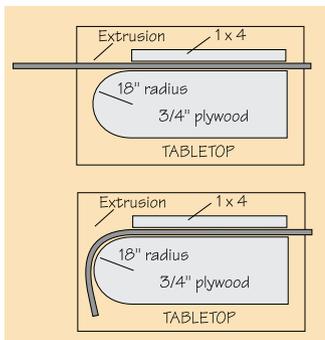


Figure 2: Simple homemade jig to bend extrusion.

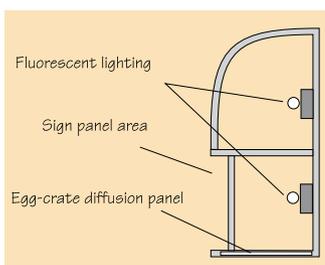


Figure 3: Cross-section detail of an awning truss.

Awnings for Everyone

CONTINUED



Figure 4:
Frame is ready
for attaching
fabric.



Figure 5: Basic tools for building awnings.



Figure 6:
Brackets for
attaching the
awning to the
wall.



Figure 7:
Installing an
awning is
simple and
quick.

bottom back. Then, I cut and bend the bottom, front and sides also using the flanged extrusion.

Now, I have a foundation on which to build the rest of the awning. Using the **Shape A**, as shown in **Figure 1**, I bend the back piece.

At this point, they can all be welded together. My welder is a Miller 250 Mig welder with a wire-fed spool gun. It does an excellent job, but there are others that do as well.

After bending and cutting all of the ribs, they can now be welded to the bottom and back of the awning. Take care to properly space and position each rib before welding. A good practice is to lightly *tack* the entire awning together before the final welds are laid down.

Figure 4 shows the completed frame for an awning. Although it is difficult to see in this photo, the front ribs are modified to be inset about 4" in the area where the sign panel will be to allow for proper light diffusion, and to prevent shadows from the ribs. Any necessary cross-bracing should also be installed at this point.

ATTACHING THE FABRIC

Figure 5 shows the basic tools and components necessary to build an awning. The most important specialty tool is the air stapler. You can purchase these from your extrusion supplier.

The fabric is cut about 6" oversize to allow for gripping to stretch it over the frame. Most companies that specialize in awning components can supply you with stapling procedures that minimize wrinkles and puckers.

The basic premise is that you start with a few staples in the top-center area, a few more in the bottom center, some to the left and right, then work your way out to the corners, much like you would stretch silk-screening fabric over a frame.

Minor, less-tensioned areas can be tightened by applying heat from a heat gun. One has to be careful, however, not to over-tension the fabric, since it will tend to tear away from the staples.

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Awning Success Story

Sign and Awning Systems was incorporated in 1994 by two veterans of the sign industry, Mickey Hodges and Mike Godwin. Both had been involved in signs for over twenty years.

In just under four years, they have built a multi-million dollar business that thrives near Interstate 95 near Dunn, N.C. They focus their attention along the I-95 corridor from Virginia to South Carolina.



The automated tubing bender allows the operator to enter a radius, guarantying accuracy.

Derrick Stewart, shop foreman in the awning department, has helped that phase of the business to produce over \$500,000 in awnings per year.

Using the staple system, they build both backlit and traditional awnings. Their shop is a collage of shapes and colors most of the time.

Mickey says that the awning business has a lot less headaches than the sign business.

“For example,” explains Mickey, “we were not able to get one foundation in or one inspection today for signs. However, we did install five awnings.”

The day I spoke to Mickey

it was raining cats and dogs, which normally causes a problem with traditional sign work, but not with awnings.

Sign and Awning Systems’ largest portion of the awning business comes from restaurants. After that, convenience stores and motels bring in a good quantity of business.

“We’ve also recently seen a large increase in business from churches,” says Mickey, “and, surprisingly, we are now getting a lot of awning jobs for residences — particularly the roll-out type awnings for decks and patios.”

Mike and Mickey find themselves blessed with almost more business than they can handle — of course, that is typical these days if you offer a quality product.



The Sign and Awning Systems’ shop is a collage of shapes and colors.

Air pressure at the staple gun is a factor, too. Low air pressure will prevent the staples from properly penetrating the extrusion, making it impossible to insert the vinyl beading that finishes the job.

Too high of an air pressure will tear through the fabric. Blair Milliken of Milliken Industries says that 40-psi at the gun is about right.

VINYL BEADING & INSTALLATION

The final step in building the awning is inserting the vinyl beading. The vinyl beading is pressed into the extrusion profile where joints in the fabric are made.

This can be done manually with a hammer, but a neater job can be done with an air hammer designed specifically for this purpose. It is available from some

You will find that awnings are quick to build, easy to install, and profitable.

awning component suppliers for about \$200. The air hammer produces a rapid succession of blows, which enable the operator to quickly and neatly insert the beading. Beading is available in many colors to either match or contrast the fabric color.

The installation of a backlit awning is relatively simple. Brackets are made specifically for this purpose (see **Figure 6**). Most awnings are lightweight and can be installed with a minimum amount of effort. I always place a couple of mounting brackets on the wall at the top, hang the awning on them, mark the position for the others, drill the holes, then re-hang the awning.

Once it is positioned properly, the rest of the brackets can be installed and tightened (see **Figure 7**). You will find that awnings are quick to build, easy to install, and profitable — three good things for any sign person to encounter. **SB**

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