

# RUSTY *Elegance*

BY DAVID MCDONALD



*Creating a sign package for a Mediterranean-style restaurant.*

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Sometimes, a customer will come into our shop knowing exactly what they want. Sometimes, when it involves the use of materials and techniques that we have implemented in the past with great success, the visit can bring a welcome change of pace. This was the case with the new Marisol restaurant that just opened at the Cliffs resort here on the coast.

The manager asked that we create a sign that would be installed high on the

us to develop one for her. The restaurant was to be of Mediterranean influence and some simple lettering to project that style was requested.

I found a letter style designed by Chuck Davis called *Mirage Bold*. With a little finessing it was just the ticket for this particular client and the new look for the Marisol restaurant was born.

This job would turn out to be pretty straightforward, with the new logo design to be used for menus, print and advertising, as well as for signage—the large sign mentioned above, and a smaller sign located in the breezeway to greet patrons as they enter the restaurant.

## KEEPING IT LIGHT

Our client wanted the large sign, which would be 8" in depth, to appear to be thick iron. My job was to create it, yet keep it light enough to be able to be installed in a fashion that would fall within the budget. I chose to use 10-lb. Sign Foam3 (HDU) with the idea to cut the design on the router as a shell, which would keep it hollow and light. The individual pieces were then glued together with epoxy, using cyanoacrylate glue to tack-weld the pieces in place while the epoxy cured.

After creating the router paths I cut three layers of 2"-thick HDU. The first layer would be the face of the sign, including the inlays for the lettering. The second and third layers were merely the returned edge creating the look of a solid and thick piece when assembled. The letters were cut with a simple rounded-over edge from 2" HDU as well.

## QUICK AND EASY!

When all fabrication was complete we primed the signs with Coastal Enterprise's water-based primer and followed with a



The finished sign installed high on the exterior wall.

wall visible from the freeway. The sign needed to be about 5' x 12' in size. She wanted it to be thick in dimension and also include gold leaf lettering. The rusted signs that we have been doing around the city were exactly what she had in mind but she did not have a logo and wanted



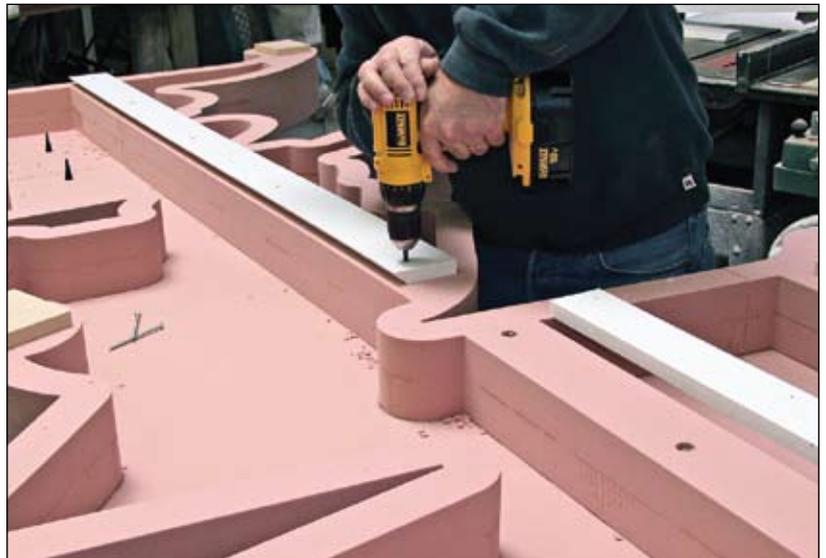
For the breezeway sign, the filigree (lace) was cut from 1/2" Sintra and the edge was softened with a subtle round-over bit. The lace was painted using the inside wall color, so that it blends in but its shadow creates a subtle embossed effect.



The front of the sign is cut out and inlays are also cut to receive the gold leaf letters.



The 2"-thick sign is then flipped onto its face and the extra 4" edges are epoxy glued and tack-welded in place with cyanoacrylate glue. The cyano will hold the pieces together until the epoxy cures.



Large 1" holes are drilled into the sign and filled with epoxy. The installation cleat (French cleat) is attached to the back of the sign using long screws and washers. The epoxy will hold the hardware permanently to the urethane panel.



Using a foam brush Robin applies the iron metallic surfacer to the front and edges of the signs. Three good coats are recommended.



The appropriate acid available from Triangle Coatings is sprayed on to the surface of the iron with an HVLP gun. When the first coat has dried I like to let the sign sit for about an hour and then wet the sign a second time to bring out more rust color.

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The small lettering that accompanies the large sign is painted with Sophisticated Finishes blackened bronze. Iron was spattered on to harmonize the lettering to the main sign.



Lefranc 12-hour size is perfect for gilding large areas. It allows me plenty of working time and always achieves a good gild. A foam brush makes fast work with this forgiving size (apply a thin film).



Normally I will gild large letters with loose leaf but it just so happened that I had an extra surplus of patent 23-karat gold leaf so I opted to use it on this job.



The gilded letters are fixed to the surface with silicone adhesive.

coat of rust-colored acrylic paint. On top of this base we applied three heavy coats of Iron Metallic surfacer from Triangle Coatings. The iron was painted on with a foam brush with little attention to detail to create a random thickness and pattern to the surface. The iron was left to dry for a couple of days, after which acid was sprayed using the HVLP gun to make the iron nice and wet. This coat was left to run down the signs and soak in. Once dry the acid was sprayed again a little less liberally, to dampen the signs, once again bringing out more rust and oxidation. After a few days the signs became a nice rust color with deep reds and other warm colors.

The letters were prepared with Lefranc 12-hour size and gilded with 23-karat patent gold leaf. The bottom edge of the gold

letters were outlined with black to dress up the lettering and give the appearance that they float away from the rusted back. The sub-copy, *at The Cliffs*, was painted with blackened bronze and then spattered with iron metallic surfacer to make it harmonious with the large rusted panel.

#### A SIMPLE INSTALLATION

The sign was installed on the wall using a French cleat. To make this, we rip a board at a 45-degree angle, creating two pieces. The two pieces are used with the help of gravity and a little adhesive to create a simple, but solid mounting assembly. After mounting one piece to the wall and the opposing piece to the sign we can hang the sign at the proper height, with the ability to slide it left or right, which gives us a

little more flexibility to position it exactly where it should be.

Normally, a wooden cleat would be mounted to the urethane board with epoxy, giving the cleat a strong and permanent bond. But we used Sintra for the cleat on this job because it won't rot and fail outside in the weather. However, epoxy does not stick to Sintra (sheet PVC), so to deal with this I drilled out large 1" cores in the urethane. The cores were filled with epoxy and then the cleat was screwed to the urethane board with screws and washers. Once cured, the screws were held tight in the epoxy core, which will not pull out of the urethane board.

To make installation simple, eyebolts were set with epoxy in the two opposing ends of the sign. These were used to hoist



The sign goes up and on to the cleat, which has been installed at the proper height on the wall. Because the cleat attachment to the sign was cut level on the router, the height was the only concern with this installation allowing us to generate a modest pattern for center registration only. The secondary copy "at the cliffs" is on the paper pattern. The smaller letters are adhered directly to the wall using silicone adhesive. Silicone is also used to keep the sign from lifting free of the cleat and falling to its death.



Here is the smaller inside sign that will direct hungry patrons to the restaurant. The lace helps to soften the hard edges of the sign and anchor it to the wall, making it a little tastier to the eye.

the sign into position with a boom truck. Steve Fear with Coast Monument Services was gracious enough to help us with the installation of this project. The inside sign was installed by first screwing and gluing with silicone adhesive the Sintra filigree or lace to the wall and then the rusted panel was pin mounted to the wall to finish off this restaurant package.

*Until next time...*

*Thanks for listening!*



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# THE CLOSE-MINDED Designer

BY DAVID MCDONALD

Lessons learned from a silly situation.



David and Robin McDonald own and operate Avila Sign & Design, a custom sign shop in Grover Beach, Calif. Contact them through their Web site at [www.AvilaSignDesign.com](http://www.AvilaSignDesign.com).

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” was the response that escaped from my mouth when my wife and business partner, Robin, shared the dialogue that she and a new customer had planned. “I commissioned you to meet the client at her dog and cat grooming shop to photograph a poodle with a towel wrapped around its head,” Robin said. “We want to create the appearance of the animal having its hair done at a traditional salon,” she explained.

I truly must have had the most distant and mesmerized look in my eyes at that moment because I couldn’t believe what I was hearing! She continued to say that a cat would be involved as well.

“Are you nuts?” I blurted with discontent, still waiting for the punch line. I was really struggling to picture this in my head and it just seemed ridiculous. “I’m a professional!” I said. (I’ve got most people tricked into believing this.) To me this resembled what would

seem to be a real sell-out for sure! I told Robin that this idea was really a stretch but she was determined to reassure me that this is what the client is requesting.

So what did I do? I did what any rational designer would have done; I made every attempt possible to get out of the pre-scheduled photo shoot. I dished up statements like, “What are the odds that the dog will sit there patiently and allow me to take photos—let alone with a towel on its head? And a cat too...forget about it! I don’t have time for this nonsense.”

The bottom line was, I would be paid for my time for the photography but I was still having trouble putting this together in my head. Even if the client could get the animals to cooperate, I would be left with the challenge of designing a logo and dimensional signs based around this crazy idea—God help me!

## THE GLAMOUR SHOTS!

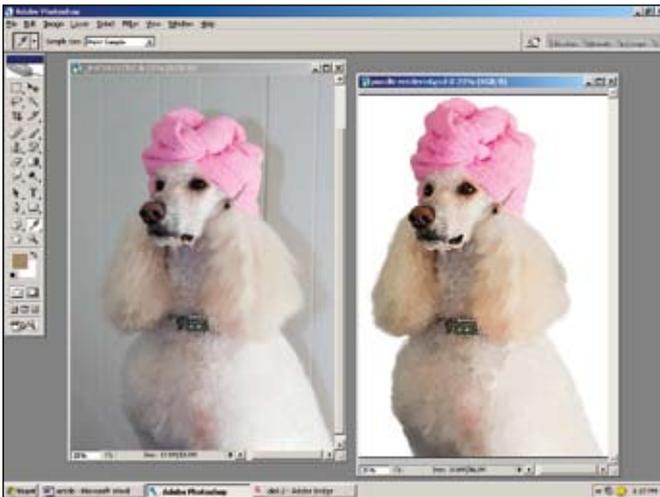
We arrived at the salon (I say “we” because I dragged Robin along to help bask in the shame) with photography gear in hand—all the stuff necessary: tripods, strobes, cameras and lenses—ready to capture that perfect shot of our models. (For those that didn’t get it...that was a joke!)

We set up the gear and talked briefly about the shoot and how best to accomplish our objective. We decided to proceed with the poodle first as if there was actually some kind of reasoning going on with this choice. The proprietor walked to a large kennel, opened it and out scampered a standard-sized poodle named June, white in color. The proprietor bent down, reached low around the canine’s legs and scooped the animal up and proceeded over to a grooming table where the dog was placed. She told the dog to sit and began to wrap a full-sized towel around the completely bewildered animal’s head,





This is a composite rendering created in Adobe Photoshop prior to building the signs. Working in this way the client can see what we intend to do with the exterior of the building. The rendering shows the new color of the building, the awning and the complete sign package. At the time of this writing none of the above are actually on the building.



To the left is the photo captured and as you can see the dog is not looking pampered or happy. On the right is the image that was sent to the Gerber Edge. First I gave the towel more height and I opened the eyes to make them friendlier. I then worked with the lips to create a happier mouth and finished the image off with a painterly effect in Adobe Photoshop. I kept the image soft by applying selective sharpening to the eyes, nose and collar.



The bulk of this project was cut from 1" 10-lb. SignFoam3. The background would later be laminated to 1/2" marine plywood.



The router work was cut to accept inlayed parts trapping the three basic colors making for an easy paint job on this sign. After painting the tan we could come back with a roller and foam brushes and apply the Tuscan red color on all raised surfaces.



All of the borders and filigree were cut from 1/2" Sintra and then rounded over on the router. They were later finished with the pink acrylic paint.



Rather than blend by hand, I decided to take a moment and quickly mask off the area and use the HVLP spray gun.



Here we see the raised areas painted with the Tuscan red. The print has also been applied and the sub-copy and hearts have been painted and blended. After dumping the loose smaltz I go over the area with a vacuum to further clean the loose material.



Using clear transfer tape, high performance vinyl is applied to the letter surfaces.



The main copy needs to be raised to clear the 1/2" borders and fill-gree. Using silicone, 1/2" spacers are glued to the back of the letter pads. Pilot holes are then drilled for positioning.

attaching the pink towel with a large bobby pin. The proprietor turned to me and said how's this? To which I stood there in amazement and replied, "Well...um I guess that will do just fine!"

I started to blast off some shots and we moved the tripod and camera as well as the dog trying different angles and posing postures. In reviewing the shots (digital) I noticed that this was actually working—short of the fact that the dog's expression reminded me of the same look I had had when Robin confronted me with the idea in the first place—not good. On the captures the dog looked as if it had just lost its best friend and the expression

was far from looking pampered.

There was a deli next door and the dog groomer asked if Robin would be willing to go and get some meat to help entice the dog's expression. I thought this was a great idea and Robin agreed. We asked her to get some tuna too, for the cat that was soon to be photographed next. (Paybacks!)

To make a long story short—and because I didn't actually use the cat image in the design—I won't bore you with that part of the story. But it was a pretty funny sight. I must admit the photo shoot went well as was promised, which left me with the task of designing the logo.

## OPENED MINDED DESIGN

I made mention to the fact that I did not incorporate the cat image in the design and because you have been turning pages in this magazine, that point should already be obvious. What I found was that the cat's head was very small and the dogs head was quite large in comparison so to place them together just did not look right no matter how much I tried. I could have separated them but at any distance at all I figured the cat would get lost and do nothing but take away from the design and already goofy idea.

After a few attempts what I decided to do was work with the dog image and make

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The letter pads are mounted in place with screws and silicone. The screws are fastened down into the plywood backing for extra strength.



The last of the inlays are fixed to the background with silicone adhesive.



The main copy is secured into the inlays as well covering the screw heads for a nice, clean finish.

it be at least more than 50 percent of the total area of the design, placing all of the other required elements around it. After I had relinquished my bad attitude and somewhat closed mind toward this job, I was able to really see it for what it was (still darn silly) and a seriously whimsical take on this design was the answer. My idea was to treat the dog image as the focus, maybe framed in a mirror or window and keep the message whimsical and bold. If I could create a concept in this fashion, the design would probably work—and it did.

It seems I needed to be reacquainted with *patience* and I learned a lot about myself while working through this design. What seemed to me at the time to be ridiculous turned out to be very doable and also a good idea. Many times the solution to a problem lies within the problem, as was the case here.

### **SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES**

So when it came right down to it I had available to me the things necessary to turn this unconventional idea into a very attractive storefront for the client. Sometimes we must be willing as designers to think *outside of the box* and for me this was certainly the case on this job.

In hindsight, it's easy to look at this design and accept it as being nice—actually, very nice—but in the beginning it was a struggle that for me could not be pictured in my mind's eye. When I put

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myself in Robin's shoes for a moment I realize that it was not as crazy an idea as it sounded and here's why.

Robin knows how much I enjoy my photography. It has become a real passion for me and the client really wanted to see a dog and cat adorned with towels and because we have the equipment to facilitate this, it really made sense. We could have created a cartoon or searched the web for clip art depicting this general idea but offering to work with the client's animals allowed us to connect with the client on an emotional level.

The design became, in a sense, more personal for the client and I believe this is a good thing. If we had to hire a photographer and outsource the printing it could be said that the concept was a bit of a stretch but for us it really did fit into our mold.

**Offering to work with the client's animals allowed us to connect with the client on an emotional level.**

**BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER!**

What I can say is that if your sales team, partner or whoever brings in the jobs from off the street puts you, as a designer, in what seems like a no-win situation, breathe—I feel your pain!

On the other hand with a little patience and a willingness to think outside of the box you might be as surprised as I was as to how well a design can come together. After all if the message is communicated well and the sign is pleasing to the eye, it doesn't matter how silly the concept because a good design holds no emotion. That is left for the observer because it is the observer who creates that part of the illusion...

*Until next time...  
Thanks for listening!*

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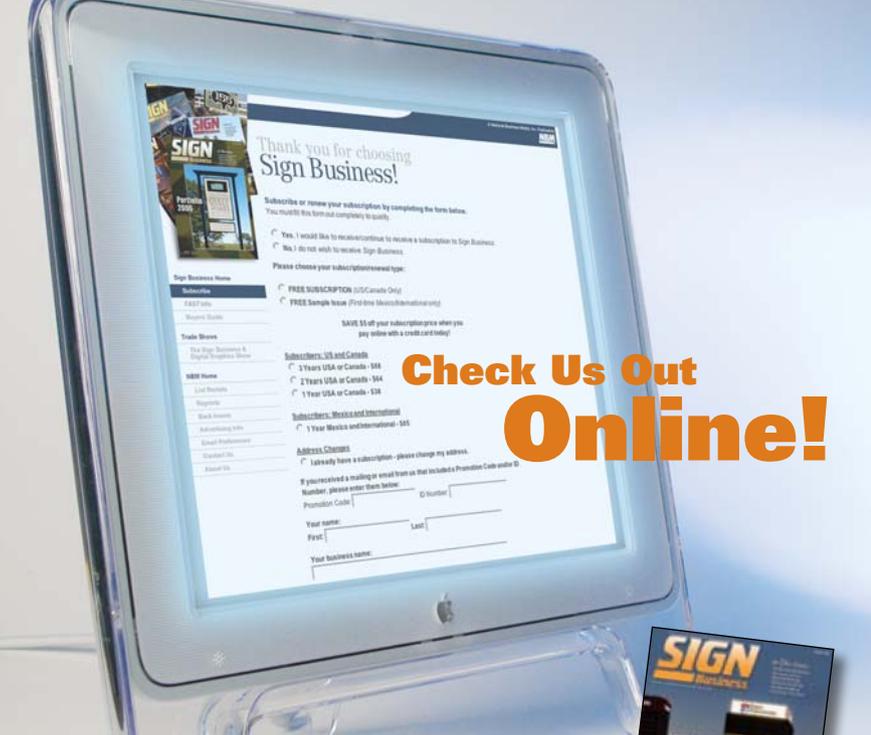
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