

# SIGN

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# Show and Tell

BY DAVID MCDONALD



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*A look back at some of last year's dimensional work.*

**Y**OU WILL BE READING this article in the month of February although I am writing it in December, which for me is the end of the year and for you the beginning of a New Year.

Last year was a tough one for many financially. Furthermore, we as an industry lost one of our leaders and heroes, Mr. Rick Glawson of Fine Gold Sign Co. One way or another we all

seemed to get through that last year — some of us maybe better than others. But we now have the next year to look forward to, which I hope brings better work and better customers to all of us!

For this article I thought it would be nice to share some of my favorite dimensional sign projects that I produced during the last year. These are not necessarily the largest or the smallest, the most expensive or the cheapest signs that we produced and I couldn't really say if I have a favorite. I just simply like them and will do a little "show and tell".

## Affairs of the Heart

**Substrate materials:** Sign Foam with plywood back.

**Other materials:** Copper leaf and 23.5-karat gold leaf; Polytek Easyflo 60 (resin casting).

**Primer coat:** FSC-88 WB Coastal Enterprises water base primer filler.

**Top coat:** Benjamin Moore exterior acrylic.

I DESIGNED THIS SIGN to be mounted onto the pre-existing posts. The two faces were installed level with each other and the top mantle was placed over the top and glued in place. (The rose-colored dental detail surrounds the bottom of the cap.) A single medallion and floral bouquet was first hand carved and those masters were then cast in resin. The sign was routed on the Gerber router from a single panel of 1" Sign Foam. Inlays were produced to accept the *Af fairs* and *Heart* copy, as well as the castings. I really liked the color palette on this sign. The pastel colors were taken from the existing building and I added the mint green color to complement the warmer tones. There are a lot of detailed router paths involved on this sign to create subtle textures and depth.





**Substrate materials:** Sign Foam with plywood back.  
**Primer coat:** FSC-88 WB Coastal enterprises water base primer filler.  
**Top coat:** Benjamin Moore exterior acrylic.  
**Aluminum leaf and transparent color:** Dupont automotive clear with House of Color intensifier.  
**Broiler letters and pads:** 1/2" Sintra (PVC) sheet.

### Alphy's

TOM SEIBERT of Tom Seibert Design designed this sign. Our collaborative efforts really paid off well here because this sign shows very well. The emphasis was put into the name Alphy's leaving the broiler in this case secondary. Tom did a great job of designing the text giving the client a unique and commanding look. The broiler panels were routed from 1" Sign Foam to look like grills. The broiler copy was routed from 1/2" Sintra and inlaid into the Sign Foam panels.

The Alphy's letters were routed, hand formed and inlaid into 2" Sign Foam. The red outline is part of the 2" background and gives the letters their home. Labor on this sign wasn't too bad although shaping the Alphy's letters did take some time. After painting all elements the proper color, aluminum leaf was applied to the outlines and then the red transparent color was brushed onto the aluminum. The inlays were fixed using silicone adhesive. This sign was produced and installed in three separate pieces — the two broiler panels and the Alphy's center piece.



### Nipomo Market Place

**Materials:** Sign Foam with plywood back.  
**Primer coat:** Fsc-88 WB Coastal enterprises water base primer filler.  
**Top coat:** Benjamin Moore exterior acrylic.  
**Background:** Osmalto (smaltz) black.

THIS IS ONE of the many signs that we did for a local gas station. It is actually installed above the exit of the car wash on the property. Robin, my wife and partner in the business, had a lot to do with the face-lift that the station received — from the striped awnings to the colors throughout the exterior. This sign is a standard formula with urethane panel and applied letters and banner. The border treatment is from Mike Jackson's *Main Street* collection of vectored turn-of-the-century art. This sign is just fun to look at with its vivid colors so I thought I would include it here as well.

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## 755 Santa Rosa Directory

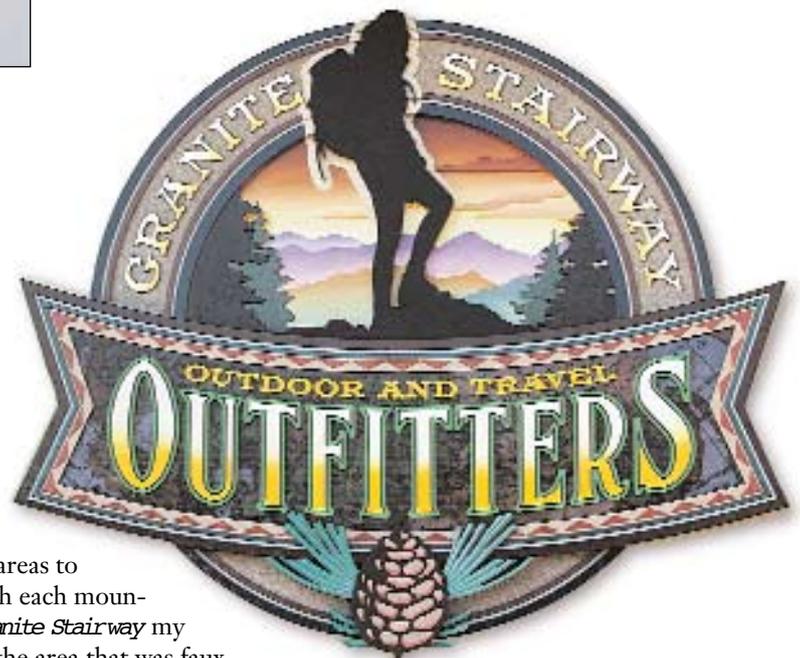
**Substrate materials:** Sign Foam with plywood back.  
**Other materials:** 1/2" clear acrylic sheet; 1/4" opaque white acrylic sheet; 1/4" aluminum sheet; white high-performance cast vinyl.  
**Decorative hardware:** Chrome mirror grommets from C.R. Lawrence.  
**Primer coat:** FSC-88 WB Coastal Enterprises water base primer filler.  
**Top coat:** Benjamin Moore exterior acrylic.  
**Charcoal Grey surface aggregate:** Clifford W. Estes Co. Inc.



THIS INTERIOR LOBBY DIRECTORY is a simple yet effective wayfinding sign. I designed the *Art Deco* sign to go with the existing architecture and color scheme that was used throughout the property. To keep the theme congruent, raw architectural materials were used here for their natural textures and finish. After the Sign Foam background was painted we poured the charcoal colored aggregate in the required area and after drying we poured off the excess aggregate. All materials and parts were machined on the Gerber router and then fastened to the finished background. The 1/2" clear acrylic was router-cut and a bevel was routed on the edge after which I flame-polished the bevel with a hand held torch. The back of the clear acrylic panel was taped off in the specified areas and painted gray to allow the aggregate to show only at the location of the suite numbers. The vinyl letters were applied to the face of the clear acrylic so that they would cast a nice shadow down onto the aggregate below. Silicone adhesive was used to fix the aluminum and 1/4" white acrylic letters. The decorative chrome screw caps made for a nice *Art Deco* finish on this interior sign.

## Outfitters

**Materials:** Sign Foam with plywood back.  
**Primer coat:** FSC-88 WB Coastal Enterprises water base primer filler.  
**Top coat:** Benjamin Moore exterior acrylic paint and 1 Shot lettering enamel.  
**Other materials:** 1/2" Sintra (PVC) sheet (Outdoor centers and outdoor travel); 1/4" Sintra (Back packing girl); Gerber Edge thermal resin print; white high-performance cast vinyl letters (Granite Stairway); Edge-printed yellow fade.



THIS 4' X 5' SIGN was a fairly intense router project! The base (circle) was cut separately from 1" Sign Foam incorporating what turned out to be many cleaned out areas to make up the wilderness scene. To create a sense of depth each mountain range sits at a different level. Around the words *Granite Stairway* my original plan was to glue a gunnysack textile texture in the area that was faux painted. Instead — the client was afraid of the idea... pity! The banner is stacked on top of the circle background and, short of the Native American design on the border, it was completely cleaned out to later receive the EDGE print of the travel map. The cutout letters and centers were glued in place with silicone adhesive. It would have been nice to carve the pinecone in full relief but there just wasn't enough in the budget to warrant that. Instead, a stylized pinecone was cut and painted like the artwork I had designed. When stacking elements at different levels like I did with the pinecone, one must also cut a spacer or dummy to elevate the piece to the right height. Beneath the pinecone is a duplicate the thickness of the banner. This wasn't necessary with regard to the banner going over the circle. I simply generated the path files in that example leaving those underlying areas for the banner to sit on.

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## Karla Dare Insurance

**Substrate materials:** Sign Foam with plywood back.

**Primer coat:** FSC-88 WB Coastal enterprises water base primer filler.

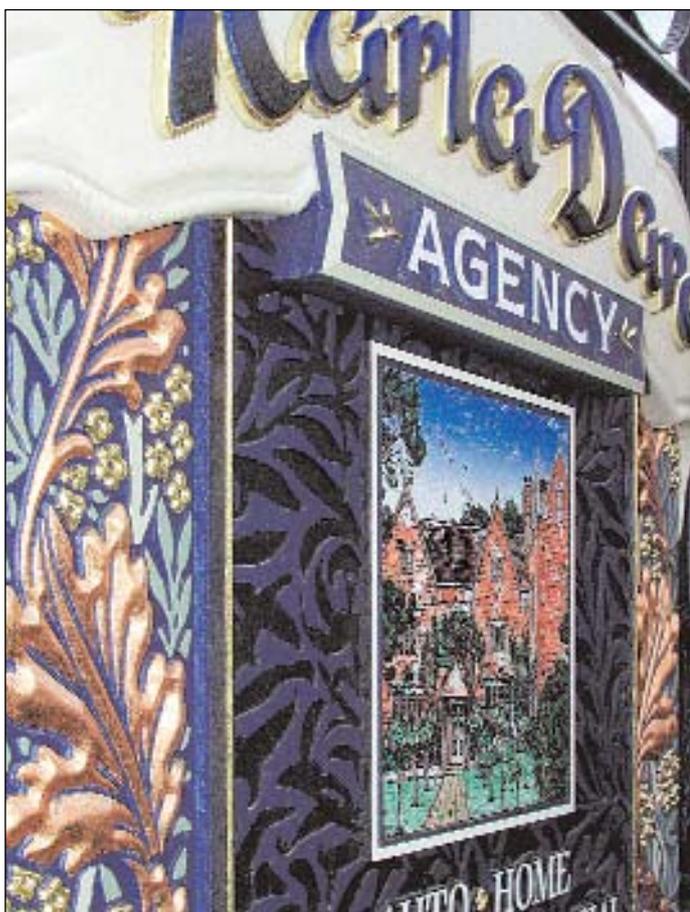
**Top coat:** Benjamin Moore exterior acrylic.

**Other materials:** Copper leaf and 23.5-karat gold leaf; Gerber Edge thermal resin print; white high-performance cast vinyl; Cyanoacrylate instant glue from Hot Stuff, Satellite City, Calif.; stainless steel eye bolts; cast aluminum light post from King Architectural; masonry.

KARLA DARE LOVES the work of William Morris who was one of the great figures of the 19th century and a pioneer of modern design. I was asked to design something for Karla with his work and his style in mind — a project I was pleased to sink my teeth into. William Morris's elegant borders and a print of the Kelmscott Manor (Morris's residence between 1871 and 1896) in the center of the design was enough to really give the sign the look that Karla was after.

For a small sign (38" x 38") this baby was a lot of work! All totaled there were over fifty separate pieces making up the body of this two-sided sign. I have always said that it is easier to machine and finish individual pieces and then apply them in the end — but this time I went to far!

Most of the pieces were very small and were hard to handle and even though the shop had pieces of urethane lying all over the place, I believe I made the right call here as well. It was impossible to get clean inside corners if I were to try to do this sign with a minimal number of layers, so rather than scaling back on the design I elected to inlay just about everything. I couldn't get away with one layer even on the main copy (Karla Dare). The gold outline is inlayed into the banners and the blue-to-black faded letters are inlayed into the gold outline. Most every piece was machined on the router using a 1/16" bit on the final pass. The secondary copy (auto, home, health, etc.) was cut and inlayed as little pads and high performance white vinyl was placed onto the pads. The banners were shaped on the router and then hand formed with an L-head grinder. There was no sanding needed with the pieces (although I did softened the copper leaves by hand). Everything was finished and then glued up with silicone adhesive. The Karla Dare letters were too small to properly get the silicone into the areas needed so I elected to use cyanoacrylate glue on them. My neighbor Jonathan, a talented bronze and metal worker who owns and operates JN Design, crafted and painted the nice light post for us, which really finished the piece.





## Village Papery

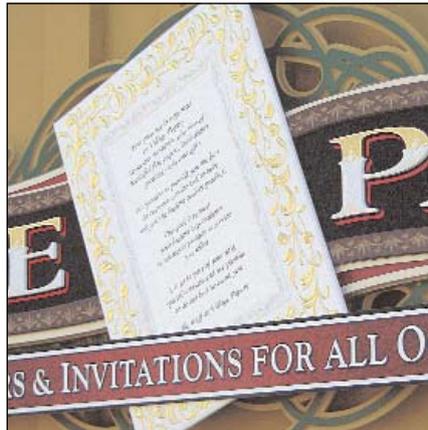
**Substrate materials:** Sign Foam with plywood back.

**Primer coat:** FSC-88 WB Coastal Enterprises water base primer filler.

**Top coat:** Benjamin Moore exterior acrylic.

**Other materials:** 23.5-karat gold leaf; 1/2" Sintra (PVC) sheet (Background spaghetti); 3mm Di-bond (Fine papers & invitation backer); black Osmalto (smaltz) background; 1/2" Sign Foam (Invitation).

**Mission statement and maroon banner:** Gerber Edge thermal resin print.



I'M PROUD TO SAY this sign came together very fast from design through production. I'm not sure why; it's just the way this one went together. The background was intended to be a free-flowing emulation of fine papers built from 1.5" Sign Foam finished with black smaltz and a bas relief border. The Sign Foam layer sits on top of the spaghetti, which was cut out and cleaned to two different levels for easy painting of the building color and the green. Raised Pads were left on the background to accept the Sign Foam letters (Village Papery).

The letters were painted white and then the top half was painted. While still wet, sand was sprinkled on to create a rough surface. The sand surface was sized and gilded with 23.5k gold leaf. This treatment creates a nice matte look (shiny from all directions). The invitation was routed and painted white then gilded and mounted over the paper banners. At this point the maroon banner at the bottom of the design needed to be mounted over everything. It was a distance of about five inches from the spaghetti to the top of the invitation. I pre-drilled the

maroon banner and spaghetti at points where I could run long machine screws through the face of the banner securing it with a nut on the back side of the spaghetti. 1/2" PVC pipe was cut to the needed length to act as spacers between both parts, giving the banner stability and a permanent height. The print was applied last over the machine screws to hide the screw heads.

### Happy New Year!

I'm sure you have noticed some common denominators in the material lists as well as with some of our working procedures. I believe we are better off sticking to the niche we have developed and sure, we sometimes will allow time for research and development (R&D) but for the most part we aren't trying to re-invent the production wheel here. Yes, we could be trying to "do it all" but I'd rather refine what I want to do and develop sound procedures to get it done. Working this way I don't feel like I'm spread so thin. I'm looking forward to yet another year working in the industry that I love.

Until next time, thanks for listening.

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