

STAMP OF APPROVAL

BY DAVID MCDONALD



Another way to achieve an elegant, custom hand-tooled background.

WHILE TOURING England, I admired the gilded backgrounds found on some of the pub signs. These signs involved a textured ground with a raised pattern — sometimes vines or maybe a repetitive design. This striking European background was complemented with a simple contrasting foreground of letters.

As I looked at the signs, I asked how the stamped texture was created and Doug Bernhardt, the master wood carver that he is, informed me of this: “A steel stamp and mallet are used to tool the areas and even out unsightly grain and splinters created during the carving process.”

Though simplistic in their design, these signs were very elegant and I was very excited to try this technique at home.

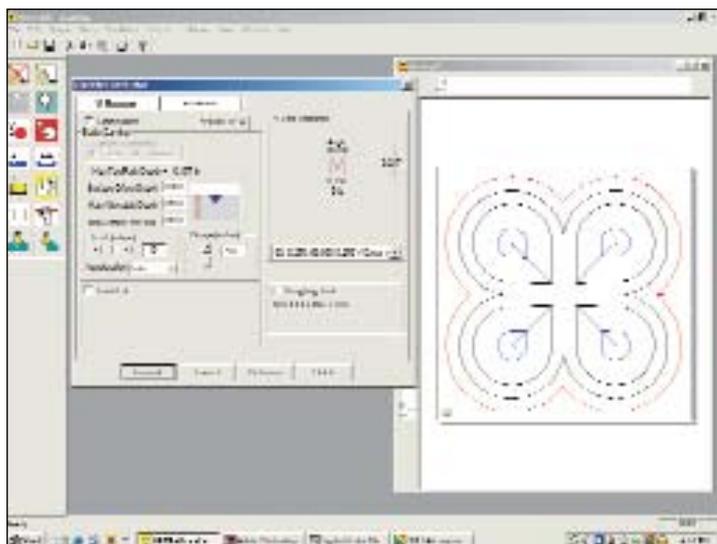
CONTROL FREAK

In our shop, efficiency is key to producing a profit, so I knew that I would need to create a process that could emulate the labor intensive hand carved appearance, yet get the job through the shop in a timely fashion. My Gerber router would do a good job with the dimensional properties of the sign, but what about the texture pattern?

I could have done some research to find available steel stamping tools but, as busy as we get here at the shop, I didn't make the time for that. I thought it would be nice to be able to create the stamp in-house where I could have control over the stamp design, not only on this job but also on any future jobs where the parameters might be different.



This residence is identified with a handsome European style sign above the entryway. We painted and gilded the architectural elements above.



Using Artpath software the stamp artwork is assigned a router path as shown.



The stamp is tooled using a solid surface acrylic material. The cutting depth was adjusted for each test until I was satisfied. In this case the middle profile was preferred.



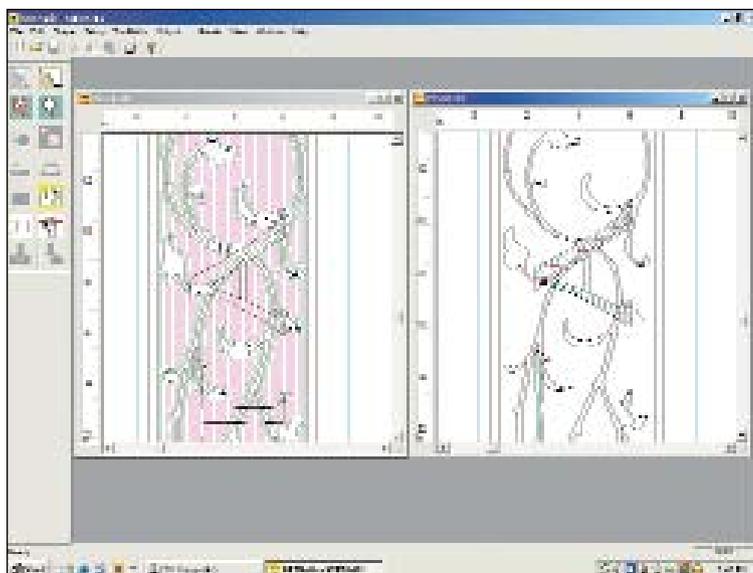
A wood dowel was attached to the stamp using cyanoacrylate glue and cut to a comfortable length to work with.



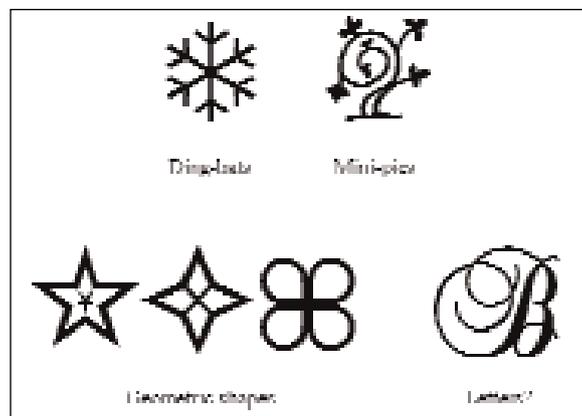
A picture of the stamp after it performed its intended job. The acrylic held up better than the dowel (note the palm tree end).



Here I am practicing the fundamentals of stamping the Sign Foam 3. I thought the tighter pattern with this rosette looked best!



Router files showing the basic paths generated to cut the job. The clean out was run first followed by the inlay for the letters.



I took a few minutes to collect a few ideas for stamps using basic items available in most computer aided sign making systems. As one can see it would be very easy to create something relevant to just about any design.

STAMP OF APPROVAL

CONTINUED



These photos show the details of the finished sign. Though not as elaborate as the European signs that inspired me — the sign is still quite handsome.

My solution was to hand machine the stamp with the router.

MAKING THE STAMP

The idea and function of the textured background is to reflect the brilliant nature of the gold. With that said, I wanted to tool a stamp that would yield a pillow type profile. A smooth profile of this type will give a soft glow to the gold rather than the sharp edged alternative.

I knew I would be using Sign Foam 3 on this residence sign and because of its closed cell nature it would be fairly easy to stamp. Solid surface acrylic was the material used to tool the stamp. I used it because it is hard enough to withstand the pounding necessary to get the job done on this small sign.

I created a simple rosette design and generated the necessary router paths. A 60-degree V-bit was used as I knew this would yield a pillow like profile. I cut a few stamps making different depth adjustments to each until I was satisfied with the results.

A wooden dowel was glued to the stamp using cyanoacrylate glue. I was concerned at first whether this glue would hold up under the pounding, but it did!

A scrap piece of Sign Foam 3 was used to try out the stamp and test different patterns. I found that I liked this particular pattern better when it is placed close together with little negative areas in between.

ROUTING THEORY 101

A sign created with this brilliant background could be accomplished with the use of texture and raised or incised letters of contrast only. To run a clean out path to remove material leaving the letters is quite simple and performed by many shops daily, after which one could follow with a stamp to create the texture.

The addition of a raised element or design (like I did with the vines) will add more brilliance and interest. The latter method is accomplished in the same fashion using only one more step. The

perimeter and the design are selected and a clean out path is generated.

In this case, the designs are treated like they were letters on a simple clean out. After the clean out is finished you can follow up with an inlay to accept the letters. The letters are cut out separately and glued in place when the sign is finished. This allows the gilding to go much faster as the letters are out of the way and the edges of the letters stay nice and clean.

Keep in mind that if you want to add a profile to the design as I did to the vines, it should be done before doing the clean out. If you execute a profile last, there will be a greater chance that you could do damage to the design as it is most vulnerable at this stage.

JUST IMAGINE

While writing this article I found myself thinking about the possibilities that can be put to use with regard to stamp design. There is a lot of stylized artwork available including fonts, ding-bats, mini-pics (from Adobe) and just about any geometric shape you can come up with, and it is quite easy to produce with today's computer aided sign making software.

For me it was helpful to have the technology available to make my idea fully realized in a timely manner. Because I used high-density urethane, I was able to use a material to create a stamp that exhibits a softer matrix. Although, if I were to do a job where wood was the material of choice, I suppose I could tool a stamp out of, say aluminum or brass, which should hold up through many a job.

The techniques I used on this sign satisfied my creative need to emulate a method used a century ago. Although my sign was, by comparison, simplified, I came away knowing that I can turn it up a notch creatively whenever the need to create something new or "old" arises.

Until next time, thanks for listening! 

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.

The Big Picture

BY DAVID MCDONALD



This digital fine art painting was created using the Art History brush in Adobe Photoshop 7.0. The rendering took me approximately seven minutes to complete. The technique is well suited for everyday sign work.



Using the Art History brush in Adobe Photoshop to achieve a "painterly" look from a photo.



First you need to open the image in Photoshop (on the task bar select File>Open). Grab the bottom right corner of the image and drag to better fill the screen.

THERE ARE MANY useful features in Adobe Photoshop and the Art History brush can be a valuable tool for anyone incorporating an illustration with their day-to-day sign work. Because I have a digital camera, I find this tool to be worth its weight in gold.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words — with regard to signage I have to agree. With the surge of large format printing in use today we are seeing more and more illustrations appearing in the outdoor advertising arena. We have been printing with the Gerber EDGE for quite some time now and have had many requests to include a photo relative to the project.

Sometimes I will find that some designs just don't look good with a realistic photo because they become too formal. An informal design might be better suited to a more *painterly* rendition of the same photo.

How can we achieve this without breaking out the artist colors and sacrificing many hours to accomplish this one task? It can be done using the Art History brush in Adobe Photoshop (version 5.5 and higher). In this article I will walk you through the simple process to transform a photo into an impressionistic painting that can be printed for a sign project.

HISTORY AS I KNOW IT

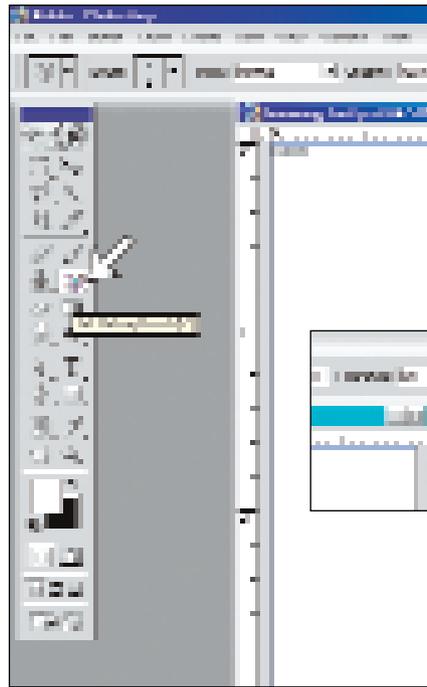
Why is it called Art History? Because it uses the history palette to paint from. What this means is that you can assign the painting to a step that was accomplished previously in the history palette and when you paint with the Art History brush, the character of the brush is assigned to that step selected in the history palette.

Once learned, this technique is quite simple to do — although you can take it to extremes using various layer techniques, building up a beautiful piece of digital fine art. The Art History brush allows you to use all of the available layer blending modes and has a few adjustable settings that alter the outcome of the brush stroke.

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Next you need to fill the entire canvas with white. In the tool bar select the default color icon. This will change the default colors to black and white. Toggle the white color chip to the foreground. On the task bar choose Edit>Fill (short-cut keys=alt+back-space in Windows or option backspace on the Mac).



From the toolbar select the Art History brush. In the Art History brush palette select a small brush size (try 4 or 5 pixels). Set the tolerance to "0" and set the brush type. (For this exercise I chose "tight long".)

The most important of these settings is the size and shape of the brush. Shapes like tight, loose, dab and curl can be selected and the opacity of each stroke can be adjusted at any time during the painting process. The tolerance setting allows you to control whether you can continue to apply paint over the area that has already been stroked. A setting of "0" will allow you to continue to paint over areas already painted whereas a setting of "100" will save your painted areas on the canvas. The *area* setting allows you to control (in pixels) the area each click of the mouse or stroke will occupy on the canvas.

THE PROCESS OF PAINTING

I snapped this photo of a hummingbird bathing himself in our backyard and thought it would make a good study for this tutorial.

The photo is first opened in Photoshop. Next you need to select the entire image or canvas and fill it with white paint. Make sure the history palette is opened on the screen (short-cut key F5). There you will see the two steps that you previously executed (open and fill).

From the tool bar, select the Art History brush and click on the icon box to the left of the *open* History State in the history palette. With the Art History brush still selected adjust your brush size to a somewhat small size and choose the *tight long* brush shape from within the Art History brush options palette.

Now you are ready to paint! By clicking or painting with the brush on the white canvas you are essentially erasing the white History State to expose the original opened Image State. Doing so will leave behind the characteristics of the pre-setup Art History settings — pretty cool huh? It's that simple! The photo of the hummingbird took me about seven minutes to complete.

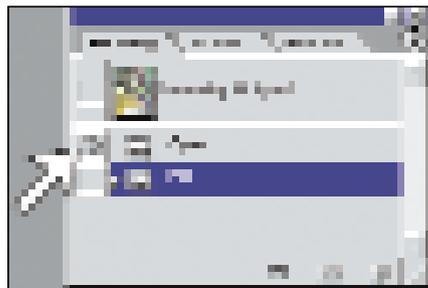
The next time you need to incorporate an illustration within your design and a painted look is the answer, give this technique a try!

Until next time, thanks for listening!

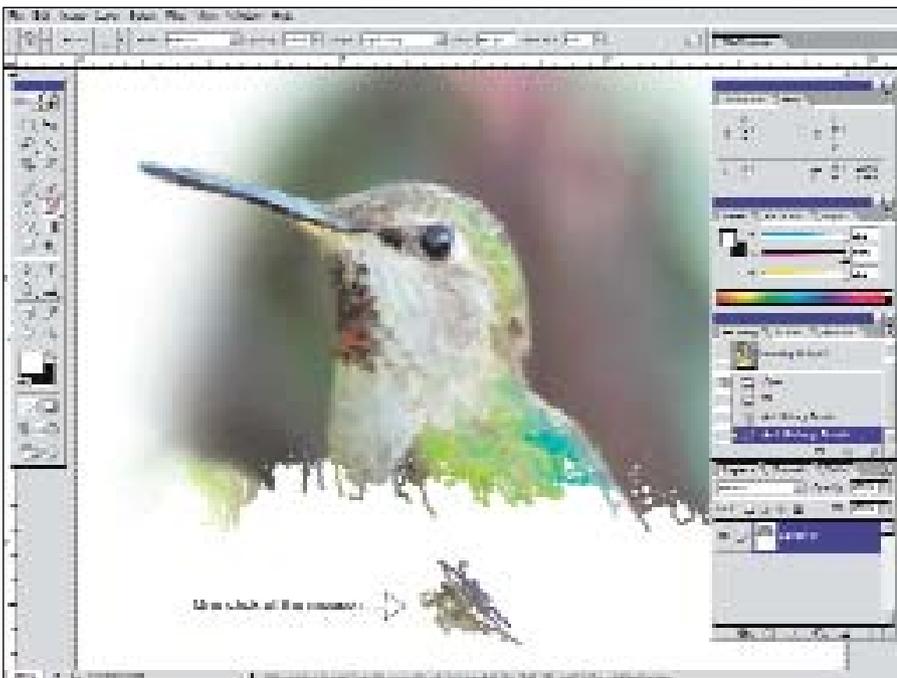
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In the history palette click on the icon box located to the left of the History State you wish to paint "back" to (in this case the "open" state). Now all you have to do is start painting!



Click drag and paint. Here I am about halfway through the photo. The illustration shows the look of this style brush (tight long) as I click once away from the work.

