



SMALL TOWN SIGN ARTISTS

Vince Brodeur

Sanibel Island, FL

Vince Brodeur started out in the sign trade as a sign designer for a company that sold illuminated signs. He did renderings, sketches, and provided drawings for permitting, as well as shop drawings for fabrication and sign installation. Later, he also did sales presentations to customers.

After 15 years in this phase of the business in the San Francisco area, he moved to Sanibel Island 10 years ago to pursue his interests in sculpture and painting.

"I have a background in general commercial art," says Vince, "and behind that is a desire to be in the fine arts."

About 8 years ago, he started doing signs again, this time as a one-man shop, seeing them through from design to installation. At first it was just small signs, and that led to larger work.

Vince's work is mostly wood signs. He does some sandblasted signs, but frequently uses cutout letters. Distinctive shapes help make his signs especially attractive.

With about 4800 permanent residents, Sanibel is a small town. The tourist population varies throughout the year. It peaks during the winter months at approximately 11,000.

Vince does not rely exclusively on signwork for his income. He does painting and sculpture, and teaches painting to several students. As far as signs go, Vince says, "We aren't in a production situation at all."

Cutout letters

Vince often uses a plastic surface on a cutout letter. This is the case on the Lime Tree Center sign. He likes the durable finish it gives the letters.

To do this, he first cuts a piece of wood and a piece of acrylic sheet to an adequate size for the letter. Next, he uses a temporary adhesive, such as Scotch Spray 77, to hold the acrylic to the wood during cutting and sanding.

Letters are cut with a stationary jig saw or bandsaw. Centers of letters like O and P are drilled then cut with a portable saber saw blade chucked in the stationary jigsaw. The blade is not held at the top, so it can be inserted through the hole that has been drilled.

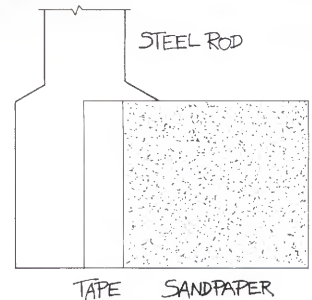
"You can get the same basic tool by mounting a saber saw on a router table," says Vince.

Sanding is done with a sanding drum on the drill press, and a 1/2-inch sanding belt on a bandsaw. He also uses an im-

proved sanding drum that lets him change sandpaper quickly and easily.

The letters are usually adhered to the background with epoxy. Vince lays the sign flat, coats the back of the letter with epoxy then positions it on the back-

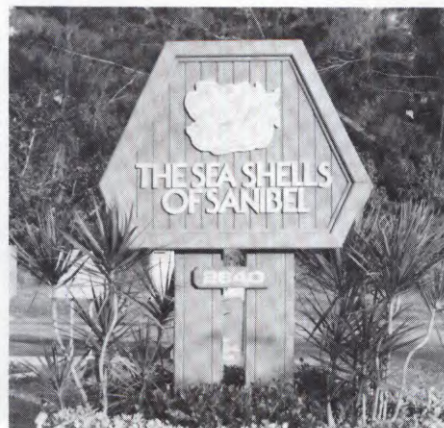
A sanding drum for letter edges



Reduce a steel rod to fit in a drill press chuck. Tape a strip of sandpaper to the rod in a flaglike fashion. The rotation of the rod will wrap the sandpaper around it. As the sandpaper wears out, just tear the worn portion off.



Gilded letters on blue, gray border



Cream letters on dark brown



Ivory letters on medium brown

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ground. For small copy on these signs, he often uses small plastic letters spray painted to the proper color.

Island sign business

Sign permits are often a problem for the sign artist. Sanibel is no exception.

“It’s important to get familiar with the people who handle the sign permitting, and to get an idea of what they want to do. You can talk it over with them and find what they are going to get mad at. Often these things can be interpreted more than one way, and you can’t expect them to see things your way if you have caused them problems in the past.”

What does Vince like best about being in the sign business on the island?

“I guess there is a minor ego trip in being able to create long term displays, especially when the designs prove pleasing. Also, the relaxed pace of signwork on the island allows me to get more involved with sculpture and painting.”

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