

Bob Kaschak

Peru, New York

Shop name: Artisan Sign Co. **Shop size:** 900 sq. ft. **Age:** 39 **Graphics equipment:** A couple of PCs and a 24-in. Summa D60 plotter/cutter
Web site: www.artisansigncompany.com

I specialize in hand-carved, gold-leafed signs, but I don't limit myself to that. I'm always trying to sell up, and I'm working on getting bigger and more elaborate signs out there. A client will often ask for a basic sign during an initial meeting, but they soon forget about that after they learn about how effective a well-designed, dimensional sign can be. The result of educating customers is often a very nice sign that they appreciate.



I live in the extreme north-east corner of New York state. I have the Adirondacks at my

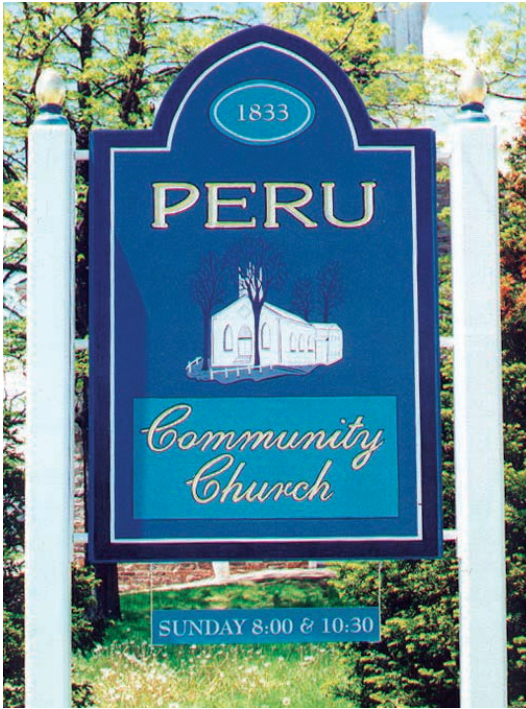
back door, and Lake Champlain out the front door. We're about 15 miles south of Plattsburgh, which is a city of 15,000, in an absolutely beautiful area—we're surrounded by apple orchards and dairy cows. It's a semi-touristy area. In the summertime we get a lot of visitors because of the lake, and in the winter there's a lot of skiers. We're only 35 miles from Lake Placid.

Getting started My sign making stemmed from doing some woodworking when I was younger. The interest in woodworking came from my father. He was a magnificent craftsman with wood and metal. Everything he created revealed his commitment to his craft.

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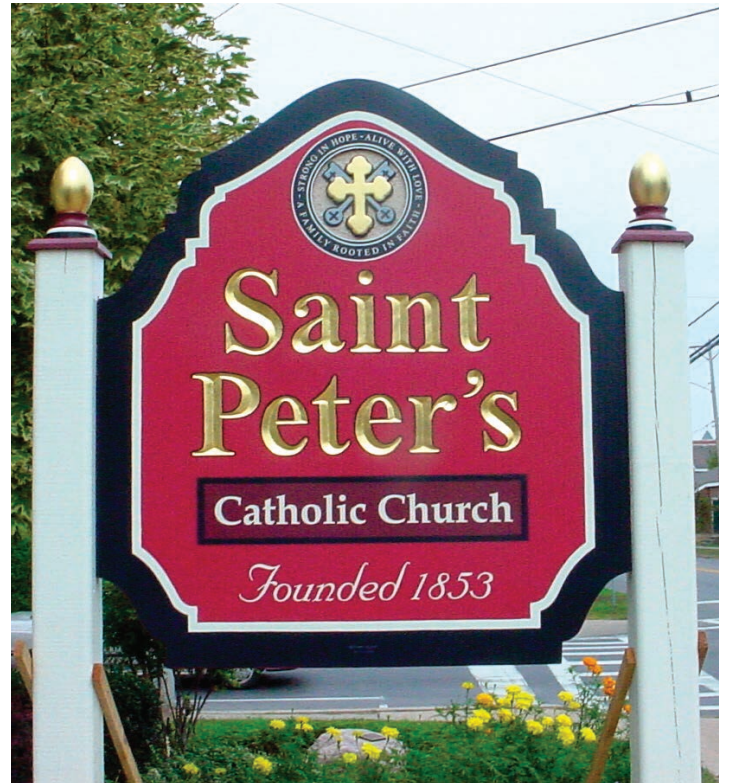
Double-faced 5-by-12 ft. sign made of two faces mounted to a 1½-by-2-in. aluminum box tubing truss. Sign faces are hand-carved ¾-in. high-density urethane board laminated with epoxy to ½-in. overlaid plywood. The 11-by-11-in. pressure-treated posts are skirted in overlaid plywood and painted with latex paint.



4-by-5-ft. panel on 3/4-in. high density urethane board laminated to 1/2-in. overlaid plywood, installed on 6-by-6-in. pressure treated posts; lettering is 23k gold leaf and sign is finished in acrylic latex paint.



4-by-6-ft. panel of 3/4-in. high density urethane board laminated to 1/2-in. overlaid plywood. "The border is the actual nautical alphabet, A to Z," says Bob, and there are two hidden messages in the border." Lettering is 23k gold leaf; paint is 1-Shot [219-949-1684, www.1shot.com] enamel and acrylic latex. Posts are cedar, wrapped with nylon rope.



Double-faced 48-by-54-in. sign on 6-by-6-in. posts. The faces are hand-carved 3/4-in. HDU laminated with epoxy to 1/2-in. overlaid plywood. The background behind graphic is coarse white smalts, carved lettering is gilded, all paint is latex.

“In the future I’d like to work more on the marketing side of this business.”



72-by-32-in. vertical grain redwood panel with 23k gold leaf lettering and acrylic latex paint, mounted on 6-by-6-in. cedar posts. “I believe this is the last redwood sign I did,” says Bob.

He taught me a lot in the short time that I had with him—he died when I was very young. But, I really picked up the passion that he had to sit down with a piece of paper, sketch out and design a piece, make it functional, make it aesthetically pleasing and then build it. A sign is kind of similar, or at least I look at it that way. I really have the creative juices for the dimensional-type stuff—the gold leafing, the carving and the more ornate work. I am trying to pay closer attention to the small details that make a big difference, and hopefully set my work apart from others.

The event that triggered my interest in sign making came when my wife’s boss asked if I’d carve a sign for her. Looking back, it was pretty pathetic—but it was a sign, and soon after that I stumbled upon a copy of *SignCraft* in a local art store. I thought, “Wow, a magazine for people who make signs!” And really, that’s what inspired me. I took off running from there. It worked out very well—my signs started getting better and better, and people started noticing them. The demand was there, so the business grew.



Double-faced 48-by-52-in. sign on 6-by-6-in. posts. The faces are hand carved 3/4-in HDU laminated with epoxy to 1/2-in. overlaid plywood. The background behind graphic is coarse white smalts “drowned” in dark green acrylic latex paint and Smith’s cream. The carved lettering is gilded.



After I made that first sign I started paying closer attention to signs and asking questions like, “How did they make that? How did they carve that? Is that real gold?” The more I learned, the more I wanted to learn.

My shop My home-based shop consists of about 200 sq. ft. of office space and 700 sq. ft. of shop space. I’ve always had a lot of wood-working tools, and I still do most of my production work by hand. Now I have a 24-in. Summa [800-527-7778, www.summausa.com] D60 plotter/cutter vinyl cutter and a couple PCs that I use to run CorelDraw! and Photoshop, which I use for all my design work.

The plotter has turned out to be a great tool; I use it to cut my masks for most of my carving. I’ll lay down the mask and then spray down sheet metal layout dye. When I pull up the mask, I have nice, solid blue filled-in letters with a really nice thin layer of this sheet metal layout dye. All I have to do is carve away the blue. It works really well, and I find it much more accurate than a pounce pattern, or a pattern projected from a transparency.

In the future, I’d like to work more on the marketing side of this business—not only offer a company a sign, but also design their logo and push it through the further stages of stationery, business cards, brochures, hats, shirts, whatever. I may not do all the work myself, but would sub it out and get to do the dimensional work that I like best. I see myself moving in that direction in the near future.

I’m very fortunate that the work I do the most is my favorite type of work. In addition, I have a lovely wife and two teenage boys. I enjoy kayaking, sailing and hiking with my family—we’re pretty close-knit and we make time to enjoy life and each other. •SC

—From an interview with John McIltrout



42-by-36-in. panel of 3/4-in. high density urethane board laminated to 1/2-in overlaid plywood. The aluminum brackets run all the way through the sign. Secondary sign is 1/2-in. overlaid plywood. Lettering is 23k gold leaf; paint is acrylic latex.



4-by-5-ft. vertical grain redwood sign. Lettering is 23k gold leaf; paint is acrylic latex.