

Tips & Tricks

Timesaving shortcuts from SignCraft readers

Dealing with a lousy customer-provided design

It's always tough to try to change someone's design, even if you know it's terrible. I'm not a designer, but I've owned a sign business for more than 30 years. I understand good design, though, and somewhat understand dealing with people.

Here's my solution for dealing with a poor design that a customer brings to us. It's easy to insult people without meaning to, so I simply tell them that I want to give them a second option to review. That's all I have time to say, because I'm off trying to sell someone else another sign—LOL!

Dave Mabeus, SignCo, Anchorage, Alaska

Acetone and dishwashing soap for adhesive removal

The *Tips & Tricks* section in the May/June 2020 issue of *SignCraft* had some great information on vinyl removal. My suggestion is on a solvent to use to remove the glue that is left behind. I have found that mixing acetone with a little Dawn dishwashing soap works great for removing the glue.

The acetone dissolves the glue, and the soap helps keep the glue from smearing and sticking to the surface again. I have to re-do lettering on quite a few painted aluminum trailers and have not had the acetone/Dawn mixture harm the paint yet, but I always do a little testing on an inconspicuous area first.

A gallon of acetone costs about \$20 at the big box home improvement stores, and the Dawn dishwashing soap dissolves really well in the acetone. I used to use xylene, but the dishwashing soap won't dissolve well in it. And if you are not careful, xylene will attack the painted surface.

Alex Lvertich, TKO Signs and Graphics, Brandon, Mississippi

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Upgrade a sign face with an attractive mounting

One easy way to upscale a sign is with the mounting that holds the face. The structure can add a lot more impact to the sign—more than just putting the sign out there on a couple of plain posts. Even if the sign is relatively simple, an interesting mounting can be a dramatic improvement.

The Arbor Landing sign is a good example. The sign is relatively simple—Komicel PVC board carved through a black vinyl background, with letters and graphic finished with 1 Shot Metallic Brass enamel. We wanted to upgrade the sign to upscale the image, so we did an interesting mounting using posts with PVC covers and caps.

Michael Keene, Woodcraft Sign Shoppe, Richmond, Virginia



Create a crackle finish background using wood glue

If you hand letter, one of the cool things you can do is create faux vintage signs—signs that look like worn, weathered relics from the past. A panel with a crackled finish lends a lot to this effect, and you can create this using wood glue, such as Elmer's Glue, and exterior acrylic house paint.

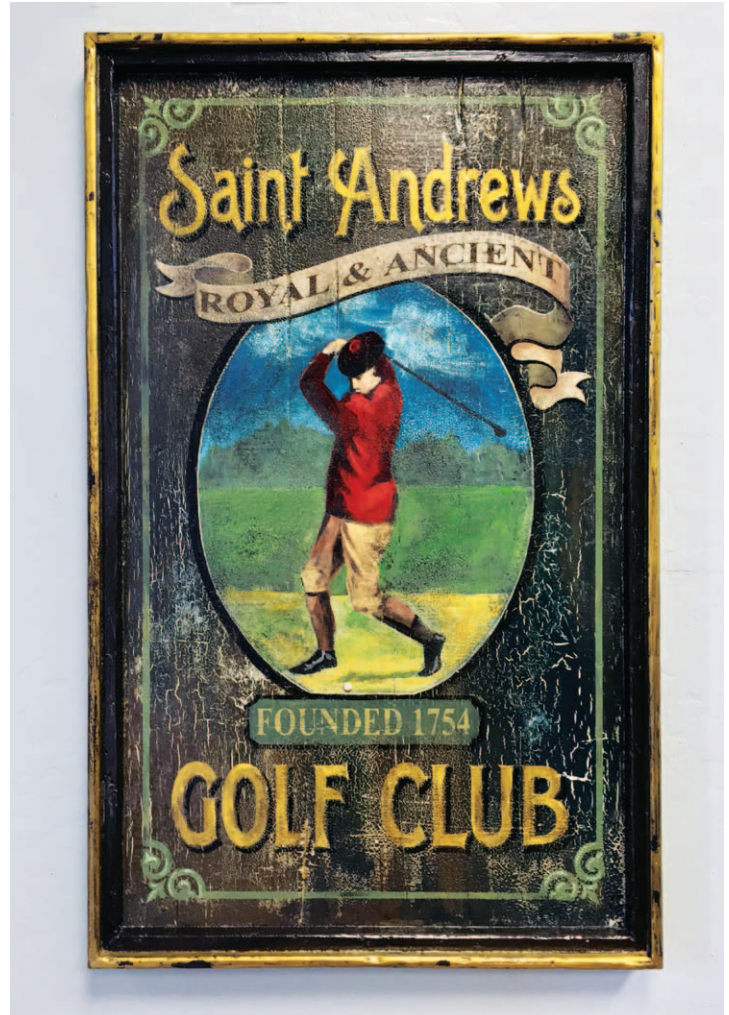
I prime the panel then coat with exterior acrylic house paint with a gloss finish—not matte, satin or semi-gloss. This base color is usually dark to provide contrast with the crackle finish coat, which is usually a light color. Allow to dry completely.

Then I apply the thinned wood glue and coat the background, then speed the drying process with a heat gun or hair dryer. Once the glue has skinned over but not yet dried through in all places, I topcoat with a light-colored matte finish paint that contrasts to the dark background.

Crackling will start to occur pretty quickly. I use a hair dryer to speed the process and create larger cracks.

You can letter with a dry brush here and there, or thin the paint more than usual to let the brush strokes show. After the lettering is dry, you can scuff and sand the lettering to add to the weathered look.

Howard Bertram, Bertram Signs & Graphics, Carefree, Arizona



Thin some white or yellow wood glue slightly with water to about the consistency of tomato soup. Coat the entire background quickly. Here in Arizona, things dry almost instantly, so this may differ depending on the humidity in different parts of the country.



Let the glue dry for a few minutes. It will get dull on its surface, and thin areas will start to turn clear. You can speed this with a hair dryer or heat gun. Topcoat with the desired background color paint.



Use a light-colored matte finish paint that contrasts to the dark background. Don't over-brush the paint or it will start to pick up the glue. Crackling starts to occur quickly. For more crazing and cracks, I use a heat gun again. Once dry, it's ready to letter.



The look of crackled, weathered paint creates an interesting effect on the background.