

# Designer at work: Dave Correll

Faribault, Minnesota



**D**ave Correll's 35-year career in the sign business has taken him in a lot of directions, from sign painting to 3D sign making to murals and more. Most recently it's taken him to a new position with Rare Aircraft, a company that restores vintage airplanes. Dave's fabrication and painting skills fit right in on these airplanes of the 1930s and '40s. And he still makes signs, focusing on hand-lettered and custom signs as well as mural projects.

"I'm just now catching up on last summer's projects," Dave says. "I have a few nice projects ahead of me, but my goal is to just take one sign at a time. I plan to do a lot more hand lettering and do them the way I used to make signs. I'm looking forward to it. I'll use the computer here and there, but it won't be the focus of production."

Dave is also a prolific type designer with a knack for creating highly legible fonts that are

especially effective for sign work. He has designed 22 fonts to date, and you'll find them all at [www.letterheadfonts.com](http://www.letterheadfonts.com). Here's what he has to say about his work today:

**Equipment:** I use FlexiSign and a 24-in. Graphtec plotter. I have always subbed out the digital printing, and that worked well for us. It made better sense than buying a printer and dealing with that technology. Some people like that, but I prefer making signs to printing them. I have a 4-by-8-ft. ShopBot CNC router, too.

**Fonts:** I often hand letter the primary copy then scan it and use it that way. I also tend to use some of the fonts that I've designed for LetterheadFonts.com. They're based on the letterstyles I've used for years so they just work well in my layouts for me. I use a few fonts



Letters and graphics are high density urethane board [HDU] cut on the ShopBot CNC router [[www.shopbottools.com](http://www.shopbottools.com)], then mounted on an aluminum composite panel with an aluminum tube frame, finished with acrylic paints.









HDU letters, cut on the ShopBot CNC router then mounted on an aluminum composite panel; finished with acrylic paints.



Letters were cut on the ShopBot CNC router then mounted on an aluminum composite panel with an aluminum tube frame. Letters are finished with 23K gold leaf.

by other designers, too, like Duncan Wilkey's Garner. It's a nice block letter that I use often.

I like creating new and different lettering for a sign. It makes it unique. That's how most of the fonts came to be—I designed some lettering for a sign then decided it might make a cool font. I really enjoy creating a complete font that others can use in their work, too.

**Inspiration:** I look at a lot of vintage advertising and old books. I really like the old stuff—that's what I'm usually drawn to. You can find some ideas on Pinterest, too. Of course, I thumb through my old copies of *SignCraft* for ideas.

**Mentors:** When I was getting started, it was Bob Behounek, of course, and Chester Cunningham and Mike Stevens. I'm sure you've heard that over and over again. Their designs were so clean and impactful. That's what I wanted to do.

I'm tired of the whimsical fonts and special effects we see so much of today. They don't have much impact, and they aren't very effective. It doesn't give much value to the customer. The work that I've always admired has appeal and impact without just being trendy.

**Workspace:** My shop is about 2500 sq. ft—nothing fancy. I have an office where I do my



Old window frame with a wood insert, hand lettered with enamels





Hand lettered with enamels



HDU letters and graphics, cut on the ShopBot CNC router then mounted on an aluminum composite panel with an aluminum tube frame, finished with exterior acrylic paints.



Hand lettered with enamels



Digital print on an aluminum composite panel



CNC routed HDU panel finished with exterior acrylic paint



There's more on SignCraft.com:  
This article is online with even more  
photos on [www.signcraft.com](http://www.signcraft.com).



Wood signs, hand-lettered with acrylic latex paint and distressed



Aluminum composite panel with aluminum tube frame, finished with acrylic latex paints



Palladium leaf and enamel on glass



design work and my paint easel where I can letter something up, and the rest is shop space.

**Website:** Our website can be found at [www.brushworksigns.com](http://www.brushworksigns.com). There's a tab that will take you to the fonts I've designed, too.

**Routine:** I usually do best when I have some quiet time to play with a design. When I was running the shop full time, I had a full-time employee who worked four ten-hour days. When he was here, I usually focused on production, though I would do the occasional design project. But on Friday, I was here by myself, and I saved the design work until then.

**Shifting gears:** Letting go of the shop after all those years was a big thing. It wasn't easy. But I really needed a change, and I wanted to get back to doing the sort of creative work that I liked best. This has worked out well. I really enjoy working on these vintage airplanes.

It's about craftsmanship, and I like that. That's what I always liked best about sign work, too. This change lets me pick-and-choose my projects and do the sort of signs that involve craftsmanship, and that's great. **SG**

—from an interview with Tom McLlrot



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