

Sign & Digital Graphics

2011 Portfolio Contest: Sign Design Winner



By: [Matt Dixon](#)
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Industry's finest sign craftsmen show what they can do

We have the easy part. Sign & Digital Graphics magazine's annual Portfolio Contest gives our magazine the opportunity to have the world's best sign makers send us their best work, free of charge, so that we can gather our judges and determine the best of the best. Every year we know that we'll receive examples of signage that do our industry proud and make the entire industry take notice of talented and creative people.

The judges, however, have the hard part. They are the ones who have to pick from an assortment of signs, any of which this magazine would be proud to display on its cover. The judges who took on the task this year are Mike "Mike Z" Szczoczarz of Countryside Signs in Seekonk, Mass.; Charity Jackson of Visual Horizons Custom Signs in Modesto, Calif.; Matt Charboneau of Matt Charboneau Signs in Drake, Colo.; former Sign Business magazine associate editor Ryan Fugler; and Sign & Digital Graphics magazine's Art Director, Linda Cranston.

While the decisions of the judges certainly weren't unanimous, the votes have given us our top three signs of 2011, plus a number of honorable mentions.

Didn't get your sign submitted for the contest? That's the best part about annual competitions—you get another chance in 2012. So next year, keep our contest in the back of your mind as you install that next masterpiece. The contest is free to enter and there are no limits to how many signs you can submit.

Also, keep an eye out soon for entry forms for our annual Auto Art Contest that features the best in paint and vinyl mobile advertisements. You can also enter online at www.sdgmag.com.



1st Place
House of Signs
Frisco, Colo.
www.houseofsignsco.com

When Roger Cox of House of Signs in Frisco, Colo., put together his pitch for the Dillon Dam Brewery, he had his sights set on winning an award.

"I had told (the brewery owners), I am so happy with the outcome of this particular concept and the materials and things that I am choosing; I want to produce an award-winning sign for you," Cox says. "And the irony of the whole thing is that I actually said that to them."

Cox had been working with the brewery for years for things such as interactive signs for a self-guided brewery tour and the brewery's original "temporary" sign put up during construction 12 years prior. Cox had to work hard to get the brewery to upgrade to a more permanent sign.

"They probably got tired of hearing from me," jokes Cox. "I think they got to the point where, well for one, it was starting to dilapidate. This thing was designed as a construction site sign. My signs hold up really well to begin with, but you never expect for a construction sign to last 12 years."



When the time came to upgrade, the sign proposal Cox offered was a little more than the brewery had expected.

"They had such sticker shock that they sat on it for a year and a half, and then I finally got the green light," Cox says.

The sign is 16 feet tall. The Dam lettering is 40" tall.

"It just overwhelms you standing in front of this sign, but it is completely proportionate because the building is so big, and so it just really works well," Cox says.

Cox and Mark Bocksch did the construction of the sign. It features 150-year-old reclaimed wood planks over a steel framework for the post. The background of the lettering is a custom-mixed smaltz, and the lettering is gold leaf with some other special effects. The barley was hand carved and the beer was created using high-resolution image of one of the brewery's beers on Dibond. The sign is illuminated using a Phillips eW Graze Powercore linear LED lighting fixture.



"It is one of those signs that is so festive and so captivating. Every time I see it, it really is working," Cox says. "Having an effective sign to draw people in from the highway, the short story of it is that their numbers are way up since the sign went up, which is just wonderful. That's the success story you want your clients to have."

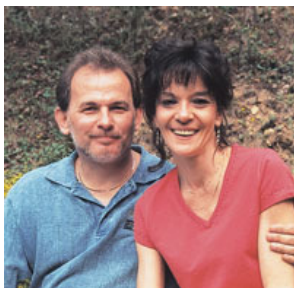


2nd Place

Custom Craftsman Signs

Sevierville, Tenn.

www.customcraftsmansigns.com



When Brother Zank and Vicki of Custom Craftsman Signs in Sevierville, Tenn., created the sign for Auntie Belham's Cabin Rentals, they were building a memorial to an old family friend as well as a monument sign.

A long time ago, Custom Craftsman Signs did some work for a family-owned store.

"We've been here in Sevier County for 20 years," says Zank. "One of our first clients when we came was more or less the same family."

A daughter of that family, Shannon Hercutt, had grown up and started a realty business in the area. She built a building in a new park and had her secretary call Custom Craftsman Signs about possible work. She already had a computer drawing of what she wanted.

Being a native of the area she wanted a rustic sign to match the local vibe. However, before Custom Craftsman was actually hired for the job, the client passed away.

Shannon had willed the business to her sister, Penny Hercutt, and a cousin, John Madewell, who lived in Georgia. The cousin decided to move and run the realty business.

Penny followed up with Custom Craftsman Signs about the sign and Zank designed a monument that fit in well with the Smokey Mountain landscape.

"I really wanted to respect the owner's thoughts as much as I could. After all, she was an old family friend who is no longer with us," Zank says. "So, I poured over the original design that she had done at her computer. That kind of window unit I have up high on there was something I never did know what she had in mind with that.

"I guess you might call it almost a logo, but to me it was a fairly powerful design element that I could float up at the top. And I want to say it's kind of a window to her soul

because that just what it wants to remind me of."

For construction, Zank originally wanted to use real rock because he prefers natural materials, but deadline and design dictated that the 14' x 22' monument employ steel framing, cement board and stucco used to make the sign look as natural as possible. However, the left column and surrounding landscaping are natural stone.

The large bear was made from a 900-pound sycamore log and was created by Capt. Dave Lavoie with a chainsaw.

Other features of the project include hand-carved HDU letters, gable, frame, and slogan panel; Foam Visions bark panels; frosted acrylic on black PVC for the window graphic element; an artifact-carved slogan panel with incise-blasted copy; and round-face carved "AB" letters stud-mounted projecting off the uneven slab on 3/8" flat-cut aluminum outline plates.

"What I have been doing on some of these is putting a large light behind so that at night there's as much or more light silhouetting the thing giving it this almost godly glow around the shape of it," says Zank.

The monument sign was finished over a period of three months and will be a beautiful lasting tribute for years to come.



3rd Place

Danthonia Designs

Inverell, Australia

www.danthonia.com.au

Danthonia Designs, based in Inverell, Australia, takes identifying boundaries to a new level with a series of roadside branding signs.

The newly amalgamated Isaac Regional Council of Queensland, Australia, required the design and supply of seven new boundary signs to be placed at their major points of entry. The signs needed to feature the council's new IRC logo and images to portray the history and success of agricultural and mining operations in the area.

"Seven identical signs were ordered at the same time," says Danthonia's Joe McKernan. "So although some of the work involved hand-crafting techniques, we did make efficient use of the opportunity by creating identical components in small batches and using some production line techniques."

To be effective as a place-branding tool, each sign had to be large, close to the roadside and readable at night. To ensure traffic safety, the state road authority required incorporation of a breakaway post system.

The contemporary design was rendered using a combination of modern weather resistant materials and traditional sign-crafting techniques. McKernan says the customer approved the design after four revisions. Dimensional elements were hand sculpted from EPS and urethane hard-coated. Grain images were roller painted through a mask. Text was chisel carved into HDU, hand painted and then finished with a retro-reflective coating.

Contrasting paint textures were used to enhance dimensionality. Pylons were engineered and constructed to break away should they be struck by a vehicle at high speed.

The design was created using Adobe Illustrator. Australian Visual Solutions carving and paint masks were plotted on a Roland Camm-1 PRO. Signfoam3 HDU was laminated using 3M adhesives to a PVC backing with urethane hard-coated EPS add-on components. The signs were primed with Resene Quick-Dry, painted using Dulux Weathershield acrylics and finished with Luxury Paints Low Sheen Graffiti Buster 200. The retro-reflective text was coated with Barloworld Coatings White Knight Reflect-all.

The 6" x 6" marine-grade aluminum pylons were fitted with a Transpo Break-Safe post breakaway support system and finished with an AkzoNobel-Interpon powdercoat. Danthonia has quite the team for its work.

"It took us about three months from design through installation and at any given time several designers, artists, carvers, painters, metal workers, engineers, logistics people, shippers, installers etc., would have been working on the project," McKernan says.

Danthonia is in the process of moving to a larger facility that McKernan says will help with efficiency and capacity. The company has also launched a feature on its website to give clients the opportunity to design their own hand-crafted signs.

HONORABLE MENTIONS



Danthonia Designs
Inverell, Australia
Designer: Nancy Kaiser
www.danthonia.com



House of Signs
Frisco, Colo.
www.houseofsignsco.com



YESCO Custom Electric Signs

Denver, Colo.

www.yesco.com



D 2 Fabrications, Inc.

Oxford, Fla.

www.dsquaredfabrications.com



Metro Sign & Awning

Tewksbury, Mass.

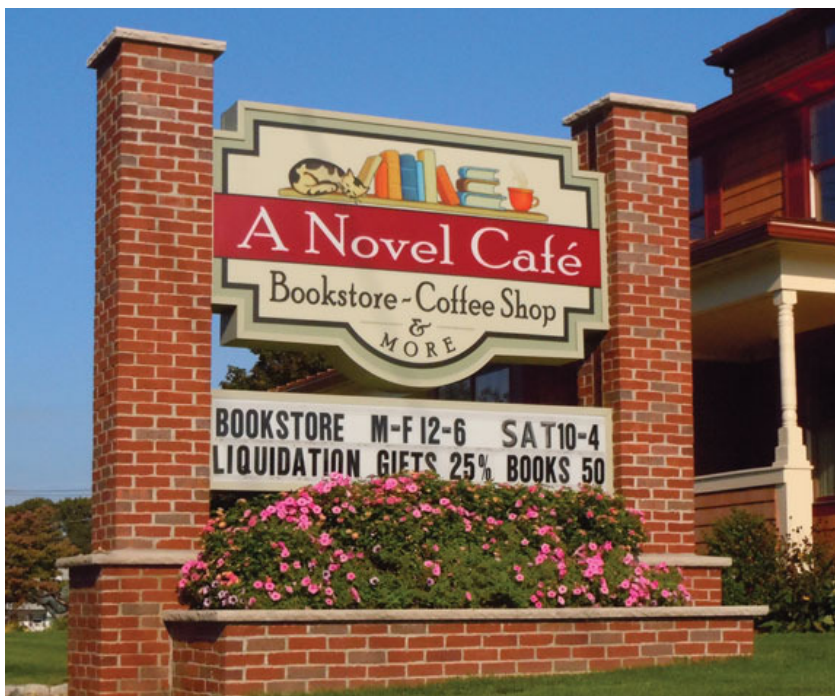
www.metrosignandawning.com



Signs of Gold

Williamsville, N.Y.

www.signsofgold.com



Metro Sign & Awning

Tewksbury, Mass.

www.metrosignandawning.com



The Great American Sign Co., Inc.

Basking Ridge, N.J.

www.greatamericansign.net

