

## Dealing with home-spun designs

Sometimes I can't help but think about the number of clients who bring in their own sign layout ideas or designs that they drew themselves. I've got to admit that some really don't look too bad and could hold down a pretty decent layout. However, the majority of these home-brewed works of art need a trip to the immediate care center!

Just thinking about the amount of time spent on most of these layouts before I see them boggles my

mind. Most clients are so proud of these design accomplishments that any negative feedback would set off World War III so fast that the rest of us wouldn't have time to take cover. If we are to be of help in these delicate situations, we need to practice walking on eggshells with army boots on, while carrying 50-lb. sandbags in each arm—without cracking anything.

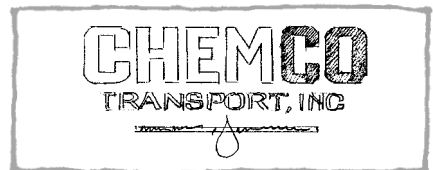
The last time I addressed this situation with a client, I got into

some hot water because he didn't tell me who really did the design work he gave me. Remember that what you're given sometimes didn't originate where one says it does. Another sign company might allow their designs out without identification or a copyright. Such designs often float around the area without proper landing instructions.

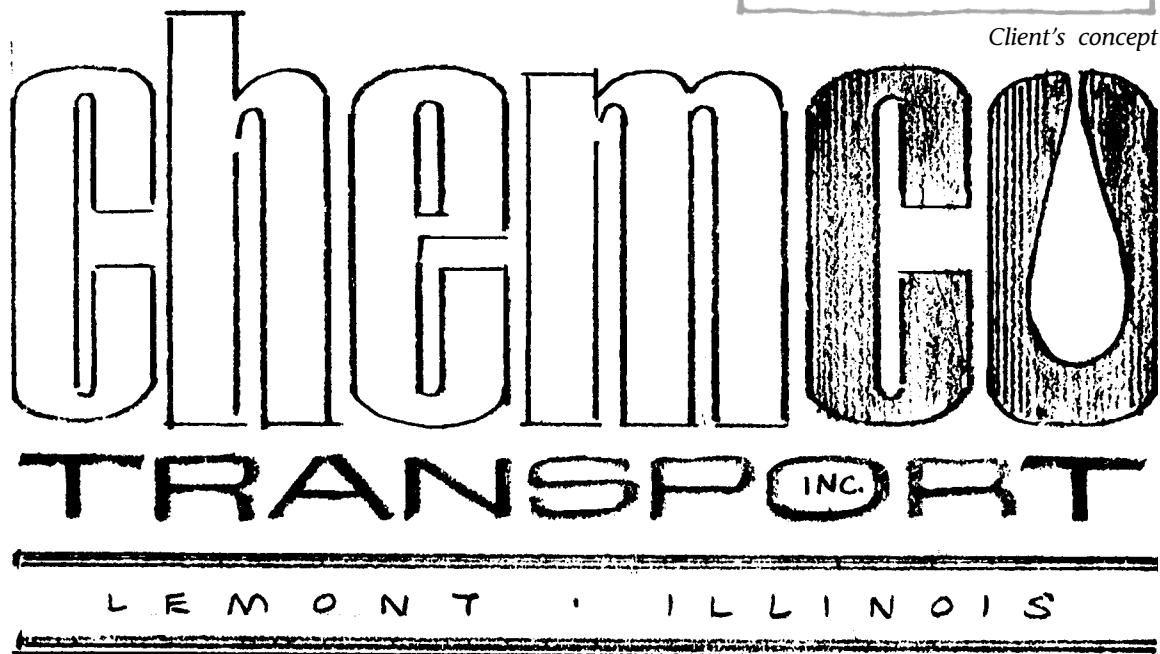
Helping these clients understand that what they have is not going to work or will not read well from across the road is a difficult task. I prefer to see clients spend their money on signs that really work, so whatever effort we put into the finished product benefits everyone.

I generally ask the clients to explain to me the best they can how they arrived at the finished design. Then I let them tell me why they chose the type, colors, dominant features, amount of copy, etc. After they hear themselves tell me why, why, and why, a simple question is asked: Are you totally happy and satisfied with your result?

Eight times out of ten, they say no. This is the time to interject any suggestions or a totally different approach. If the client tells you



*Client's concept*



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they would like to proceed with their design, then do so with a smile.

When they are open to change, it's time to sift through all the elements presented and try to use as many of the positive features as you can. This will help the original design work but with different emphasis, colors, typefaces, etc. Unless they request a total redesign, I always try my hardest to adhere to the original integrity of my client's design.

People often try to use a design intended for close-up reading, like

a business card, for their sign. This approach can cause many readability problems on a vehicle or a large sign. We simply cannot read the message on such signs up close for a long period of time. It's usually moving or we are speeding along. The last thing we need to be doing is trying to read at speed!



Client's concept

I think all we can do is make our clients aware of how their designs are intended to be used, then be able to correct them into a working sign design. I'll run a few examples past you, and explain what transpired in each one:

**Chemco Design** was a bit mechanical and anemic. All the elements were there—it just needed some extreme contrasts in type and to use the open area in the "o" for the drop of liquid. Now the drop doesn't need to sit all by itself; instead, it becomes part of



Client's concept



the design. Hiding the *Inc.* in another “o” allows *Transport* to be larger with better readability. This is a unity of elements.

**Olson’s** had the business card look. These two different companies needed to retain a bold look, yet be separate. Shapes were used to isolate the companies from one another, while keeping the design unified.

**Gulf Landscape** wasn’t very far off, but it had a bit too much script and a tree that needed a little tropical breeze. The client wasn’t happy with the way it looked and wanted to give the word *Gulf* more pop. The horizontal line was retained, a circle serves as the sun, and a tropical tree was added. This gave way to a large loose *Gulf* script—similar elements in usable sizes.

Mr. Sweeney of **Sweeney Construction** really wanted to build his logo out of two-by-fours with a plumb bob. Close up, one might have a chance to understand the design. However, it was going on a pickup truck door, so with a few modifications and keeping the integrity of the idea intact, a simplified logo emerged.

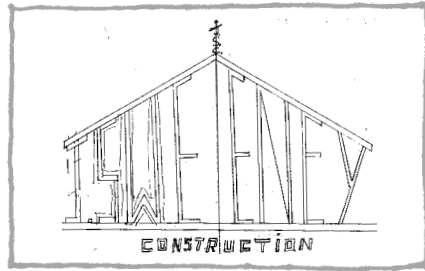
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*Bob Behounek is a sign artist/designer at Van Bruggen Signs in Orland Park, Illinois. His book, Trucks, is available from SignCraft.*

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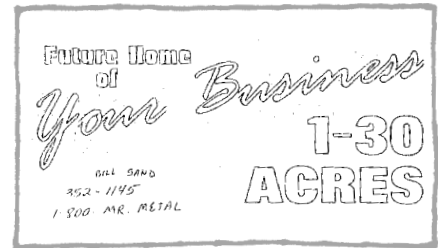


Client's concept



The **Future Home** board sign was heading in the right direction, but the elements were all floating by themselves. The script in this case was a bit too unreadable, so a casual style helped to smooth out the connections of the script. Panelizing the different elements with color allowed the message to read more easily. The panels also direct your eye toward who is doing the selling and how much is available.

Again, I'm sure there are many ways to redraw these examples. I'm not saying that what I did is the only way to do these, but they show an alternative to using the client's ideas without modifications, and they show how much more effective the signs could be. □



Client's concept

