

*Slate is easier to carve than you think, and is an impressive material for plaques and small signs*

## Cut in stone: Rob Cooper on the carved slate sign

Well, it's been about a year since my last article on carved lettering (*Combine carving and calligraphy for impressive results*, Nov/Dec 1995). Things are going very well — I sold quite a few carved signs over

the last year. In Miami, where carved signs are not common, that's not an easy thing to do.

Spending a year or two working at carving, experimenting with different ideas and showing your

work to potential customers, helps a lot. You can spend forever on the phone trying to explain a carved sign to a customer, but seeing really is believing. As soon as they see the V-cut and gold leaf letters, you



*I made this piece for Carl Rohrs, the renowned calligrapher from Santa Cruz, California. I used a rough, broken piece of slate that I found out behind the shop. The face was too rough to carve, so I ground it smooth with a coarse disc in drill and finished it with an orbital sander. All the lettering is carved, with the Rohrs gilded and the rest painted light gray. This was a surprise gift for Carl, and it arrived at his house on his birthday — pure fluke!*

## Cut in stone: Rob Cooper on the carved slate sign



1-in. thick textured slate 26-in. long, mahogany top and bottom. The lettering is carved and gilded; the ampersand is carved and painted.

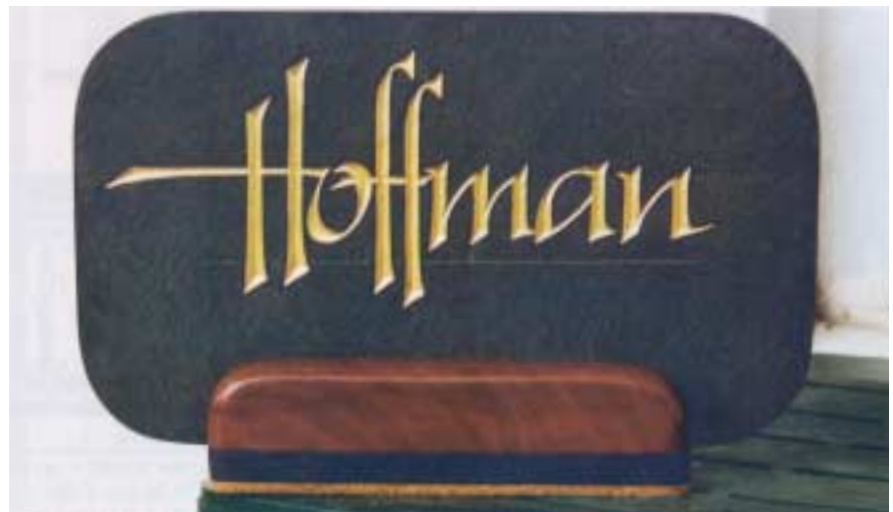


I made this sign from 2-in. thick Honduran mahogany, 1/4-in. slate, 23K lettering, and a keystone base. Be careful when blending slate with wood; the colors should be similar in tone, or you may break up the lettering.

can see the look of excitement on their face.

The majority of carved signs I've done lately have been wood, but carved slate signs are beginning to sell themselves. Every customer who has ordered a slate sign has visited the shop and seen both wood and slate signs — and then decided on slate. Chuck, from Summers Painting (whose truck was featured in the July/Aug 1996 issue of *SignCraft*), is a good example. He saw one of my carved slate pieces, and said, "I need a sign. Make it in slate!" That was it — no price, no specs, just a go-ahead to do whatever I want!

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I used a grit-edged jig saw blade to cut this slate tile to 6-by-10-in. The base is mahogany on plywood.



*This is a slate piece with carved, gilded letters, mounted in mahogany frame, mounted on a 2-in. thick piece of albezia. The blue-green panels are plywood, with a removable address. I bought the pre-carved redwood pineapple and painted it. The sign stands 28-in. tall.*



*This was for a friend of mine, Ron Berlier, in California. Ron called me after he saw my first carved sign article in SignCraft, and expressed a keen interest in slate lettering. This was a Christmas gift for him last year. I would say that this is my favorite piece of lettering in slate. 12-by-12-in.*



## Cut in stone: Rob Cooper on the carved slate sign



*I made this 12-by-12-in. piece for the Denver Letterheads meet last year. It's made of green slate, Honduran mahogany, and the letters are carved and gilded. Most people try to read what it says, but it doesn't say anything — it's just a bunch of letters!*

Most people seem to like gold leaf on slate, but I think that painting the lettering gray looks much more elegant. It does depend on the color of the slate, though. If the slate is very light in color, the gold doesn't stand out unless you outline it. I think outlining it detracts from the elegance of a letter just cut in slate and left looking natural.

It's hard to explain how I carve slate. People have called me and asked, but trying to explain how to hold a chisel, without actually being able to show someone, can lead to confusion.

My technique is, at best, crude. Just think of it as making a series of angled cuts into the slate. It's not much different than the technique I use when carving wood. Sit down with a small piece of slate (a slate tile, for instance), a small, sharp, flat chisel, and a No. 11 stencil knife, then do



*This is an unusual piece, and the carving was a little tricky. The lettering is carved from a solid piece of albezia, then gilded. I carved the ampersand in a piece of 1/4-in. slate, then mounted the lettering on it. This piece, in turn, is mounted on another piece of green slate. I really like the "S" on this sign.*

whatever it takes to make that V-cut incised letter. If you play with the angle you're holding the chisel at and how hard you're pushing, you'll figure out what works and what doesn't. Watching the deepest edge of the chisel to make sure you aren't going too deep and cutting into the other side of the letter also helps.

Anyway, these are some of my recent slate pieces. I have three or four more in the works right now. Buy a \$5 slate tile, a \$5 chisel, and have a go — you'll be surprised with your results! □

*Rob Cooper lives in Miami, Florida. Watch for details of some of Rob's recent carved wood signs in an upcoming issue.*



*This is a letter style I've been using a lot on carved signs lately. All the lettering is carved and painted gray or gilded. The top and bottom bands wrap around and have a keyhole on the back for mounting.*



*This is my house number. I just couldn't live with those stick-on letters.*



*I carved this slate and mahogany sign for the main entrance at SignCraft.*



*Green slate mounted on Sintra PVC panel on albezia wood. All lettering is carved and gilded. 12 in. long.*