

Seeing is believing, and there's nothing like a set of before-and-after photos to show what a difference a new layout can make

More cool “before-and-afters”

by David Showalter

One of the aspects of sign work that I enjoy most is seeing how you can transform a business's image when you make over their sign. There's something about seeing what you can do to create a more effective image for a business with their new sign. Maybe that's why I like to photograph signs “before and after”.

I shoot these just for my own use. I suppose they would make a good sales tool—not to put down someone else's work (sometimes I'm replacing a sign that I made a few years ago) but because

they show what a big difference a sign can make to a business's image. When you look at them, I think the new version gives you a completely different opinion of the business.

It shows how design and your approach to layout can make a big difference in what the sign will convey to the reader. To many customers, it may seem that what the words on a sign say is the whole message. I think these examples show that there's a lot more to it than that—even on the rather basic signs.

Seeing the value of good layout

Effective layout adds a lot of value to a sign. On the routine job, a good layout makes it easy to read and pleasant to see—rather than boring or generic. On custom work, when someone has a little more to budget for design, the right layout makes the sign easy to read, plus it draws the reader's eye in a special way. The sign will be visually interesting—exciting or fun or classy or clever or striking or whatever.

In our changing market, you can



A few years ago, I designed a really nice sign for Bellaire Apartments. Their sign was in bad shape and needed redone. They decided they couldn't afford it, so they painted out the sign and had some vinyl letters cut for it. A couple years later it was really falling apart so they called back. They said they had to



do something but it had to be very economical. This is overlaid plywood with a

little cedar trim and vinyl lettering done in Caslon Black.

More cool "before-and-afters"



Clear Lake Marina had just been remodeled and they wanted some new colors and new copy. The lettering was done on the computer. I did a little blend on the anchor by rolling down the yellow enamel and wet-blending a little orange at the bottom. Welcome to is hand lettered, the rest is vinyl.



Snows Fire Protection Service had different lettering on each of their vehicles. Most of it was provided by the equipment companies that built their vehicles, as part of the package. They came to me with this new van, and I told them that I thought we could come up with a whole new look.

I cut and rolled the gold enamel, then rolled in the panel for Fire Protection Service. I did a little hand lettering on Bryan & Defiance, Ohio and the swash behind the phone number. The lettering for Fire Protection Service and the phone numbers was done on the computer. Everything else was done by hand. The yellow vertical lines through Snows and the offset outline are intentionally wavy. That's a little different. It's a nice change of pace, and it goes really fast.





John Cox [Thorough-Graphic Signs, Lexington, Kentucky] and I redid the Signs & Graphics mail box for Pete Bonjarino, who has a sign shop in Saratoga, New York. John goes to Saratoga every year to work a horse sale there, and got to know Pete. I went along to help John one year, and while we were there, we did this for Pete just for fun. He's a great guy. You know how it seems that you're always too busy making other people's signs to do your own? That's how it was for Pete. It's all hand lettered.



I did the sign for Mohre Real Estate for a branch sales office many years ago, before I had the computer. We designed a new logo when they changed their name, and they wanted it on the new sign for this branch. I gave the word Office lots of space, and added the salesman's name on a panel on the bottom.



One of my customers brought the Dinner Tickets sign in to see about getting a better one made. I decided to donate it, as you can see in the small copy at the bottom. I give the local churches a break on their signs anyway.





I made the For Rent Townhouse sign a long time ago—notice the unique colonial cutout and how I tried to use up all the space on the panel! I was just getting into script, too. When I re-did it, we got rid of the unnecessary copy—less is more, especially on small signs like this.

use good layout to set you apart in the marketplace—to give your signs an added value. It gives customers a reason to buy from you instead of someone else. It takes a little effort to learn and develop, but it's really rewarding for both you and the client.

You get a lot of satisfaction from creating effective layouts, and that's something that a lot of people don't get from their work any-

more. It brings you a lot of referrals, too, and these are just the sort of customers you want. Many times they're already sold—they've seen what you can do and they want something like that for their business.

With all the technology, it's easy just to pump out the work. I find I sometimes have to make myself slow down and think a little about why I'm doing what I'm doing.

It pays off, and helps make the work more fun, too.□



David Showalter's shop, David Design, is in Bryan, Ohio.