

Playing with plasma fire!

A new tool for metal graphics and brackets

By Dan Sawatzky

Ten years ago, when we purchased our MutiCam CNC router I was excited to discover how we could use it to create even better dimensional signs. We spent months creating dimensional samples to help us learn how to use both the software and machine. Those samples were featured in an article and on the cover of the March/April 2006 issue of *SignCraft*. Since then we have fabricated some pretty cool dimensional projects with this powerful machine—many of which have been featured in *SignCraft*.

Last year we took delivery of a MultiCam CNC plasma cutter. Like the router we weren't quite sure how we would put the machine to use but we knew it would be a creative and fun ride! We already had a handle on EnRoute software which we would use for designing for the plasma cutter. The learning curve on the steel cutting plasma cutter is much less

daunting than a router. In a few hours we were up to speed. Then it was a simple matter of hooking up the awesome capabilities of both machines and software with our imaginations. Anything was indeed possible!

Brackets designed for the sign For many years I have believed that sign brackets should be designed in conjunction with dimensional signs and even become part of the signs we build. Having a CNC plasma cutter at our disposal made this instantly possible. Best of all, we had just the project to give this a serious try.

We recently won the contract to add a theme to NEB's Fun World, a bowling alley, pub and family entertainment center in Oshawa, Ontario. The client suggested a garden theme and we, of course, took it one step further, making it an enchanted garden, complete with all manner of faerie folk.

We will build all of the elements four times normal size to effectively shrink our guests down to the size of faeries. The theme work for the fifty-two lanes of the bowling center is now well in progress but I'll report on that in another article. Today's commentary is on the six dimensional signs we just finished for the new pub.

Peter and I each took three of the signs. The assignment was to build the dimensional signs within the theme and also incorporate sturdy steel brackets into the design from the very start. **SC**

—Photos by Rebecca Sawatzky



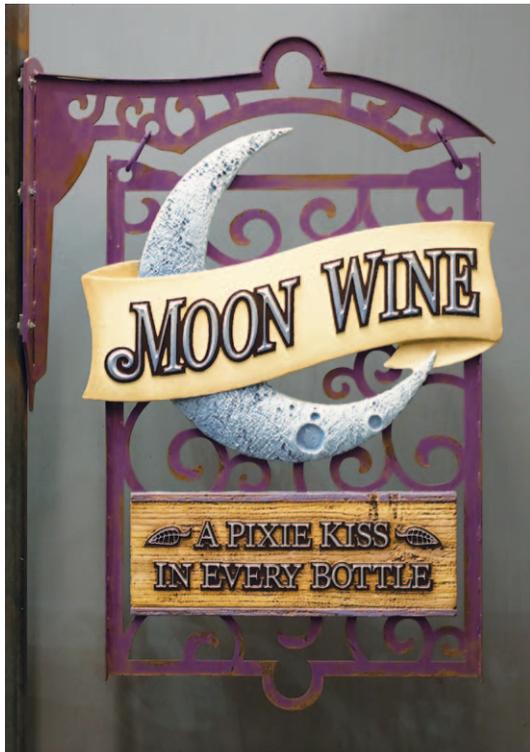
As we considered the kinds of faeries that would live in our enchanted garden, we decided we had to include a garden gnome like so many people have in their flower gardens these days. The gnome, of course, inspired the brand name of the liquor.



This sign is elegant and earthy to convey the perfect mood of the forest. The plasma cut and welded steel bracket is quite unlike anything seen previously. Janessa skillfully painted and aged this sign to look like it has been around as long as the sprites that live there.



Dan Sawatzky's shop, Sawatzky's Imagination Corporation, www.imaginationcorporation.com, is in Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada.



Few things are more magical than a blue moon, and Peter's design captures that spirit beautifully. The plasma cut steel bracket is laminated into the middle of the dimensional sign panels, which are routed from 30-lb. Precision Board. The woodgrain effects on this and the other signs here were CNC routed using a bitmap pattern from our new Woodgrain Texture Magic [available for download on www.signcraft.com].



This sign is one of those designs that is so ugly it's actually kind of cute. Rebecca picked colors and glazes which added the perfect amount of grunge for a troll sign. The lighthearted scroll bracket is a purposeful contrast to the double-sided troll bust below.



Though not part of this series, this sign is a good example of how a plasma cut steel bracket can be designed and built into a sign from the very start. The little dragon bracket under the sign is six layers of 1/4-in. steel plate sandwiched around a 1/2-in.-thick steel core which goes into the center of the sign via the "flame" coming from the dragon's mouth. This bracket is then welded onto heavy steel tubing which is laminated into the center of the post.



Peter did the design and fabrication of the Crown & Pin Pub sign. He wanted to create a "dimensional label" that might appear on a bottle of spirits. There's a sturdy steel frame laminated into the center to keep everything secure. Steel pins protrude from the bowling pin which are welded to the inside of the crown. This allows it to float in space.



The Toad Stool Elixir sign is well worn and aged. The 23K gold leaf lettering adds a whole lot of bling and class. Nothing sparkles like real gold! The mushroom figure is hand sculpted, using Abacadabra Sculpting Epoxy. All paints and glazes are hand-brushed acrylic.

There's more on SignCraft.com: This article is online with even more photos on www.signcraft.com.