

New ride signage creates a park's new theme

Thinking ahead lays the groundwork for a new project

By Dan Sawatzky

Even though our client has a fully built-out amusement park, which was founded in 1910, our recent project for them was very much like starting with a blank page. While the place now very much resembles a parking lot with rides, their exciting goal is to redesign and build a full-blast theme park over the next ten years, with a natural, park-like setting. That long-term goal is still very much in the planning stage but they added some new rides this year. They asked us to do the signs.

We encouraged them to take a longer view

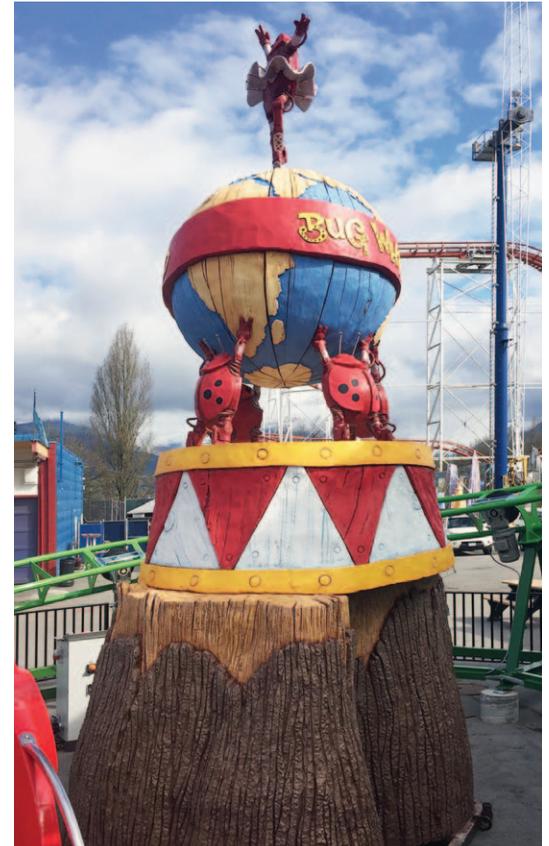
as we designed this year's signs. Rather than do something that fits into the current "carny" style we wanted to design signs and features that will be appropriate for the future look of the themed park. The rides and signs they are currently installing will most likely be moved to a new location in the future. Our plan was to think of the future as we designed and built. We purposely designed things to be modular to facilitate easy moving later. It was our goal to raise the bar significantly and set the theme and style going forward.



We define a sign as "anything that draws attention to our client's product, service or business." This includes the layout and landscaping. In this case we wanted to show our client how things would appear when they totally redo the park in the future. We wanted to raise the bar and set the theme. This was a good plan for both them and us, of course.



The ride signs and features are done in primary colors to appeal to kids of all ages. The ride structure is designed to blend in with the landscaping in a more subtle fashion. For now, it looks good on the hard landscape of the tarmac. Eventually it will look even better when everything is redone in a proper and permanent fashion.



The large main feature sits in the middle of one of the ride loops. The base will be buried in bark mulch for now, but when moved to its permanent home, low shrubs will soften the transition to the ground. The colorful portion of the feature protrudes high above the ride so it can be seen from a distance.



The structural steel supports for the globe are cleverly hidden in the arms and legs of the lower bugs. A final substructure of ¼-in. round steel (pencil rod) forms the armature to which we will attach the galvanized steel mesh.



We then troweled on a thick coat of fiberglass-reinforced concrete. Once it had set the perfect amount our crew carved in the detail. The globe was to look like it was made from thick, curved planks of wood. The lettering on the band was hand carved in. To speed things up, I laid it out in sections, using an overhead projector and transparencies.



We stuck to the primary colors as much as possible since this ride is designed to appeal to young families. The darker glazes tone things down a bit and tie it all together.

We were tasked with the identification of two rides this year. The first was FlutterBye, which we chronicled in a previous issue of *SignCraft* [May/June 2017]. The second, larger ride was dubbed Bug Whirled, a figure-eight, spinning, family coaster.

We first created a plan view of the ride as we envisioned it would appear in the future park-like setting. Then we designed the signs for that scenario in our presentation. There were two elements: one for the center of the ride and a marquee sign for the entrance. Landscaping will play a much larger role in the future.

The concept drawings again featured the mechanical bug circus theme. In the center, a dancing ballerina bug is held aloft on a giant globe by four struggling bugs who are balanced on a drum on top of a massive stump. It would tower more than twenty feet in the air to jut over the raised track of the ride. At the entrance a lone bug would be stringing a colorful banner on a tree which would announce the attraction. To work out the construction details I worked up a quick study model of the centerpiece. We determined the feature should be built in three sections to facilitate easy transport and assembly.

As always we began with a sturdy welded steel frame. Lifting points were welded in and then we fashioned a

pencil rod armature around this. Metal lath was tied on and then a thick coat of fiberglass-reinforced concrete was troweled on and carved. Many of the fine sculptural details were done using Abracadabra Sculpting Epoxy. The banner was designed to look like a rippling cloth but is actually routed 30-lb. Precision Board. To achieve the folds in the cloth I drew up a bitmap which our EnRoute software translated into the perfect shape when I applied it to the sign relief.

The sign was painted with Sherwin-Williams Acrylic house paint. As always we applied three base coats, all brushed by hand and then a series of glazes to bring out the texture. The delivery and setup of these two pieces proved to be as easy and as speedy as the first one. We are excited to begin planning for next year's additions. **SC**



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The ballet dancer, who is to be perched on top of the globe, has a sturdy, welded steel frame running through it. The main body is sculpted from fiberglass-reinforced concrete while the arms, legs and tutu are sculpted from Abracadabra Sculpting Epoxy. It is hand painted with three coats of Sherwin-Williams house paint and then glazed to bring out the textures and add character.

There's more on SignCraft.com: You'll find more of Dan's articles on www.signcraft.com.