

CorelDRAW® 12 is the tool of choice for award-winning sign-makers at Signs & Designs

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David Schacterle
Signs & Designs
Cedar Falls, IA



David Schacterle is an experienced sign-maker and shop-owner in Cedar Falls, IA. His firm Signs & Designs was recently awarded First Place in the commercial building signs category in the 2005 International Sign Contest hosted by the International Sign Association and Signs of the Times Magazine. The award-winning sign, Pursuing Picasso, was designed in David's tool of choice – CorelDRAW Graphics Suite 12.

Like many designers and sign-makers, David Schacterle started out in the sign industry long before computers entered the workflow.

"I founded this business in 1981 and it was all hand-painting back then. Quite a few things have changed in 24 years," he says and laughs.

Today, the company has 10 employees, a full-service manufacturing shop with large format printers and routers and a steady flow of new customers. The company offers a wide range of signs, including storefront signs, awnings, electronic LED signs and trade show booths. With an excellent track record and more than a few awards under his belt, David doesn't have to spend a fortune on advertising. Customers seem to find their way into his shop anyway.

"Our firm has consistently had a reputation for excellent design skills. Many sign-makers have the capacity to build OK signs, but not everybody can offer that well-designed creative flair that will really get you noticed," he says.

One of the things that differentiate Signs & Designs from other sign-makers is its holistic approach to storefront signs. David puts it more bluntly:

"There's no point in putting a gem of a sign in a crappy environment. We often help our customers repaint or touch up the external walls and store windows to transform the entire storefront into a cohesive, color-coordinated marketing tool. It doesn't have to be very expensive, but it makes a

tremendous difference in appearance."

In the early days, David Schacterle and his employees at Signs & Designs used sign-making software like CASmate and Inspire to create their signs, but he quickly realized that there must be a better, less expensive and more flexible way to design and create their signs on a PC. David explains:

"There has been an unfortunate tendency in the industry to try to force sign-makers into a fold. When Flexisign bought CASmate and Inspire they cancelled support for older versions, because they want you to purchase their new versions for \$1,500 per computer. The upgrades can cost another \$500 every 6-12 months or so. I have 10 computers in my shop. It would be very expensive for me to keep everything up to date. I needed something more flexible, but I didn't want to compromise on quality or ease-of-use. And most importantly, the application had to be compatible with my existing equipment."

David Schacterle discovered CorelDRAW around version 6, and he's been a big supporter ever since.

"When we start working on a new and exciting project, we need an application that allows us to capture that creative spirit and focus on the design. It should seamlessly follow us in the creative process rather than putting up obstacles and getting in the way. In my opinion, CorelDRAW is uniquely suited for the sign-making industry."

“I designed the signs from scratch in CorelDRAW 12 and my first presentation went really well. It’s very rewarding to get that kind of creative freedom in a highly visible project.”

In a recent project for the University of Northern Iowa, David was invited to create signage for the new campus cafeteria. The university had planned to divide the cafeteria area into four sections – Chats Coffee Shop, Flare’s American Grill, Avanti Italian and International Wasabi Grill.

“They didn’t consult an external creative agency like most larger clients do. They simply told me what kind of atmosphere they were looking for, and asked me to come up with some creative suggestions. I designed the signs from scratch in CorelDRAW 12 and my first presentation went really well. There were hardly any changes at all. It’s very rewarding to get that kind of creative freedom in a highly visible project.”

The designers at Signs & Designs export their CorelDRAW documents as EPS files, which are imported to CoCut Professional – a bridge software used to control the vinyl cutters.

“Once the basic shapes have been created we spray-paint all the parts with paint from our Matthew Paint mixing station. The benefit is that we can specify the Pantone color profile in CorelDRAW and match that to an exact paint mix. There’s no guesswork involved in getting the color right,” explains David. “CorelDRAW makes it easy for us to manage a professional color management system.”

In the fall of 2004 Signs & Designs was approached by Pursuing Picasso – a paint-your-own-pottery store in downtown Cedar Falls in need of a storefront sign. According to the client, they needed something that was fun, colorful and would get them noticed.

David Schacterle started the process by taking digital images of the existing storefront – an old H & R Block store that was closing down to be replaced with Pursuing Picasso.

“One of the best features in CorelDRAW is the tight integration between vector and bitmap images. I can import the old storefront image and add my vector drawings directly on top of it. Not only that, I

can use the Eyedropper tool to sample colors from the photo and drop them onto my vector shapes. Matching colors in seconds!”

After taking some measurements, David Schacterle designed the Pursuing Picasso sign directly to size in CorelDRAW and showed the client what the new sign would look like in the real world. The sign went through seven or eight adjustments, but in the end they decided to go with a design that was very close to the original proposal.

“It’s only 16” deep and the metal top is perforated, so it won’t stop rain, but the aluminum frame is 20” long, and I think it makes quite a colorful and creative statement, says David Schacterle. “I believe one of the reasons this project was successful, is the nice texture built into it. The word “PURSUING” at the top is mounted on a bed of crushed black glass, and the raised PVC letters in “Picasso” have drop shadow elements built by using parts of duplicate letters.”

By using the PowerClip feature, sign-makers are able to import a textured image into a CorelDRAW document and quickly insert it into vector shapes, providing the client with a design proposal that closely resembles the final look.

The Pursuing Picasso sign impressed not only the client. The design won the First Place award in the 2005 International Sign Contest hosted by the International Sign Association and Signs of the Times Magazine.

Some people in the sign-making industry use Illustrator, but David Schacterle has never been a big fan.

“We have it installed on some of our machines. There’s always an interesting battle between the two camps. Whenever I see someone doing something in Illustrator I sneak up behind them and say: “Oh, you need that many steps to do that? Huh, I can do that much quicker in CorelDRAW,” he says and laughs.



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