



STRICTLY COMMERCIAL

Francis Lestingi is proprietor of Signs of Gold (Williamsville, NY).

By Francis Lestingi

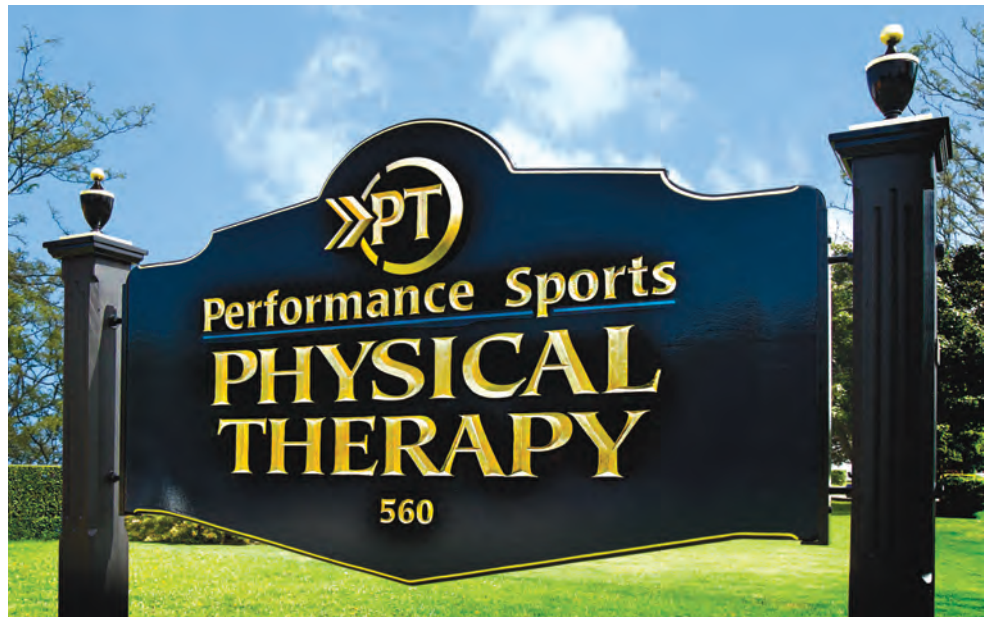
Winning at Post Time

Preparing for effective post-sign installations

For nearly two decades, I've been producing handcarved, gilded, wood-sign artistry. My son, Stephen, has handled my installations since the beginning. About 40% of that work has been devoted to fascia productions, which we discussed in "Facing Fascia Installations" (see ST, January 2010, page 46). Now, we're ready to reveal our techniques for our more prolifically produced sign type: post-mounted signage.

Over the years, the mantra, "Necessity is the mother of invention," has guided us. Thus, I've developed various procedures and devices to assist fabrication. First, I designed a wooden, calibratable installation jig to help us methodically determine precise, post-hole placement, as well as accurate post positioning once they're in the holes.

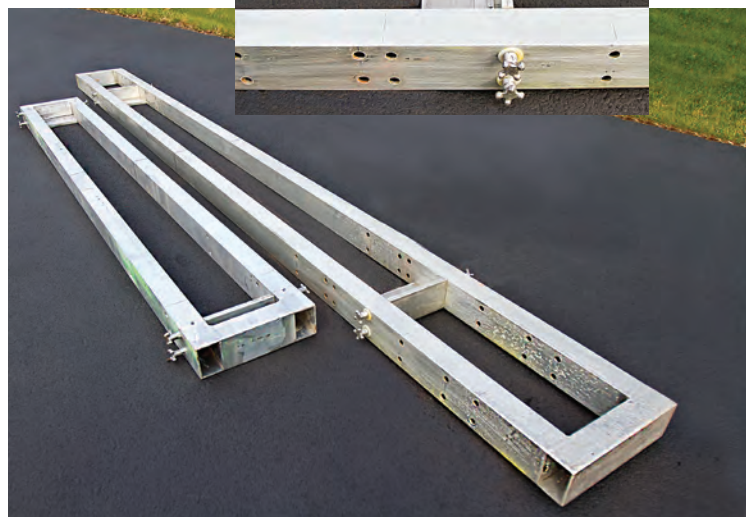
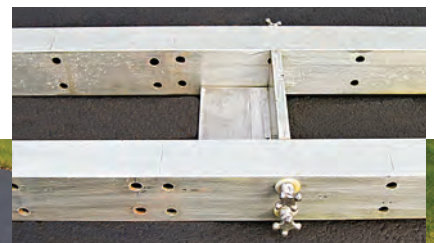
The original, maple jig has evolved into two aluminum jigs – one for smaller panels, one for larger. Each jig provides two, adjustable slider platforms that sit atop of the posts. We calibrate the



jig before an installation by measuring the panel and adding 15 in.

For instance, for a 60-in.-wide panel, we calculate 75 in. as the distance between the posts' outside edges. To reach this figure, we add the 60-in. panel; 2 in. on either side

of the panel; and each of the 5.5-in.-wide (nominally 6 in.) posts. We drill holes, as needed, in the jig to



We designed these installation jigs to allow us to mark exact locations for post-hole digging and for maintaining precise spacing between posts. Shown are a large version capable of handling up to 4 x 8-ft. panels, and a smaller version used for 3 x 5-ft. panels. The insert outlines the adjustable platforms that sit atop the posts.

Equipment and Materials

Coating: Sikkens Cetol solid-color, exterior wood sealant, from Akzo Nobel Coatings (Flying Hill, PA), (610) 775-6640 or www.akzonobel.com; 1Shot lettering enamel, from One Shot LLC (Chicago), (773) 646-2778 or www.1shot.com

Hardware and Equipment: Powdercoated, aluminum brackets, fabricated by Signs of Gold; Post-hole digger, from home-improvement and building-supply stores; dry-cement mix, from home-improvement and building-supply stores; installation jig, fabricated by Signs of Gold; finials and caps, fabricated by Signs of Gold; stainless-steel lag screws, available from building-supply stores; steel panel-transport handles, fabricated by Signs of Gold; reciprocating saw, from home-improvement or building-supply stores;

Panel: Gilded, mahogany panels, fabricated by Signs of Gold



With the placement of the sign determined, the installation jig was used to mark the digging locations with spray paint. We dug the holes about 16 in. sq. and 36-42 in. deep. Local authorities determine varying depths for frost-line requirements.



When the depth has been achieved, “levelers” are inserted, and a large, adjustable level is used to check if the depths are equal. If so, the 6 x 6 posts are inserted. If not, more digging is done until we’ve made it level. The “levelers” are 2 x 4s with a small segment of a 6 x 6 post at their ends.



With the 6 x 6 posts inserted, the installation jig was placed atop the posts to ensure that the posts are level and spaced accurately. Vertical levels were also attached to the posts to ensure that the posts are plumb.



We secured the posts with 120 lbs. of dry cement mix per post. The dry powder was packed in with the chisel end of the tamping rod. Eventually, ground water produced a very strong cement pod at the base of each post.



After having distributed the dry cement evenly around the post, we shoveled the soil back into the hole while tamping to assure rigidity. After we shoveled and raked the soil, a large, tamping tool was used to smooth out the mound. At this point, the installation jig may be removed.



With the posts firmly set, the custom aluminum brackets were inserted into the pre-drilled post holes. The substrate panel was inserted into the channels to rest on the “shoes.”



The detailed, treated 6 x 6 posts, which were stained prior to installation, inevitably get dusty while being handled during their insertion. We cleaned them by spraying water from a pressurized, garden-spray dispenser.

accommodate panels of various sizes.

We use the jig to indicate where the holes will be dug. When the holes are dug with the posts inserted, we place the jig atop the posts to create proper spacing and leveling.

We then use dry-cement mix to firm up the posts. Eventually, ground-water mixes with the dry cement to produce a hard footing. At this point, we remove the jig.

To attach the panel to the posts,

we designed channel brackets, which we customize for each new panel. At the base of each bracket is a “shoe,” on which we rest the weight of the panel during and after the installation. The brackets,

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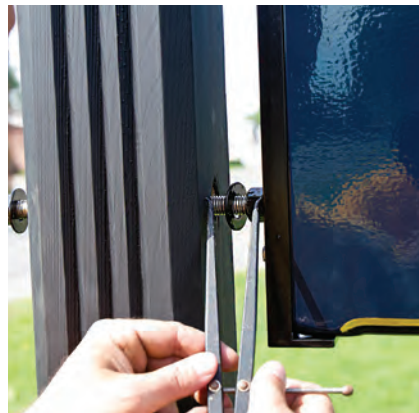
We placed the panel on foam-rubber cushions, which were on workhorses, and removed the steel handles that enabled the panel to “float” on the truck floor while en route to the installation site. To seal the screw holes, we applied kneadable, wood-epoxy putty. Other pre-drilled bracket holes accepted lag screws.



We inserted the panel into the channel bracket slots, and it rested securely on the “shoes” while we prepared for the lag screws’ insertion.



The panel and brackets were shifted to the left to provide room to insert the two, stainless-steel lag screws through the bracket and into the pre-drilled holes in the panel’s edge. When this was completed, we shifted the panel and brackets to the right and attached the lags on the other end.



A divider tool determined equal spacing of the panel between the posts. The panel, now attached to the brackets, could be shifted to the left or right until centered.



After we centered the panel, which left 2 in. between its edge and the posts’ inner surface, we tightened the inner nuts first, followed by the outer nuts.



Using a cordless reciprocating saw, we trimmed off the excess threaded rod. It wasn’t actually excess; we needed this extra rod length to move the panel and brackets to the left and right.



Even though we previously washed the posts with water, we gave them a fresh coat of stain with a foam brush to really freshen them up.

which comprise rustproof baked and powdercoated aluminum, fit around the panel’s end-grain, which we pre-groove to fit the channel. We affix the bracket to the panel with stainless-steel lag screws, and

the brackets to the posts with threaded rods, which are welded to the brackets. The 6 x 6, treated posts have pre-drilled holes to accept the threaded rods, nuts and washers. We detail these posts with

fluting, chamfering and round-overs (the subject of a future article), and, because they’re treated and don’t accept paint, we stain them twice with a solid-color sealant.

After we’ve attached the brackets

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We pre-painted all installation hardware prior to the install, but there is usually need for a touch-up. We used an inexpensive, re-usable brush and 1Shot® enamel in a medicine bottle.

to the panel and posts, the end result is a “floating” substrate. The panel doesn’t touch the posts; there’s a 2-in. gap between them. Keeping them separated helps prevent

weathering problems. We also use the “floating” concept for panels while working in the studio and transporting them for installation.

Whether or not a panel is double-



We secured the detailed mahogany finials and caps to the post tops. Silicone caulk on the uncoated cap surface and the unstained post top created a very good bond. To prevent water from seeping down between the brackets and the panel, we applied a silicone seal.

sided, we always attach two or more, custom-made steel “handles” to each panel’s end-grain while they’re in production. This technique allows us to flip or transport



Stephen proudly affixed our company nameplate to the post with double-sided, foam tape.

the panels without damage to the surface or protruding appliqué.

After the posts are installed, we clean the posts with water because they inevitably get dusty during the

installation. Next, we apply another coat of stain to enhance the surface. Then, we apply touch-up paint to the hardware and a dab of silicone on the bracket tops, add our name-

plate, and secure the finials and caps.

Finally, it's time to photograph our work, and return to the computer to upload this sign to our website portfolio. ■

More about Francis

After a career in academia as a physics, chemistry, math and theology instructor, Francis returned to his love of the lettering arts and started Signs of Gold, Inc. with his son, Stephen, in 1994. Today, he serves on the board of the Society of Gilders. Each year, he joins the group in their pro-bono project – restoring gold artifacts in historic New Orleans churches that were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Lestingi has earned first-, second- and third-place awards in ST's Sign Contest and nine first-place awards from the United States Sign Council's (USSC) sign-industry competition. Lestingi has also designed two calligraphic fonts, Pierre and Calileo, available through www.LetterheadFonts.com, and two other digital typefaces, FranHand and Stefano, which are available through www.MyFonts.com.