




# HANDY-DANDY GUIDE

## TO MAKING EYE-POPPING SHOW BANNERS

**B**ANNER-PAINTING TIME AT GOLDFIELD'S. It means no sleep, no days off for at least a month, broken backs and bruised knees—but we love it. Banners are our passion, our obsession and our proud creation. A couple of years ago, Henry appointed me the “official banner-painting apprentice” because I get into it 100% and pay strict attention to what he is teaching me. Henry always says that if he hadn't become a tattoo artist, he would have gone into sign painting. Unfortunately, hand-painted signs have become nearly extinct in the computer age, but that is another story.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY SUNNY BUICK • ADDITIONAL PHOTOS BY CHARLES GATEWOOD









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The second big banner, painted for the 20th anniversary of the first tattoo convention in Houston, below. The third banner, Sunny's first, right.



### REMEMBERING THE BIG SIX

The Goldfield team has painted six banners, a new one each year. I'd like to tell you a little about each one and then tell you how we paint them, the steps we take and the supplies you'll need to paint your own beautiful baby. The first banner that Mr. Goldfield hand painted was inspired by turn-of-the-century carnival-ride art. The banner itself is the largest of the series. The canvas was left over from a set of banners that Henry was painting for a sideshow that Capt. Don Leslie was putting together. The banner was so big that they had to build a frame out of two-by-fours to make it hang in their tattoo convention booth.

The second banner was painted for the 20th anniversary of the first tattoo con-

vention in Houston, Texas. Henry was really going for a San Francisco-postcard look with this one, and he says he made sure to put the color pink in it just to piss off the Texans. Henry and the crew were frantically painting up until the last minute, hoping it would dry in time, just like all the others—until we discovered the hairdryer.

The third banner was the first that I participated in. It is everyone's all-time favorite—the sexy, blond sailor girl, with her gravity-defying treasure chest!

The fourth banner was an encore to the praise and popularity of the sailor girl. A beautiful mermaid (I posed for the hands) with a red sky. You know that old expression, "Red sky at morning, sailor take warning, red sky at night, sailor's delight"? There is a great story about the day we were painting her hair down

below, and Dave said to Henry, "Put a little orange mist with the airbrush, and it will make it look more like a peach." Henry thought it was a great idea, and we all made lots of "peach" jokes. Just then, a girl walked in and asked if she could get a peach tattoo. Guess where? On her "peach," of course. The lucky artist who got to do the tattoo was in heaven. It's the kind of day that makes a man love his work.

The fifth banner holds the record as the world's largest sheet of flash; second place going to Goodtime Charlie Cartwright's *Something for Everybody* banner at three feet by six feet. Our flash banner was the most labor intensive, because every nook and cranny and every color had some airbrush shading.

This year's banner holds precedent be-





cause Henry included the words, "and Co." after his name, and he also put the names of his crew, Dave Bobrick, me and Bob James. Of course, we were very honored and excited.

## EASY INSTRUCTIONS

We start each banner off with a drawing. For the most recent banner, Henry spent considerable time researching and sweating over sign painter's magazines and old font books for unusual lettering. Lettering is an art form in and of itself, and years ago Henry was able to study sign lettering. A good knowledge of and the ability to do lettering is crucial to being a decent tattoo artist. And Henry is really good at it! Usually Henry starts off with a drawing of a girl or a piece of flash and adds the lettering, but this

time he was going for an old-fashioned, hand-painted sign. So he laid out all the lettering and border and our nifty slogan, "Forget the Babysitter and Bring the Kids." (Don't tell anyone, but I think he made a typo and what he really meant to say was forget the kids, bring the babysitter.) The finished design of the banner was then sent to a sign and banner shop to be scanned into a computer via an electronic pen and blown up to over 350%. We also ordered a vinyl banner to be sewn. This is where you take a leap of faith that the banner-shop man (a) will get your stuff back to you in a timely fashion and (b) he won't fuck it up because he doesn't know what he is doing or (c) that he doesn't leave anything out or forget to tweak that one spot you wanted him to correct because you couldn't deal with it after working on

the drawing until 3:00 a.m.

Banners are usually painted for the purpose of taking the show on the road. Banners are crucial to the overall look of your booth. They hook, then reel the customer in. They convey what you and your shop are about, the kind of work you do and how much of your heart you put into it. There are infinite ways that you could go about making a banner. You can even paint a small picture and have a huge vinyl sticker made. The only limits are your imagination and the amount of time you want to spend. I know that there are probably a lot of people out there more qualified to teach about the fine art of banner painting and many of you who have painted banners before. I'm just going to try to give a few tips that I've learned during my banner-painting apprenticeship.



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### THE SUPPLIES

THE ESSENTIAL LIST OF THE STUFF YOU WILL NEED:

#### BANNER

You can order this from the sign shop where you have your artwork blown up. Order a five foot by nine foot vinyl or canvas banner, a size which fits most convention booths, which are usually ten by eight feet high. Get six grommets on the long side and four on the short. Vinyl holds up better and is easier to paint on, but you could do killer oil painting on canvas. By the way, save the cardboard tube they give you the banner in—you'll find out why later.

#### BLOWUP

If you can't find a sign shop that has the time to do this, or you want a cheaper route, call a large Kinko's, preferably the 24-hour kind, 'cause we all know what night owls tattooers are. Ask if they have a blueprint copy machine. Just tell them how big you want the finished product to be, and let them do the math. Don't ever try to draw directly on the banner, your proportions will be off, and it won't look planned out. I must say I prefer the computer blowup because they can do a clean consistent line.

#### BRUSHES

Don't screw up by being cheap about brushes. Sable brushes are cheaper than they've ever been. Go get new brushes every time you paint a new banner, so it

doesn't look like you globbed the paint on with a tree branch.

- Rigger, liner brush size number 1, 2 & 3
- 1/8-inch lettering brush
- 1/4-inch lettering brush
- 3/4-inch flat brush
- 1-inch flat brush
- Fan brush for blending
- Funky old brush 1/2- to 1-inch flat brush or round for mixing paint

#### LIGHT TABLE OR POUNCE WHEEL AND BLUE CHALK

We used an inexpensive light table, ten by 12 inches, and just unrolled the banner a little at a time—moving the light table and rolling the part of the banner that was already done as we went. We found that this makes a cleaner transfer and saves a few steps. If you want to do it the way Leonardo Da Vinci did it, get a pounce wheel.

#### NO. 2 PENCILS

Use a soft pencil so that you don't press too hard and tear your paper. The only brand you should have in your shop is Dixon Ticonderoga. Anything else is complete shit and it's No. 2, not 2.5 or 3, dammit!

#### ACRYLIC PAINT

Buy Liquitex or Utrecht in the tube. Purchase only the colors you need, and get large tubes of black and white and whatever

background color. That way, the next time you paint—which will probably be next year—the colors won't be getting old and funky. Also, while you're at it, pick up some gesso and airbrushing medium.

#### A PLACE TO PAINT

Try to work on your banner project in the front room of your shop, right in the middle of the public. It draws attention and people like to watch. A word to the wise: Rope off your project so stupid drunks don't stumble in and walk on your wet paint!

#### STYRO CUPS, PLASTIC BAGGIES AND RUBBER BANDS

For mixing and saving your colors.

#### BUTCHER PAPER, HOLE PUNCH AND TAPE

For making stencils, for airbrushing and for rolling your banner up when you're done.

#### BIG ROLL OF TRACING PAPER

#### AIRBRUSH AND AIR COMPRESSOR

Optional. Get a Paasche brand airbrush if you do. It's a good one to start off on.

#### HAIRDRYER

If you have ants in yer pants or you're a classic procrastinator, like us.





The fourth big banner, featuring Miss Peach, top.  
The world's largest sheet of flash, above, banner number five.



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## DOIN' IT

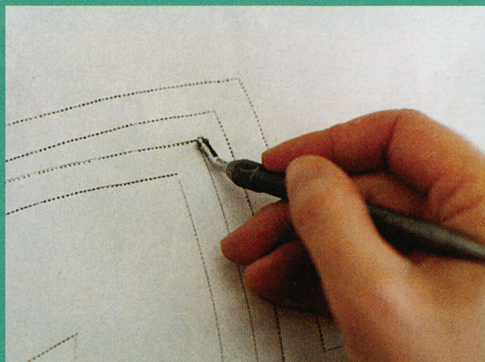
Okay, now you are ready to begin the great undertaking. You've got your big blowup of your line drawing and your blank banner. Have one person slap a coat of gesso on that puppy while the other one turns the blown-up line drawing over and, using the light table, draws a heavy pencil outline on all the lines. Be sure to get lots of graphite on these lines, and be sure that you are doing this on the back of your design. When the gesso is dry, carefully line up your image, right side up, on the banner. Measure your border, make sure it's centered, and then tape it down. Now get

several people involved, and draw over every line, pressing firmly.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A LIGHT TABLE, you could do it the old Leonardo way. Take a pounce wheel (looks like a cross between an X-acto knife and a cowboy spur, and perforate every line. Then line up and tape down your design onto the banner material. Next, pour some carpenter's blue chalk powder into an old sock. Tie off the sock with some rubber bands, then beat the sock on every line, making sure enough chalk is going through the holes. If you've done this properly, there

will be a fine coat of blue chalk all over the shop and up your nose. Either way you do it, take up a corner at a time and look to see if you missed anything. Using the blue chalk method, you will need to pencil in everywhere there is a line of little blue dots. Next, take the banner outside and shake the dust all over your neighbor's car. Then take it back inside and, with a damp sponge, wash away all the chalk. You will have washed most of the pencil away too, so re-pencil it.

NOW, BEGIN PICKING OUT COLORS and mixing them in a Styro cup with a little



2 & 3) Pounce wheel.



4) First coats.



6) We work really late and get very tired.



7) Sunny lining up the frisket.





1) Paste-up design, ready to send to sign shop.



5) Taping off to airbrush.



8) An artist's pensive moment. (Notice how much we mask out.)



9) Cutting in the background color.



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10) Henry's proper hand position for straight lines.



11) Masking and painting into the night.



14) Sunny cutting in the background color.



15) Rose, before two kinds of dark red were sprayed in and the pink touched up.

water, until you get a consistency like tattoo pigment. Start by painting things in the middle, so that you're not kneeling or leaning into areas you've already painted. Everything you paint will need three or four coats of thin paint. Use your hairdryer to speed things up. A sign painter's maul comes in handy for resting your arm. Make steady, long strokes with your brush. Use the large brushes for large areas and small brushes for the tight areas. Also, never leave your brush resting in your cup of paint or in your rinse cup—it ruins it. Wash your brush out every so often, even if you're

working in the same color. It saves the life of your brush and makes your strokes much smoother. When we did Henry's portrait, I premixed and numbered ten cups from lightest gray to black. This way, we saved a lot of mixing and blending time.

ONCE YOU HAVE YOUR BASIC COLORS laid in solid, and before doing any outlines, you can play around with some airbrushing. Airbrushing takes some time to master, but don't be shy. Take tracing paper and trace the area you want to airbrush, leaving lots of room where you

want a smooth spray, being sure to cover the area where you don't want any paint. Take your tracing and tape it over a large piece of butcher paper. Cut out your negative space with an X-acto knife (use an old piece of mat board as a cutting surface), then use a hole punch to perforate along the edge of your cutout. Place the butcher paper on the banner, line it up carefully, and tear little pieces of tape to cover the holes. Place butcher paper all around your masking job to protect the banner from overspray. Mix the color in a Styro cup and add a few drops of airbrushing medium. This stuff keeps





13) New day, lots of work to do.

12) Henry airbrushing straight up and down.



16) What would we have done without the hairdryer?



17) Henry and Dave keep things moving.



18) Here's our system.



19) Nice airbrushing.





24) Sunny perfecting everything.

23) Leona goes for the gold.



27) Sunny working on Henry's portrait.

28) Retouching the white.



the paint from drying too fast and clogging your airbrush. With a brush, transfer just a little paint into the airbrushing cup (it's good to have a cute assistant for this). Do your thing with the airbrush, then dry the paint with the hairdryer and lift up your masking to admire your work. If you messed up, paint over it and try again. Clean your airbrush right away to avoid clogging. Take the machine apart, and don't lose the parts down the drain.

If you do, don't take apart the sink, you can always buy new parts.

WHEN YOU'VE PAINTED everything and carefully done your perfect outlines, stand back, stretch and admire your work (you deserve it; you've probably put at least a couple of weeks of your life into this thing). When it's all dry, lay down three rows of butcher paper (longer than the banner) and lift your banner up (get

some help) and place it facedown on the paper. Then take that cardboard roll I told you to save, and roll up your new banner. Now you're ready for the road!

Good Luck.

P.S. If you need a few words of encouragement or further suggestions, drop by Goldfield's at 404 Broadway, San Francisco, CA, or give me a jingle at (415) 433-0558.