

# Airbrushing on Vinyl

**Rather than stocking all of that colored and textured vinyl, I now simply stock a few light-colored vinyls and either paint it myself or have my employees paint it.**

In the beginning, there was only paint and brush, and it was good! But now, if you are going to be a competitor in the sign field, you had better arm yourself with a computer and a cutter. Unfortunately, along with the cutter comes the rather large stock of vinyl colors and patterns that you should keep in inventory, causing a great deal of waste.

Through the years, I have watched the onslaught of small sign shops creep into the tiniest of towns, and it never fails that they all sell the same thing. Of course, with this phenomenon comes the inevitable "price elimination game," where one shop underbids the other until one just can't stand to be in business anymore. That's when it dawned on me to concentrate on "value added" rather than "price elimination" in order to offer something that the competition does not or can not.

Rather than stocking all of that colored and textured vinyl, I now simply stock a few light-colored vinyls and either paint it myself or have



CHROME



WOOD

my employees paint it. With a few of my edging techniques, I can save time, material, and money by skipping the inline outline used in a lot of lettering styles. Furthermore, when I display all of my lettering styles in the shop, about seventy-five percent of all the customers pick out an airbrushed style, which, by the way, fetches about double the stock of non-airbrushed vinyl lettering. Not bad considering that your competition can't even offer this service, which usually results in a permanent customer for your business.

Now, for you non-artists out there who can't even draw a stick figure with a ruler, you don't need to worry. This is not, and does not require, art training. In fact, the people I teach are very much just plain, old small business owners that want to make a good honest go of it. Actually, you don't even have to get your hands full of paint like myself. I just feel better becoming one with the paint (Just kidding!).

For starters, you will need an airbrush, and the one I suggest is a double-action bottom feed, the Iwata Eclipse. It is a great choice because it is very durable and extremely economical. Next, you will need some paint. The paint I use is Createx Auto Air. It adheres to just about any surface and lasts about as long as a car paint job would, as well as accepting most good clears. A blow drier will also be needed. Can you believe some people use these things for hair? Go figure!

The next item you will need is a compressor. I use a Silentaire compressor that is made in Italy and, best of all, it is almost completely silent! There are also alternatives such as a good Sears model, that is if you can stand its noise. Then I use Arlon vinyl to paint on, as it is matte-finished and accepts the paint quite nicely, even when you are in a hurry. Once you are all set up, I crank the com-

**When I display all of my lettering styles in the shop, about seventy-five percent of all the customers pick out an airbrushed style.**

Now, get out your airbrush and prepare to play. The first one we're going to do is chrome. Chrome is a very popular texture as it lends itself to so many custom applications such as cars, trucks, and hot rods!



1

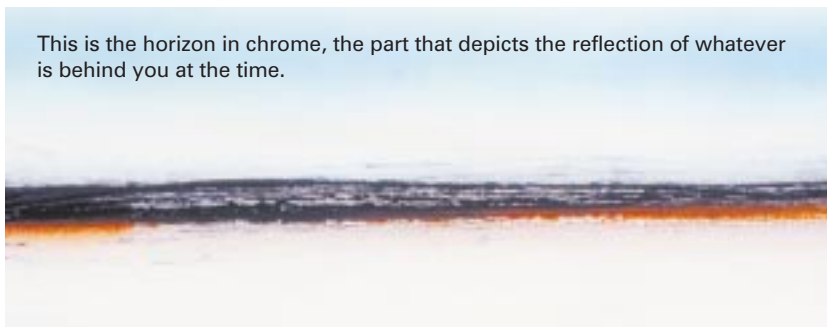


2

**Step 1.** I use Carribean blue for the top of the letters, fading from the top to the middle in long, fast strokes making sure that I never stop the airbrush at any time. Look at the distance I have between the surface and the tip of the gun. This never changes in most all of my textures.

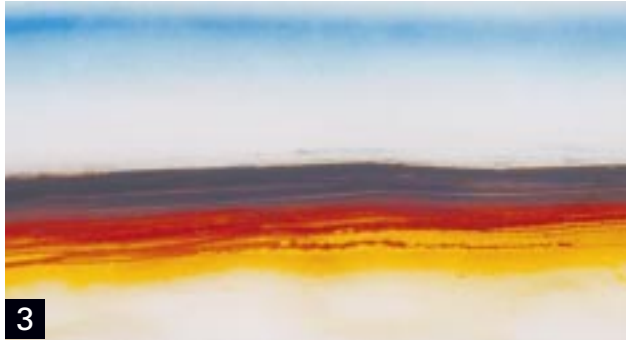
**Step 2.** One of my secret special tools is a plastic bag, and only those of you who have read this deep into this article will know this! I spray paint, in this case black, onto the plastic bag, and with a long swipe, I spread paint across the middle of the lettering.

This is the horizon in chrome, the part that depicts the reflection of whatever is behind you at the time.



# chrome

**Step 3.** From here, use the airbrush to fade dark brown starting from the black in the middle to the bottom of the letters. Make sure that you put more paint at the middle of the letters and fade down using less and less paint.



**Step 4.** Now use golden yellow to go over the brown and evenly glaze over the brown, giving it a warm feeling.

**Step 5.** After the paint has completely dried, cut out a corner of a piece of cardboard and round off one end. Use it as a freehand stencil to create edges to your letters giving them a beveled look. This is very easy with a little practice. Hold the shield down on a corner about 1/8th the distance from the cut line and spray black toward the bottom of the letters. As a rule, I spray black toward the bottom right of the letters and white towards the top left of the letters, giving it a light source at the



top left. Now, on the curved part of the letters, I only highlight parts of the letters once again giving it an illusion of being beveled.

**Step 6.** Now, after the paint is completely dried with a blow drier, start to weed, and, wow, what a difference! It went from looking like a piece of garbage to resembling a piece of art, which, by the way, you could charge twice the normal price for.



pressor up to about eighty pounds and let 'er rip!

The first thing I do is scrape, or "scuff," the whole piece of vinyl down with a piece of 00 steel wool to give the paint a tooth to stick to. After this is done, don't touch the surface to be painted with your fingers, as this will cause the paint not to stick where small amounts of oil from your fingertips are present. It also goes without saying to not spray WD-40 anywhere near the work area. Next, cut the letters using a plain, fat lettering style with no serifs. Yes, cut first and paint later!

I have been asked before if this will stay on for a long period of time. Well, I have tested Createx Auto Air, and, yes, it will last over two years if it is not scraped and scratched. However, if you're concerned with longevity, I suggest that you use One Shot clear coat over the airbrushed area. After I apply the letters to the surface, I then clear it. I apply it with a roller, but, when it is still wet, I stop the roller by wedging a screw in the side of it, and I then pull it across the wet clear. This pulls out all of the small bubbles that were caused by rolling it in the first place. Let it dry, without touching, for about a day, and this should last longer than the vinyl ever would.

I always suggest practicing these techniques for a while before going online with them. They will seem frustrating and clumsy at first, as will using the airbrush, but, with a small amount of practice, you will find your bottom line worth the extra time you spent learning this new skill.

Until next time, happy airbrushing! ☺

*For more information on obtaining videos that cover the material in this article, contact Pat at (850) 230-3709 or e-mail him at [hugeart@aol.com](mailto:hugeart@aol.com). You can also visit his web site at <http://www.patreynolds.com>.*

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**Next, we are going to tackle the wood effect. This is extremely popular and has huge amounts of applications. First, prepare the surface with the 00 steel wool and cut your letters out without weeding it.**



**Step 1.** Here I am spraying the entire surface with golden yellow and allowing it to dry completely.



**Step 2.** Next, I use light brown and heavily spray the top and bottom area to where it is almost puddling. Then I use dark brown to go over the light brown and also the middle.

**Step 3.** Now for the cool part! I use my other secret special tool, saran wrap, and, before the paint has a chance to dry, I lay it over the wet paint completely. Now with my thumbs, I start in the middle and spread the saran wrap out to the edges causing it to have a wood grain effect.



# WOOD



**Step 4.** Finally I remove the wrap quickly to reveal a horrible looking pile of brown paint. But, wait! We have a few more steps to go before you get discouraged.

**Step 5.** After the paint is completely dry, use the same shield you used in the chrome to create the edges. Here, they are very important, as the beveled edges can make or break a wood grain effect. Once again, use your corner edge and lightly spray black to the bottom right-hand corners of the letters and white to the upper left-hand corners.



**Step 6.** Dry the whole thing really well with a blow drier and weed away. The results should be astounding. From what you thought you had to what you have now is quite a difference. Further more, you did it in about two minutes! Now that's something to write home about.

