



STRICTLY COMMERCIAL

By Francis Lestingi

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

From Paltry Posts To Classic Columns

Even mundane sign components require proper attention.

Rarely does one have the opportunity to fashion a silk purse out of a sow's ear, as the old saying goes. But, we do just that every time we complete a post-mounted installation. In our last step-by-step article, "Winning at Post Time" (see ST, page 24, May 2012), we described our techniques for installing post-mounted signage. Here, we detail our procedures for making attractive, detailed, fluted posts out of lumberyard, rough-hewn, 6 x 6 x 10 pressure-treated, Southern-yellow-pine posts.

We – I work with my son, Stephen – start at the lumber yard, where we select the best "sow's ears" (i.e., posts) we can find. We reject outright posts that are twisted or warped. We seek true posts with as few checks as possible. A check is a slit or crack in the wood; they're so named because, at one time, checkmarks were placed near splits to mark them.

Back at the shop, we're ready to perform our silk-purse transformation. We start by filling all checks, splits, fissures and knots with black caulk. We use caulk that matches the stain we use (we'll discuss the stain later). We use a putty knife to spread the caulk so it penetrates deep into the crevices. After the caulk cures briefly, we use a heavy-duty belt sander to remove excess caulk and smooth out the surface. We start with 60-grit belts, and end with 120.

Equipment and Materials

Caulk: DAP black caulk, available at home-improvement stores.

Coating: Solid-color, water-based black stain, lag screws and brushes, available at home-improvement stores.

Posts: Southern yellow pine, treated 6 x 6 x 10 posts, available from lumberyards and home-improvement stores.

Tools: Centering ruler, square, belt sander, router with gate, V-bit, chamfering bit, round-over bit, perpendicular drill jig and auger drill, available from home-improvement and hardware stores.



Our classic columns add an impressive frame to an elegant sign.

Now, we're ready to start post detailing, which involves fluting, chamfering and rounding them over. We accomplish this with a handheld plunge router. To ensure precise detailing, we apply a series of careful measurements on the clean, sanded post face. Using a V-shaped bit, we produce three fluting lines. The central flute starts 4 in. from the top of the post, and is cut the same length as the panel's

width. Thus, the posts for a 4 x 8 panel will have a 4-ft.-long, central flute. The lines on either side of the central flute will be an inch shorter at each end.

Next, using a chamfering bit, we rout a chamfered edge on all four sides of the post, equal in length to the central flute line. For double-sided signs, we produce identical fluting on the other side of the post. The final detailing step is to "round-over" all the edges of the posts that have not been chamfered. Besides adding to the posts' aesthetics, the rounding-over of the sharp, 90° edges facilitates more comfortable handling of the posts during installation.

We attach our sign panel to the posts with handcrafted, aluminum-channel brackets that have threaded rods, which pass completely through the 6 x 6 posts. In our last milling step, we drill a pair of holes



We select the best posts we find at the lumberyard, but they're often pretty unsightly. So, we seal cracks and splits by filling them with black-silicone caulk.



Using a putty knife, we spread the silicone deep into checks and around any knots, and let the silicone cure briefly.



With the aid of a heavy-duty belt sander, we clean up the silicone patchwork first with a 60-grit belt, which we follow with 120 grit. On the first pass, we run across the grain to smooth the surface rapidly. Subsequent passes follow the grain.



After the caulking and sanding are complete, we start marking down measurement guidelines. With the aid of a "centering ruler", we establish the center of the post.

through each post. With the aid of a perpendicular drilling jig, which we clamp to the pre-measured post, we use a 1-in.-thick auger bit to do this.

For the final transformation step, we coat the treated posts with a solid-black stain. We don't prime or paint the posts because treated lumber won't accept these coatings. This actually simplifies our process and creates a handsome, matte-black finish on the posts. We always use flat-black stain on our posts and never add color, and certainly not gilding.

Our goal is fabricating posts that fittingly frame the sign panel with quiet, non-distracting dignity, and thus direct attention to the gleaming, gilded substrate. Of course, we always top our posts with painted, modestly gilded finials and caps, but we'll save such details for a future article.



We place two lines, one 4 in. from the top of the post and the other 1 in. below that. Our central-flute line will start at the 4-in. mark and end at the pre-determined length of the substrate panel. The two side flutes will start at the 5-in. line.

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With a handheld plunge router, equipped with a side gate and a V-shaped bit, we run the first outer flute.



Two or three passes at increasingly lower bit depths produce the outer flutes. The central flute follows these.



After the three flutes are cut, we use a large chamfering bit to place a chamfer cut, which equals the length of the central flute.



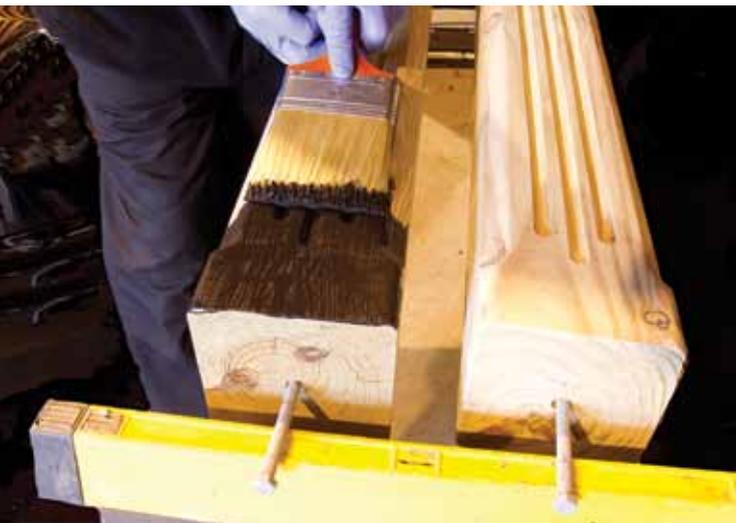
The last routing step is to use a large bit to round over all 90° edges that haven't been chamfered.



With the fluting, chamfering and rounding-over complete, the last milling step requires drilling holes in the posts to accept the brackets we use to support the sign panels.



We clamp a perpendicular drill jig to the post and, with a 1-in.-diameter, auger-bit, drill completely through the post.



The completely milled posts are supported on shop horses by drilling holes at the top end of the posts and inserting loosely fitted, 8-in.-long lag screws. This technique permits easy post flipping during the coating process.



Because treated lumber can't be primed or painted, we stain our Southern-yellow-pine posts with a water-based stain. We apply two coats at the shop and a final, touch-up coat onsite after installation.

More About Francis

After an academic career 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 Trustees of the Society of Gilders. Each year, he joins the group in their *pro bono* project restoring Hurricane Katrina-affected historic churches in New Orleans. 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 sign-design competition. Lestingi has also designed three calligraphic fonts, Pierre, Calileo and Verdi, which are available through www.LetterheadFonts.com, and two other digital typefaces, FranHand and Stefano, which are offered on www.MyFonts.com. For more information about his shop, visit www.signsofgold.com.



An example of our stately detailed, fluted, chamfered and rounded-over posts