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Marquee Magic

New sign has old look, feel

BY RACHEL CARTER



Rachel Carter is a freelance writer based in Loveland, Colo.

TONY PASQUINI needed a sign for his third and newest Pasquini's Pizzeria restaurant in the Highlands, one of Denver's latest up-and-coming neighborhoods.

How appropriate the design began on a napkin.

"He sketched it out on a napkin, like an old movie marquee sign, and asked if it would be possible to re-create that kind of look," said John Dobie, founder and owner of BSC Signs in Broomfield, Colo.

It was.

BSC crews installed the sign last summer: two 15-foot wings that wrap the corner of the brick building in a red, white and gold neon glow, topped by a tower of neon that spells out "Pasquini's" over the entire 12 feet, which reaches to the roof. The exposed neon hovers above faded white letters in a dinged and dented aluminum frame.

Pasquini came to BSC last summer, looking for a sign that would complement the 1910 brick building on the corner of West 32nd Avenue and Zuni Street. He wanted a sign that would be a throwback to the 1930s.

Dobie called in designer Matt Charboneau, who has been in the sign business for 25 years. Charboneau met

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The tower section after install during day. BSC Signs

Taken from across the road, the sign illuminates the entire intersection! Seth's (Acme Neon) neon looks spectacular! BSC Signs

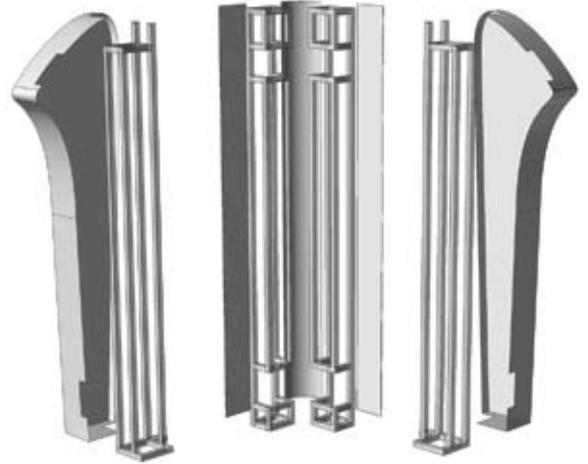




Matt using wet and dry sanding techniques. BSC Signs



Before and after samples for customer approval. BSC Signs



Our designer, Dustin Monroe, is a whiz at creating exploded views and router files to match. BSC Signs



Test lighting in shop before installation. BSC Signs



Master Fabricator Mike Lewis and Shop owner John Dobie inspecting the tower during construction. BSC Signs



Discussing the installation plan. BSC Signs



Matt's sign writing abilities are only exceeded by his design skills. BSC Signs



John and Matt discuss how thick to apply the paint. BSC Signs



Close up of the neon and distressed letter. BSC Signs



Notice the unusual neon colors at close quarters. BSC Signs

with the owners and talked with them about their restaurant, their customers, their menu and their marketing.

“I have never designed a sign for a client; I have always designed it for customers,” Charboneau said. “That is the secret.”

Charboneau started researching. He downloaded countless pictures of signs from the ‘30s, ‘40s and ‘50s, taking notes, getting ideas, testing different concepts. The design for the horizontal sections came easily enough, but he struggled with the tower. Charboneau narrowed it down to three choices and, in the end, morphed all of them to create his final design.

Then the work began in BSC’s shop—a job that wasn’t easy, Dobie said.

“It was a challenge,” Dobie said. “It wasn’t the run-of-the-mill kind of job, but we overcame that with our people.”

BSC employees are used to making their signs perfect, shiny and new; for the Pasquini’s Pizzeria job, they had to be untrained a bit, Charboneau said with a laugh.

“It was like, ‘Forget everything you know,’” he said.

They constructed the aluminum frame and the aluminum skin in the shop, leaving every dent and ding on the surface. They then painted the cabinet black in BSC’s paint booth, using Matthews acrylic polyurethane in a satin finish. Using 1 Shot enamel, Charboneau hand-painted the letters in white and outlined in red in a font he chose to invoke a bygone era.

Then it was time to make the sign perfect by making it imperfect.

They wet-sanded the letters to wear away the paint—and wear away any impression that the sign wasn’t at least 50 years old. They finished it with a flat, no-gloss clear coat, Charboneau said.

“That totally made the sign look like

it was older than dirt,” he said. “It gave it character.”

According to Dobie, Seth Totten with Acme Neon Signs bent the neon using the “classic neon” technique. Although classic neon is more expensive because it’s more of a specialty, it has a “strong look” because the glass tubing is coated with a phosphorous color.

Everything was preassembled in three sections in the BSC shop, and crews installed the sign in September 2007.

It wasn’t an easy job, but it was one of both Charboneau and Dobie’s favorites.

“What makes us proud was the trust and the confidence the client gave to us to do the right thing,” Dobie said. “(Pasquini) let us run with it. He invested the trust and confidence in us from day one. He let us run with it and didn’t try to tell us what to do at every opportunity. We wanted to excel and make it just right for him.”

Dobie opened Broomfield Sign Co. in January 1999 in one unit of an industrial complex. The company first did only sandblasted wood and stone commercial signs, but in 2002 it became clear to Dobie that, to expand the business, the company would have to broaden its product line. Dobie bought a second, adjoining unit and expanded into the electric sign business, doing neon and LED signs.

When the volume of electric sign business picked up, Dobie decided to expand again, buying a third unit in the same complex a year later to house a computer numerical controlled router table. Buying the MultiCam router table helped automate the production process and brought the company into its third phase: architectural signage, Dobie said.

Dobie then decided to take the company beyond design and production and



Mike adjusts a neon section. BSC Signs



Todd assembles the tower neon. BSC Signs

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It was hard to make a perfect letter look old, but someone had to do it! BSC Signs



Matt and Mike show off their new baby. BSC Signs



Horizontal sections installed first, then came the tower. BSC Signs



Sign after install during the day. BSC Signs

into installations. He developed a team of installers, and in 2005, bought the company's first bucket truck, a 34-foot Telsta. Two years later, the company bought a 65-foot Elliott crane truck.

BSC Signs now works with Triangle Sign & Service based in Baltimore, Md., installing signs for Gap Inc., including Gap, Old Navy and Banana Republic stores and works with Priority Sign Inc. in Sheboygan, Wis., to install AT&T signs in the Denver area.

"We went from commercial to electric to architectural to install," Dobie said.

After growing the business for nearly a decade, Dobie said the company has all the equipment and space it needs, and he now plans to focus on solidifying the business.

"We want to continue offering the services that we have, but increase our level of service and volume, basically with the same products," he said. "Now it's time to mature the company and refine our service and improve the running of our day-to-day business." ^{SB}

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