

Corel Call

By Emerson Schwartzkopf



Among sign-software publishers, Corel used to be a dirty five-letter word. Not any more.

About the author: Emerson Schwartzkopf is Technical Editor of Sign Business and a noted authority on computerized signmaking. He will be presenting seminars on computerized sign systems and four-color imaging at this summer's Sign Business '94! events in Indianapolis, Ind. and Long Beach, Calif.

NOT LONG AGO, admitting to using CorelDRAW™ for signmaking used to be like, well, driving a Volkswagen to a Cadillac dealership.

"You use Corel?" came the response from many a sign-software vendor. "How about using a real program?"

Not anymore, though. With the release of another version of the Canadian graphics software later this month, Corel is sure to keep its position as a mainstay in

computerized signmaking.

It's not that the Windows-based software is used as a sign maker's only design and production tool, although a few users do go directly from Corel to a plotter. Instead, it's a design aid that's often used in conjunction with mainstream signmaking software.

The upcoming Version 5 from Ottawa, Ontario-based Corel Corp. may have even more to please sign designers. And, companies offering ultra-sophisticated, sign-specific packages are making sure that Corel can team up with their product lines.

COSTS RIGHT

While it's impossible to figure how many sign makers are using Corel — even a few thousand is pretty insignificant, compared to the hundreds of thousands of Corel software packages sold — it's still sizable as far as the sign trade. And, it boiled down to two main factors: availability and cost.

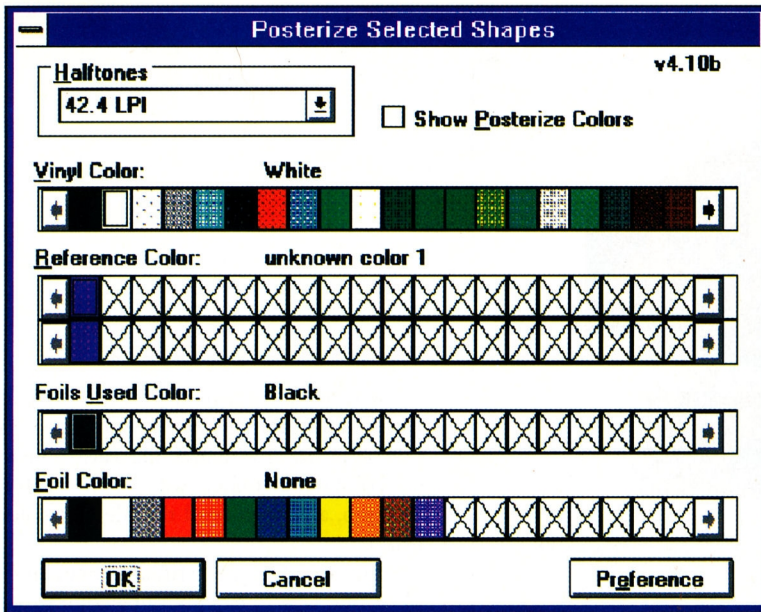
CorelDRAW made its first appearance slightly more than five years ago, providing one of the first graphics programs for use with Microsoft Corp.'s Windows™ Version 2. Compared to today's versions, the original Corel didn't offer much; however, it worked in vector line art, which made it more adaptable to signmaking than other bitmap-based art programs.

Corel also sold on the retail market for less than \$300. Included with that price was its collection of more than 100 proprietary WFN-type fonts. With a little adaptability, sign makers found they could manipulate text and graphics for nearly any job, and a few companies began offering ways to connect, or bridge, the Corel art to a plotter. (One other Ottawa-based firm, CADlink Technologies, made its name in the sign market doing this with its original ThermaZone products.)

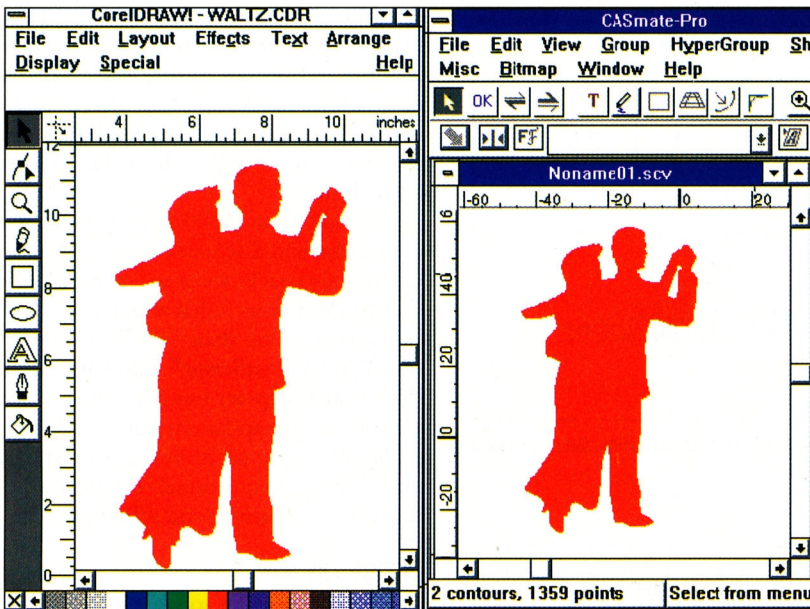
Long-time Corel users say they started



CorelDRAW® is an extremely popular illustration software from Corel Corp., Ottawa, Ontario. While not designed specifically for signmaking, many sign professionals find it a useful design tool.



Taking Corel's colors to a printer like Gerber's EDGE is done through posterization, where the "unknown", or Corel, shade is matched with the EDGE's foils. (Graphix Advantage™ software courtesy Gerber Scientific Products Inc.)

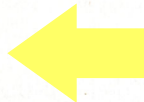


Going from CorelDRAW to a sign application with minimal fuss is getting easier, as shown by this cut-and-paste from Corel to CASmate-Pro. Notice that the shape is intact, although it may need some resizing. (CASmate software courtesy ScanVec Marketing Inc.)

using the program because it was the only real way to use a PC for signmaking, and that Apple Computer Co.'s Macintosh platforms were — at that time — still too expensive. Now, with a bevy of PC-based sign software and cheap Macs, they're still sold on Corel. Why?

"You can just use it for anything," says Bill Mogensen of Mogensen Design in Shadow Hills, Calif. And, he ought to know; he's been a winner in Corel's annual design contest with his sign designs.

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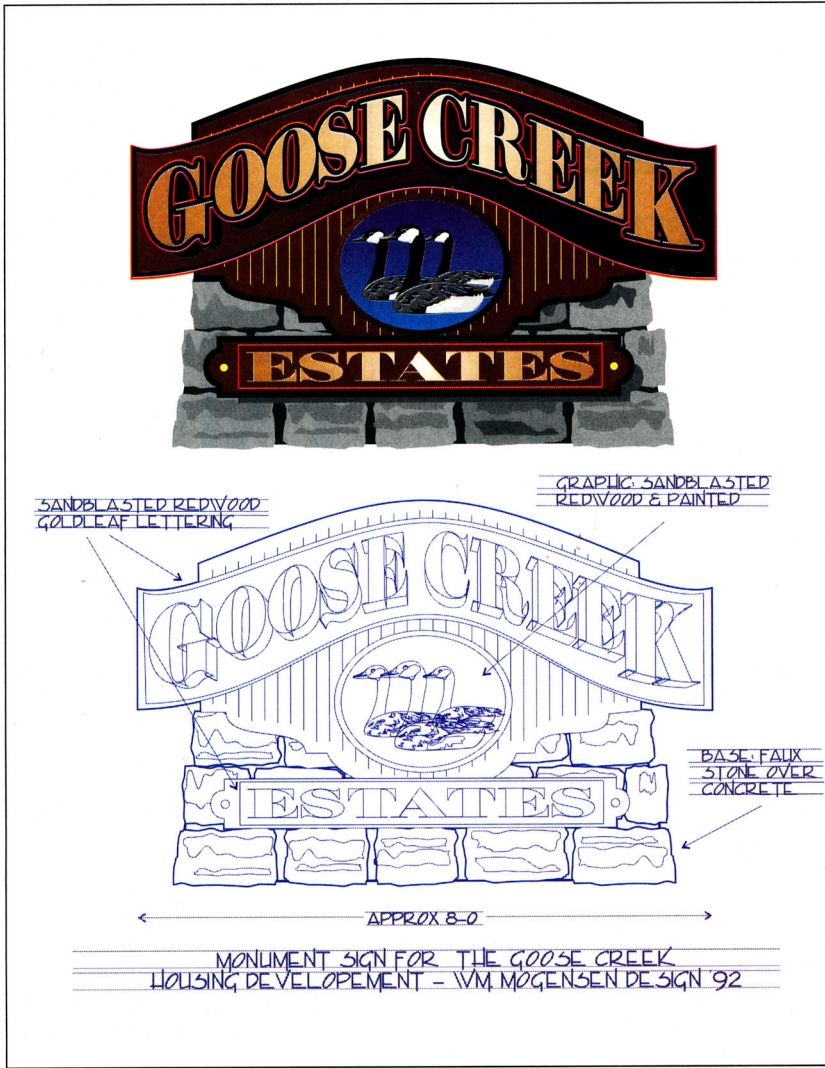
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This design for Goose Creek Estates earned Bill Mogensen of Mogensen Design, Shadow Hills, Calif., an award in the 1993 CorelDRAW World Design Contest.

Mogensen does plenty of his work in Corel, although he counts estimates as one of his big advantages. He's also able to set colors that match what he'll do in a sign job, and then send the file to a color printer.

"I have a simple estimate-sheet template," he says. "I can put out a color proof on a Canon bubble-jet printer, and the customers just go wild over it."

He also uses Corel Version 4's design capabilities, which include plenty of the features seen in sign-specific programs: welding of outlines, fitting text to paths, distortions, mirroring and image alignment. Other effects, such as outlining, can also be created with a little bit of user know-how.

At less than \$500 street price (at mail-order and discount software outlets), Corel 4 also packs some value. By using a CD-ROM disk included with Corel, users can access more than 750 TrueType™ and Type 1 PostScript® fonts and more than 18,000 clip-art images. Some of the artwork is bitmap-based, but a large segment offers plottable outlines of states, provinces, international symbols, pictograms, decorations and silhouettes.

BRIDGE THE GAP

Mogensen will also be the first to tell you that Corel can't do everything. While plenty goes into Corel — the package also includes a charting function, bitmap painting and on-screen animation tools — what comes out isn't always so pretty for sign makers.

For years, some of Corel's file-exports left sign makers without anything worth cutting. It's worth noting that, until Version 4, Corel wouldn't even import any of the files it exported as Encapsulated PostScript (EPS), and even today the quality is uneven.

While a vectorization program is included, CorelTRACE doesn't offer the sophistication of other raster-to-vector programs available to sign makers. And,

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Calling Corel

Wondering how to directly connect CorelDRAW Version 3 to a plotter? Or, why you're still getting General Application Errors (GAEs)? The answers may be only a phone call away.

Corel offers 47 technical bulletins on a FAX-back through its Interactive Voice Activated Network (IVAN). Call (613) 728-0826 and dial 3080 when prompted for an extension. Request Document #2000, and Corel will automatically fax a list back to you of available bulletins. (If you're looking for that plotter help, request #2008 for Version 2 and #2019 for Version 3. There's no plotter aid available for Version 4.)

If you're connected to CompuServe, you can download the same documents, along with Corel artwork. The command to gain entry within CompuServe is GO COREL.

Sign Business is also running an experiment by offering the Corel bulletins in a CorelDRAW section of the National Business Media BBS. Set your modem to 8-N-1, call (303) 469-5121 and go to the Files section after logging on.

MOGENSEN DESIGN
818 352.4102
POB 8128 LA CRESCENTA, CA. 91224-0128

CLIENT	RSMC	DATE	
JOB	BANNERS	NOTES	
		SIZE	3ft. x 8ft.
		DRAWN BY	[Signature]

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while plotting could be done directly from the program, Corel essentially contains a size limitation of 30" x 30", with no real tiling command for large images. (See the *Calling Corel* sidebar.)

The main holdup comes because Corel DRAW, up to now, uses a computing technique called integer math and doesn't use a math coprocessor. To compensate, there are those connections to plotters: bridge software.

Look at this month's *Software Update*, and you'll see plenty of bridges to span Corel's plotter gap. For less than \$1,000, programs offer a variety of manipulations to Corel files, including scaling, tiling, some curve-smoothing algorithms and a selection of plotter drivers.

Most of these programs require importing Corel images as EPS or DXF files. Some do it in a seamless approach; when a file is exported in EPS from Corel, for example, the bridge program automatically loads into Windows for sign work.

Some changes are coming with bridge work, however. CADlink and Solustan Inc. in Medford, Mass., are two companies working with Corel's own metafiles, which contain graphical pictures in vector-based formats. Exporting files would be simplified and require fewer steps than current programs.

Another way to utilize Corel files would be a bridge hardware product that would directly connect the software with Gerber Scientific Products Inc.'s Signmaker® through any IBM-type PC. While the third-party developer is still a little hesitant to talk until the product's out of final testing, the hardware — an emulator card that translates fonts and Corel images to Gerber fonts — should be available for approximately \$1,500 before the end of the year.

Corel itself may provide some bridge answers with Version 5, slated to be released at the end of May. Corel

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CLIENT	Luigi Interlani/INTER-ABRUSTUC	DATE	3-1-94
JOB	P/U Truck	NOTES	
	50% Deposit, Bal. COD	SIZE	
		DRAWN BY	[Signature]

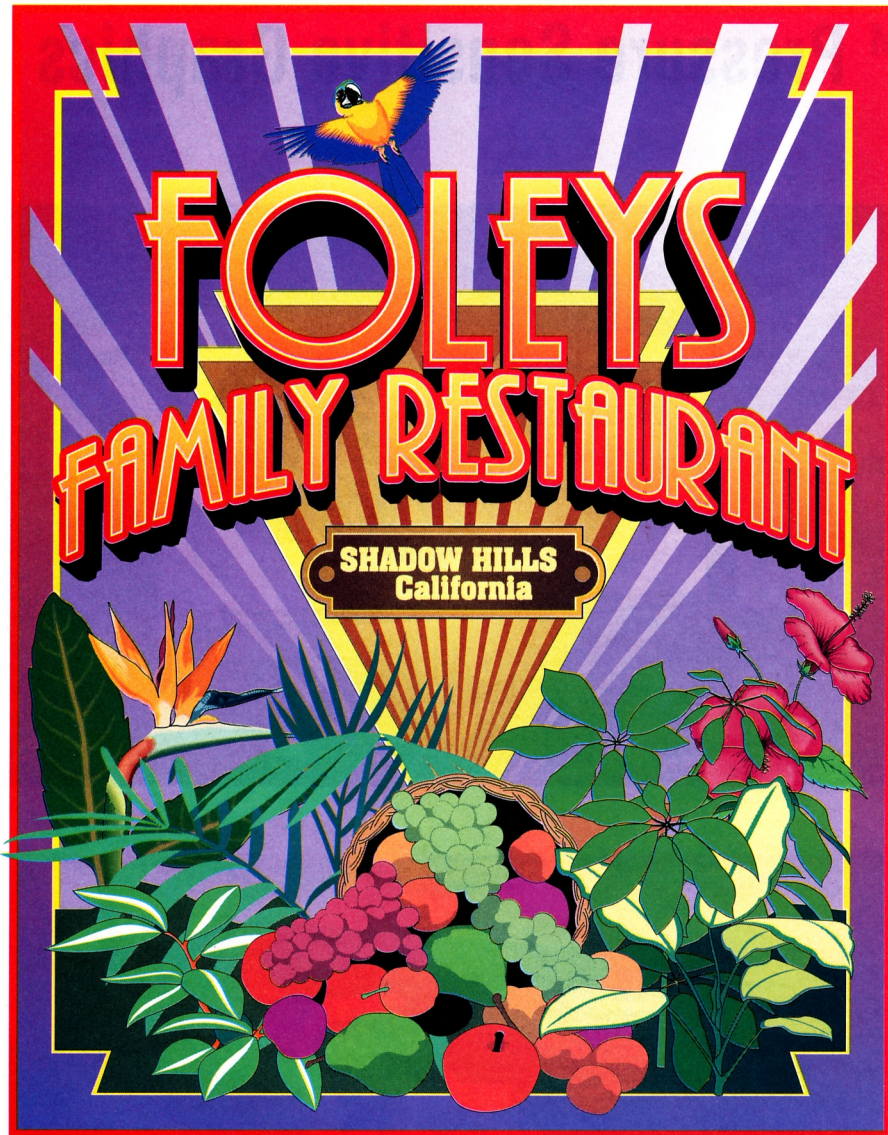
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CLIENT	ACAD	DATE	3-25-94
JOB	Corel Conf. -4	NOTES	Hanging Banners
	Material: 10oz. Vinyl	SIZE	~30x33 in.
		DRAWN BY	[Signature]

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Sign designers also find Corel useful for generating proofs. These estimate-sheets were assembled on a pre-designed template and printed on a Canon bubble-jet. (Artwork courtesy Bill Mogensen)



A vibrant poster designed on CorelDRAW. (Artwork courtesy Bill Mogensen)

spokesperson Julie Galla says the new software will include math coprocessor and scaling support, although further details won't be forthcoming until the actual release. (And, incidentally, Corel will continue to sell Versions 3 and 4 after the new package hits the streets.)

COLOR... YES AND NO

Direct cut-and-paste — the easiest way to get a Corel file — isn't supported by many Windows-based programs. However, both Amiable Technologies of Philadelphia and Wilmington, Mass.-based ScanVec Marketing are two that accept Corel files without problems.

How easy? Say there's something on the Corel CD you want to import, such as the silhouette of Sherlock Holmes. Call it up in Corel, press the Control and C keys simultaneously on the keyboard, and then switch to the sign-design programs like the newer Flexi™ or CASmate™ Windows products. Press Control and V at the same time, and there's the Corel image — imported with color fills that approximate the Corel color.

Gerber accommodates Corel's hues in more detail; within a pull-down menu in the Composer screen of the Graphix Advantage® software, there's something called Posterization. Users can create a color file in Corel, export it as an EPS, AI (Adobe Illustrator® format) or DXF file, import it into the GA software, and then launch Posterization to match Corel's colors with Gerber's own scheme.

Unfortunately, importing Corel files including color sometimes doesn't produce the results users expect. If a Corel file comes in via cut-and-paste or EPS/AI/DXF file import with a graduated-fill or other color alteration, separate images are created around every change in the fill.

For example, the rendering of Hillary Clinton included with Corel accentuates her cheekbones with a gradual red blushing of the skin tone. That change in color, however, shows up as a 12-step layered image (visible in Corel in Wireframe mode) that looks like a small hill on a topographic map.

Still, Gerber's efforts to work with color images — along with the other work being done to connect with Corel files — shows that attitudes are changing. Instead of being treated as the off-the-shelf outlaw, sign-software publishers are taking CorelDRAW on as an affable partner.

CorelDRAW Version 4.00B3 was used to research and illustrate this article. Software courtesy Corel Corp.

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