

signs of the time

Signwriter Jeff Harvey creates some clever effects with his art... and shares a trick or two.

If Ashburton signwriter Jeff Harvey of Harvey Signs and Graphics ever tells you he's more autistic than artistic, refuse to listen. The self-deprecating, fun-loving craftsman is enthusiastic about techniques and skills that, were it not for people like him, are in grave danger of being lost.

Keen to share the knowledge built up over a 25-year career, he runs workshops to take newer signwriters through processes which should endure, despite widespread changes in materials and digital technology since Jeff began in the trade.

Lots of water has flowed under the bridge since 13-year-old Jeff painted his first sign, 'To Let' on the door of his grandmother's outhouse. Some

of the technological change – such as that employed in Resene paints – has been incredibly positive. "I just love Resene's proactiveness, the paint's superior technology, and its eco-friendliness," Jeff says.

Most signwriters who entered the trade after 1985 didn't learn such skills as hand-lettering, Jeff says. This was because of sign plotters being released onto the market, which cut out vinyl letters, and do so amazingly quickly. Nevertheless, the digital technology "took a long time to be perfected".

If the new wave of digital practice has done anything to the industry, Jeff says, it's meant true creative design flair has more rarity value. Personally, he loves a creative challenge.

"People arrive here wanting a sign but they can't visualise what they'd actually like until you design something marvellous for them. A bloke will come in saying he wants something blue. When I tell him about eight blues, he'll say he doesn't care which. Women seem more interested in making detailed choices. It'll take longer, but it's more enjoyable to do something for someone who really cares about quality and finished effect."

Some of this is created using special effects. Jeff is known nationwide for his gilding-on-glass work, using 23-carat gold leaf, distilled water and gelatine.

Loving both the digital era as well as old techniques, Jeff says some vintage signage from past eras was naïve and simple in nature, and that "simple things often work best".

But don't be deceived by Jeff's rendition of 'simple'. It might involve a fake spiderweb, or chrome lettering treated to a mossy or glistening wet effect. In fact, what's possible probably rests on a vastly wider horizon than you could imagine.



- Resene Fire
- Resene Mai Tai
- Resene Rebel