

Chapter 7

BUILDING YOUR BOOTH

CART OR BUILDING?

When deciding to build a venue for selling your wares, you need to decide what environment will best present your work. The decision to sell from a booth or a cart may be purely budget driven, as booth spaces are customarily “higher rent” than a cart, but ultimately it comes down to what best serves your product. A jeweler might be able to happily present their work from a tiny Gypsy style wagon, or they may prefer the ability to “set the scene” by creating a larger “living room” environment that draws customers in to explore their glassed displays.





In this Chapter we explore the various ways you can display your products, and some of the best practices to help integrate your booth or cart into the larger Story of the Faire. How elaborate your booth, or how committed you are both financially and energy wise to the ultimate “look” of your environment is up to you. Keep in mind that the more your booth or cart supports the larger theme, and the more it stands out from your neighbors, the better your chances of drawing customers, encouraging return visits, and the higher your potential of making a sale.



CRAFTS & FOOD THAT SUPPORTS THE PERIOD

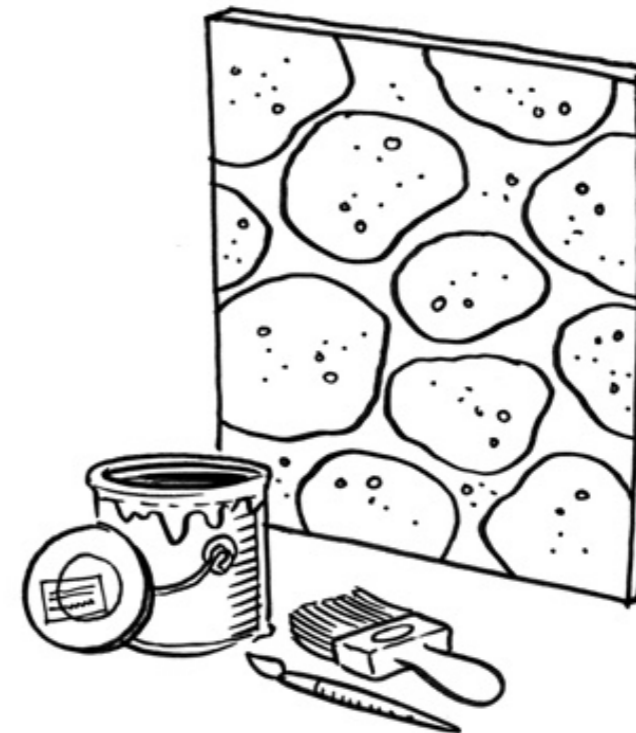
A lot of effort goes into insuring that crafts people create products that help support the period a Faire is set in, it should be stressed that the food that is sold has an equally important role in supporting the larger Faire experience. As



TRUST ME, “NO ONE PAINTED ROCKS ON PLYWOOD IN THE RENAISSANCE”

One temptation when designing a Faire structure of any kind is to use stone as a major architectural detail for booths, stages and other structure. True, stones are a basic building material of any period represented by a Renaissance Faire, but unless the building is permanent, stones are hard to transport. The obvious conclusion is to try depict them by painting them on something. This can give a theatrical effect that *could* work as part of a set piece in a play on one of the Faire stages, but for use on a booth it only succeeds in confirming that the structure is fake. When in doubt about

we discussed earlier, certain craft purchases can become a tradition and an integral part of a yearly visit to the Faire. The same is true of the food. Having that annual turkey leg, or the meat pasty that they can only get at the Faire is often reason enough to go each season. Food vendors have the unique opportunity to offer tastes and smells that are not easy to come by during the rest of the year. Although not every customer will have an adventurous pallet, you owe it to them to be able to experience the Faire with their tongue as well as their eyes. Sometimes more common foods can be made period with a slight twist. Why serve cherry pie when you can offer “The Queen’s Cherry Tarts”?



ROCK WALLS PAINTED ON PLYWOOD
LOOK LIKE ROCK WALLS PAINTED ON PLYWOOD

the use of stones in a temporary booth, the answer is, *don't*. One acceptance to this rule is the use of bricks; another frequently used building material of the period. Although hand painted bricks look as artificial as hand painted stone, there are convincing lightweight faux bricks available that work rather nicely. The challenge with these brick panels is avoiding overly bright or comically colored faux bricks, in favor of the more weathered and highly textured varieties. Even then, it doesn't hurt to add even more aging to the surface with a wash of watered down brown paint and finishing it off with handfuls of rubbed in dirt. Some of the best brick panels I have seen come from many a winter between Faires stored out in the elements. Faux bricks might actually be the only part of your booth or building that will actually get better with age.

FABRIC AS A CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL

The cheapest building material by far for creating your booth or building is Fabric. Unless you are located in a particularly windy area (you don't want your booth to become a kite), fabric is relatively inexpensive, is easily transported, and does a fabulous job of defining the walls of a structure, hiding areas of your booth you don't want people to see or go into, and is great for roofs, awnings, and shade while still allowing light to get into your booth. Many Faires insist that all fabric used in booth construction be certified fireproof before the

event opens. This can be accomplished by using pre-fireproofed material, having your fabric fireproofed and certified prior to construction, or some Faires will fireproof your booth for you, for a fee. If you are worried about being around toxic chemicals be sure to research what is being used to fireproof anything in your booth so that you are more educated about what is and is not safe.



Sturdy canvas awnings on a booth always look best



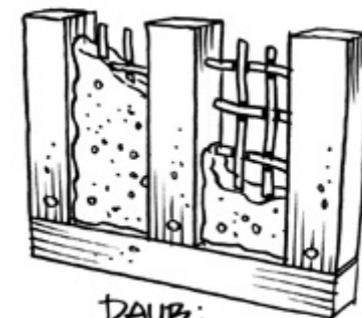
NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO TO THEM, BED SHEETS LOOK LIKE BED SHEETS

When having to create booth walls, roofs, or awnings of fabric it is tempting to use something cheap and readily available, the obvious choice is to resort to used bed sheets. Although I have seen these used on countless booths, I have to say there is just something about them that cries out “BED SHEETS”! It may be the lightweight material, the color, or perhaps the types of patterns that customarily appear on them, but bed sheets actually defeat the look of a sturdy Faire booth and broadcast a lack of quality that will only cheapen the appearance of your wares.

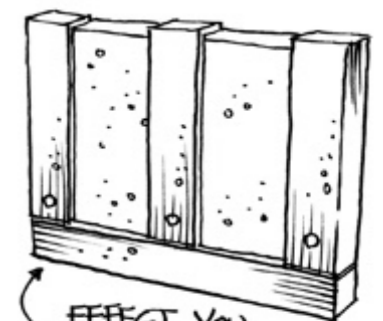
UNDERSTANDING HOW TIMBER WALLS ARE CONSTRUCTED:



WATTLE:
WOVEN LATTICE OF
WOODEN STICKS



DAUB:
SOIL, CLAY, SAND,
STRAW & ANIMAL DUNG



EFFECT YOU
ARE TRYING TO
SIMULATE

PLYWOOD TUDOR, OR UNDERSTANDING WATTLE & DAUB

When recreating the illusion of an English country village during Britain's Renaissance, it is desirable to try and simulate the architecture of the times. In the mid-1600's, buildings were most often timber frame affairs, which we often think of as the signature style of the times. Since it is impractical to transport and erect an actual timber frame structure for only several weekends a year, the next best thing is to try and recreate it using present day materials. This is easy enough, but to be successful it is important to understand how timber frame buildings were constructed, because this technique creates a very specific look, one that is all too often recreated incorrectly.

I am sure we have all had the experience of seeing a motel or apartment block that has attempted to recreate itself as an "olde world-y" timber building. This is often done in stucco with boards applied to the surface to simulate timber construction. Timber buildings, often called Tudor, are what we think of when we imagine Olde England, a quaint

holiday scene, or even Santa's house, but creating the effect has a few architectural pitfalls that can be avoided if you understand how timber buildings were actually constructed.

The building technique used in creating a timber building is called Wattle & Daub. A completely finished, freestanding, timber structure is made where vertical columns make up the



walls and support the roof, while horizontal and diagonal members stabilized the upright timbers. It is good to remember that the timbers are actually doing all the work supporting the structure and making it stable. Only then are the gaps between the timbers filled to keep weather on the outside of the structure. To do this, twigs and branches (Wattle) are woven between the beams, often in a slot carved into the inner face of each beam. These are then packed with a mixture of mud, clay, straw, and dung (Daub) to act as a sort of plaster. The timbers would be visible from both the exterior and the interior. In following eras the interior was often coated to hide the timbers inside, creating a “Half Timbered” look.

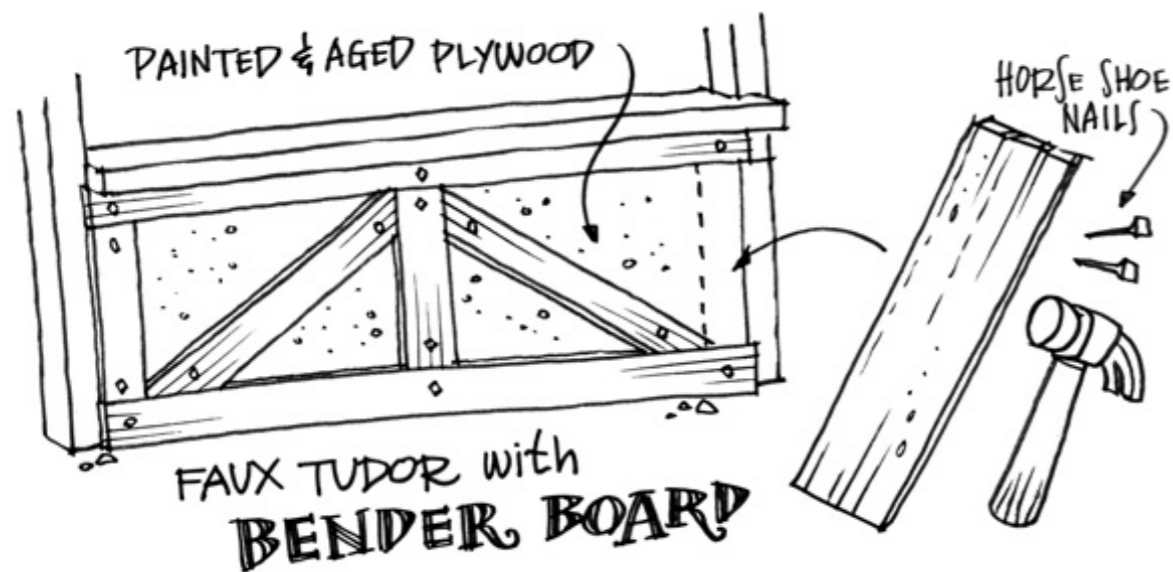
Most important to remember is that vertical timbers *support* horizontal timbers, and diagonal timber *brace* vertical timbers. All too often, faux timber facades ignore this fact and come up with unconvincing results. The biggest mistake is often to create “V” shaped elements that, although decorative, are not at all structural, and can draw attention to the fact that a structure is faked.

BENDER BOARD



The easiest way to simulate timber frame construction is to use plywood and apply wood to represent the vertical and horizontal beams. One material that works really nicely for these fake timbers is Bender Board. Bender Boards are usually 1/4" by 4" rough cut lumber that is most often used to bend around the edges of garden beds. Many of these are being replaced with a plastic look-alike material, but actual wood Bender Boards are still available. Coated with a watered down brown paint, applied like a stain, before attaching them to the plywood works best, and makes creating a convincing timber building fairly painless. This allows you to pre-paint the plywood (see Rag Rolling), making your structure complete once the faux timbers are applied.

USE WOOD CHIPBOARD WITH CAUTION



When choosing plywood for your period structure, it is tempting to use a type of plywood known as Wood Chipboard (although it is called by many names). This is plywood that is created using glue and chunks of waste wood chips and is popular in home construction because it is cheaper than conventional plywood panels. The very rough surface *sounds* like it would be a very convenient way to help simulate your plaster or Daub walls. The problem is that even with several coats of paint it still looks like modern Chip Board, and might contradict the period effect you are trying to create. My advice when using Chipboard is to apply many coats of thick paint to the surface, add dirt to the mixture,

and even a little plaster, anything to help hide the telltale Chipboard surface.

RAG ROLLING

Now that you understand the fine art of Timber Frame construction, the next subject is how to simulate a convincing, mottled Daub surface. The easiest method for this is by using a paint technique called Rag Rolling.

When painting plywood to look like a plaster or mud surface, it is important to hide any details that might suggest that you are actually using plywood. Lower grade plywood often includes knot holes, or long running grooves or grains that are typical in this material. Before painting, be sure to fill these holes and cracks with Spackle or wood putty to hide these obvious elements that could ruin the illusion you are trying to create.

Once you have covered your plywood with a base coat, pour out a little of the base color and add a slightly darker color to it. This darker color should only be a very slight tint, almost indistinguishable from the base color. Avoid making this too great a contrasting value since it **will** draw attention to itself. Then, taking a cotton rag (avoid using terry cloth or a bath towel, an old cotton sheet works best) and bunch it up into a loose roll. Lightly rolling the rag roll in the slightly darker paint, then gingerly apply it to the base color by rolling the rag along its surface. Try to do this in a loose and “organic” way, avoiding symmetrical lines or stripes. Crossing the path

of your rag rolling will also hide any obvious lines that might appear as to continue to mottle the surface texture.

If for some reason your end result is too busy, usually something that happens when too dark a color is applied to the base, feel free to apply another coat of watered down base color over the top. There is no wrong way to do this, but it will take some trial and error to discover a look that you like the best.

AGING YOUR BOOTH

Another method for making your booth as convincing as possible is to age it down to give it the look of a structure that has been in the weather for more than a few weekends.

Ironically, and not surprisingly, the method many people use for storing their booths during the off season... usually throwing it in the back yard or leaning them up against the garage, has the unplanned effect of aging a booth quite nicely. Often the ritual of retrieving last year's booth involves brushing off mud and vanquishing black widow spiders before loading it on the truck. Still, it would be nice to have a little more control over the aging of your structure.

One quick method is to mix up a very light wash of brown ink or very watered down paint. The consistency of this

mixture should be no more than dirty water and should contain very little pigment. First wet down all the areas you intend to age, then taking a sponge soaked in the dirty liquid, begin to scrub in the wash into the corners of beams, along the base of the booth, and in and around high traffic areas like doors and windows. Think about how mother nature might distress your building, so that roof eaves might shield the top of your walls while the base might get the most splash and aging. There is no wrong way to do this, so distress as much as you like, and hold back if it is feeling a little too “ramshackle” for your taste. Mostly, you are trying to remove that brand new look that comes with any recently built structure.

FERROUS SULFATE

If you are creating a primarily wooden structure (not plywood but actual wood boards and timbers) and you want to convincingly age your brand new wood quickly, then you might consider applying a Ferrous Sulfate wash. Ferrous Sulfate, also known as Copperas or Green Vitriol, is a fertilizer that is also a very effective wood stain. Dissolve 2 ounces into a pint of water and apply to any new wood surface and it will turn aged and silver by the following morning. This is a technique used widely by the Disney theme parks to make new structures look old overnight. Be sure to use this chemical with caution, as Ferrous Sulfate is moderately poisonous.

FAKE BRICKS

Brick is definitely a building material used in the periods surrounding the Renaissance, and in many ways it was more creatively used then, than in our modern architecture. There is a lot of leeway when using brick as a design motif, but like stones it is important to use materials that are convincing. Luckily there are commercial sheets of faux brick that are available, some more convincing than others, the real secret is how you distress it. Applying brick to a booth is easy enough,



aging it down to not draw attention to itself is your next challenge. Like the tricks used in aging timber structures, consider applying washes of stain or watered down paint to give it the appearance of being weathered.

With brick there is also the opportunity to be a little playful. Research some of the many patterns that were used during this era and see what you can come up with. Probably the most convincing use of brick is when it is used on a booth that hides just how thin the faux brick really is. Whenever possible created the illusion of wall thickness to keep the eye from coming to the conclusion that your bricks are impossibly thin, and so unbelievable. Here are just a few examples of what is possible when laying out your brick details.

THATCH

Thatch is one of the oldest roofing materials and a favorite when depicting a building from this era. The problem is that a true thatch is costly, cumbersome, and not that portable. Real thatch can be a foot or more in thickness, with a very characteristic appearance. With the exception of ambitious permanent structures, real thatch is impractical, but that doesn't mean that it can't be faked as a detail on your more temporary structure. Rather than attempting to recreate the thickness of thatch, it is better to go for something a little

more theatrical. There are faux thatch materials on the market that are most often used to create tropical huts, sometimes found in Tiki themed establishments. These materials come treated with fire retardant, but cheaper quality faux thatch can have a plastic appearance. Thatch can also be faked by bundling your own reeds, straw, or other organic materials, or better yet attach them to thin strips of wood that can be layered onto the roof of your booth and easily removed and used again for a future Faire. Handmade thatch will need to be treated with fire retardant, so speak with the local fire department or your Faire organizer before considering this particular building material. Allowing the thatch to droop over the edge of your booth will suggest the curved appearance of real Elizabethan thatch, and help hide just how thin your roof surface actually is. A thatched Faire booth or building will definitely help your structure stand out, as long as it is done well, and with an eye to recreating the illusion of real thatch.