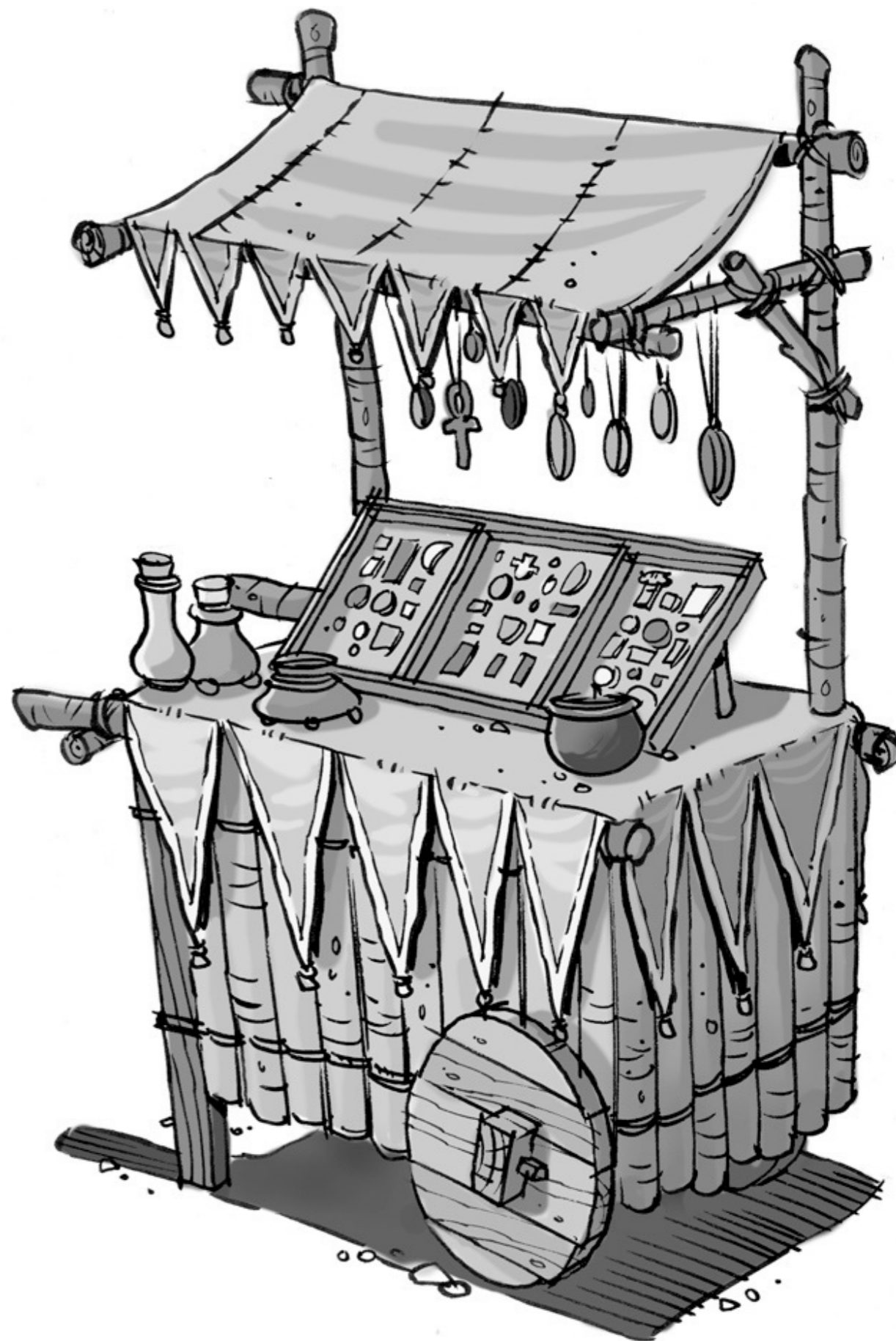


## Chapter 9

# BUILDING A CART

If you like, you could always consider foregoing a traditional booth and create a cart. This is especially good if you have small items, or your larger booth has smaller products you can also sell in a satellite location. The biggest advantage to a cart is not only the smaller booth fees, but you are mobile and can rationalize moving if your first location isn't working for you. Carts can pepper a Faire and have the advantage of being out in front of your customers and not tucked in a corner somewhere with little hope of moving. Some carts are even mobile enough to move constantly, always going where the people are.



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This is very nice if you wish to park yourself at the exit when the Faire is ending, or near the stage when a big scheduled event is imminent. Carts can come in all sizes and even include places for you to sit within them. The following sketches will give you some ideas of what a cart might be, and maybe inspire you to dream up something unique to you and your products.

## CREATIVE MERCHANDISE DISPLAYS

There are practical considerations to make when creating a display for your work. Potters need sturdy shelves, expensive jewelry needs to be in a case, and fine breakables should be out of the easy reach of children. Displays also need to be something that can be easily broken down and carted home after a Faire has ended. All this being true, there is an opportunity to think outside of the conventional crafts fair display when presenting your work at a Renaissance Faire. Using organic elements like twigs and branches can create unconventional but attractive displays. Without wanting to over power your work, think of it like a flower arrangement, where your product represents each bloom. Find ways to tell the story of how your art is made. A metalworker could display a few items on an anvil, or surrounded by blacksmithing tools. A woodworker could cover the floor of his booth with wood shavings, and weaver could display baskets filled with wool in all stages from sheep to yarn.

Anything you can do to your environment that speaks to the process taken to create your products will better help your customers relate to what they are looking at and eventually purchasing.

It must be added that the original Renaissance Pleasure Faire was based with the goal to recreate history, and their early booths demonstrated how their wares were crafted. It is worth considering including a work area within your booth that would allow you to work on building more merchandise for your shop. This allows your customers to better understand the workmanship that goes into each piece, creating additional interest and entertainment, and a way to keep you busy during the Faire. One thing you can do that Walmart never can is demonstrate the love and attention that goes into everything you make.

Food merchants have a harder time displaying their products, purely because the health department frowns on the presenting of uncovered food. With this in mind, food vendors have an opportunity to suggest how the food is being made. Although just behind the plywood wall and screen a booth worker may be stirring a stainless steel pot over a gas burners, but this shouldn't stop the owner from displaying an oversized cast iron pot in a large brick hearth with the menu items painted on its side. Also creating banners and signs that depict period people eating your food, for example Henry the Eights holding a turkey leg, or a court jester juggling meat

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pasties is a way to suggest to the public that to eat your food is to consume a bit of history itself. The reality of running a food booth is that the experience in the kitchen is very different than that on the street, but that shouldn't stop you from telling a story, one that takes its audience deeper into the role playing that drew them to the Faire in the first place.

## BUILDING A HOOCH (BACK ROOM)

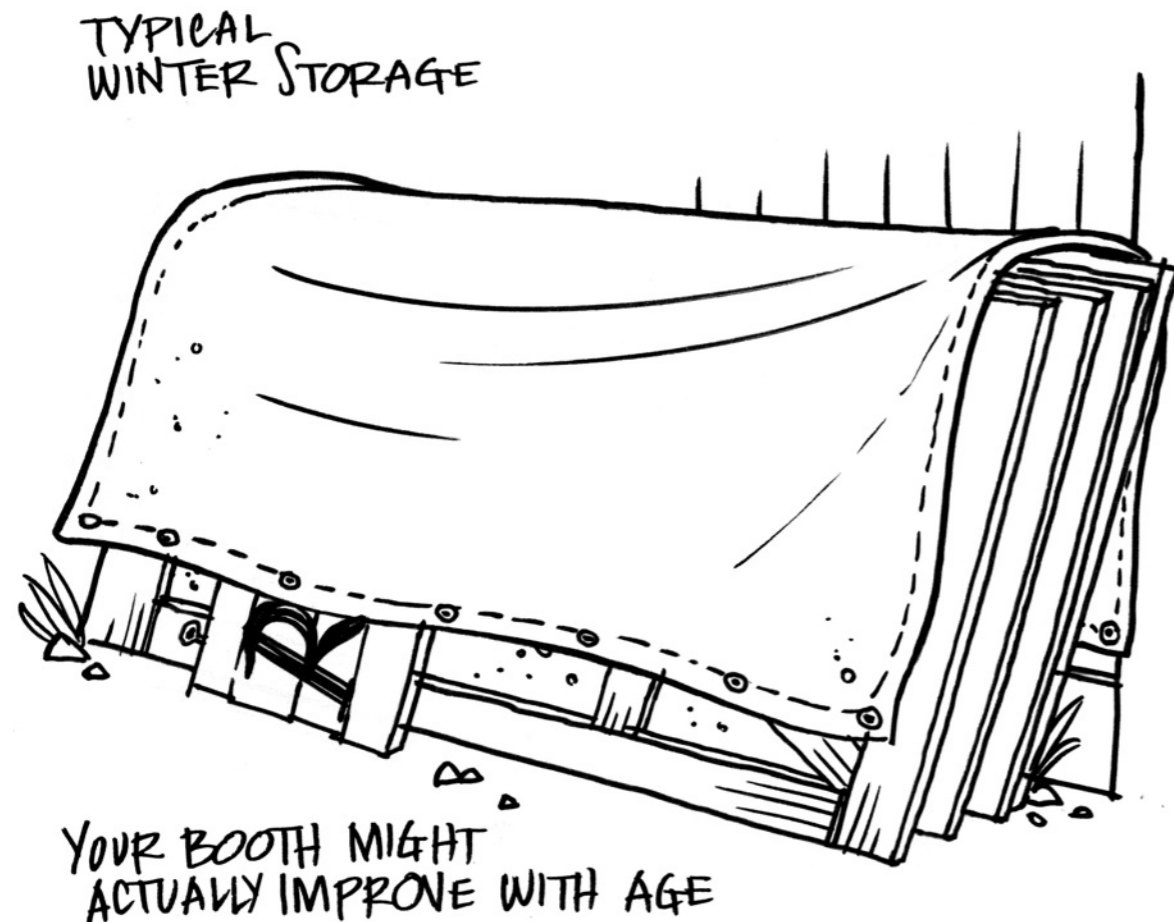
The “Hooch” is the private space behind a booth. This is where anachronistic items are stored, extra merchandise is kept, and sleeping bags wait for overnight camping. These back rooms have an almost mythic quality, as they are tiny, private bubbles in the middle of the glorious chaos that is a Faire. Legends of quiet encounters, the conceiving of babies, and the partaking of various substances are truer than fiction, and many fond Faire memories include “what happened in the Hooch” during and after business hours. Still, a Hooch has a business function that necessitates that its contents are not viewable by the public and valuable items are safe when you are out front working with your customers. Hooch's are famously easy to get in and out of, so it is advised that you create a simple plywood box that you can padlock for your more valuable items. The extended family that is a Faire are not here to rob you, but you might as well avoid temptation by not leaving valuables out where they might inadvertently disappear.

A Hooch can consist of simple burlap walls, or be as complex as an entire lock-able building. Some Hoochs are under the counter, some can be a penthouse on the roof of your booth. At the Oregon Country Fair, a contemporary of the Renaissance Faire, but with a more tie-died spin, has booths that one could argue are all about the Hooch, with secondary attention paid to the merchandise being sold below. The OCF is a spectacle that you could argue hasn't truly been experienced if you haven't watched it go by from an elevated private deck perched on top of someone's booth with a glass of some beverage in your hand. The Hooch is just another perk awarded to those participating in a Faire, made better when you are the owner and not just a visitor.

## BREAKING THE 8 FOOT HEIGHT BARRIER

One of the challenges to designing and building a period booth with materials purchased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the temptation to stick with the standard dimensions offered in the lumber you buy and build with. There is a temptation to make things 8ft tall, to use up all of the materials we are given, but this tends to have the side effect of making the entire world stop at 8 feet. One way to combat this temptation is to push yourself to build both above, and below these dimensions. 6 foot tall structures appear to the modern eye as tiny, and 12 foot buildings giant, purely because we are

so used to this 8 foot standard. This will also help the silhouette of your event, making the structures move your eye up and down as you wander the Faire.



## OFF-SEASON STORAGE

Once the Faire has ended for the season, where to store your booth or cart becomes the new problem. More often than not

the collapsed parts of a booth are left to lean against the side of a garage with a loosely draped tarp over it, not always protecting it from the elements. Once the Faire is over it can seem like ages until the next one, so the care of your booth might get placed lower on your list of concerns. Fear not, I am a firm believer that Faire booths can improve with age, and if a little moss happens to grow in the corners of your beams, or mold in your thatch, it often just helps make it look the part all the more the following year. There are of course exceptions to this rule, but more often than not, a little age doesn't hurt the overall effect... and in some cases it actually improves it.

## GETTING THE ACTION ABOVE THE GUESTS

Once you have broken beyond the 8 foot mark, the next obvious opportunity is to get a few people up there to help draw attention to your booth and wares. Although a structure that allows for the safe weight of a person can be more expensive, having a barker elevated above the heads of guests can add a dynamic quality to your booth that is more likely to draw customers to you. This is true of booth workers and performers sitting in the trunks of trees. Banter from over our head is just not something we often encounter in our modern lives, so take advantage of surprising your audience by making them look up for a change.

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## GAME BOOTHS

Game booths can be the most lucrative of businesses in a Faire, but ironically they are often the most poorly designed. This can happen when a booth is so very large, like an archery game, that themeing such an expanse can become cost prohibitive. Although I sympathize with your pain, I have to say that the ugliest booths often house games. I know there are exceptions, but before you catapult a bean bag at me or fire a dowel at my head, lets discuss opportunities game vendors have that are unique to their business.

Often the biggest challenge for any game vendor is getting visitors to actually participate in their game. This is a problem that midway games have struggled with ever since the invention of the county fair. What is unique about a Renaissance Faire is that *your* game can actually help transport your audience into the historical time the event is set in. Any opportunity you have of suggesting a little role playing with your game or activity will only encourage participation. Firing a bow is fun, but becoming a knight firing a bow, or wielding a sword, or winning the approving glance of a pretty booth maiden, brings your guests inside the story. If you are tossing coins, why not do it inside the mouth of a dragon (artfully painted on the canvas facade), or hurl bean bag peasants from a rampart overlooking a miniature village? Creating a large game booth can be very

expensive, but it can also have the highest return for investment. Whenever possible try to stage your larger games in an environment that doesn't overlook obvious anachronistic elements (cars, modern buildings), back your booth against a tree lined hillside if possible. If that is not possible, do the best you can to attractively block the view of un-Faire-like vistas, it will help your sales to offer an attractive experience.

Another opportunity is to elevate your barkers above the heads of the passing crowd. Building a short tower, or rigging that allows your booth people to do a better job of drawing attention to your game will succeed in letting them know how fun it will be to play your game, and add interest and energy to your corner of the Faire.