

# Enhancing a silhouetted image with Photoshop

*A shadow and mirrored reflection help an image stand out*

By Dan Antonelli, President and Creative Director, Graphic D-Signs, Inc.

## Download the files:

You can download the Adobe® Photoshop® file Dan used in this article by going to [www.signcraft.com](http://www.signcraft.com), clicking on *Features* and looking under the *How To* heading.

## Software:

Adobe Photoshop 7.0  
Eye Candy 5: Impact for Photoshop  
by Alien Skin Software  
Macromedia FreeHand MX

## Platform/OS:

Macintosh 1.8 GHz G5 Dual Processor  
OS X v10.4.4  
3GB RAM

Last issue, we explored how to silhouette a photo of a truck-lettering job, and make the image more powerful. In this step-by-step, we'll do the same for a freestanding sign, and we'll also add a faux background, shadow, and mirrored reflection. This effect is often used in print advertising. Once you master this, it becomes another trick up your sleeve—especially for those who have a digital printer.

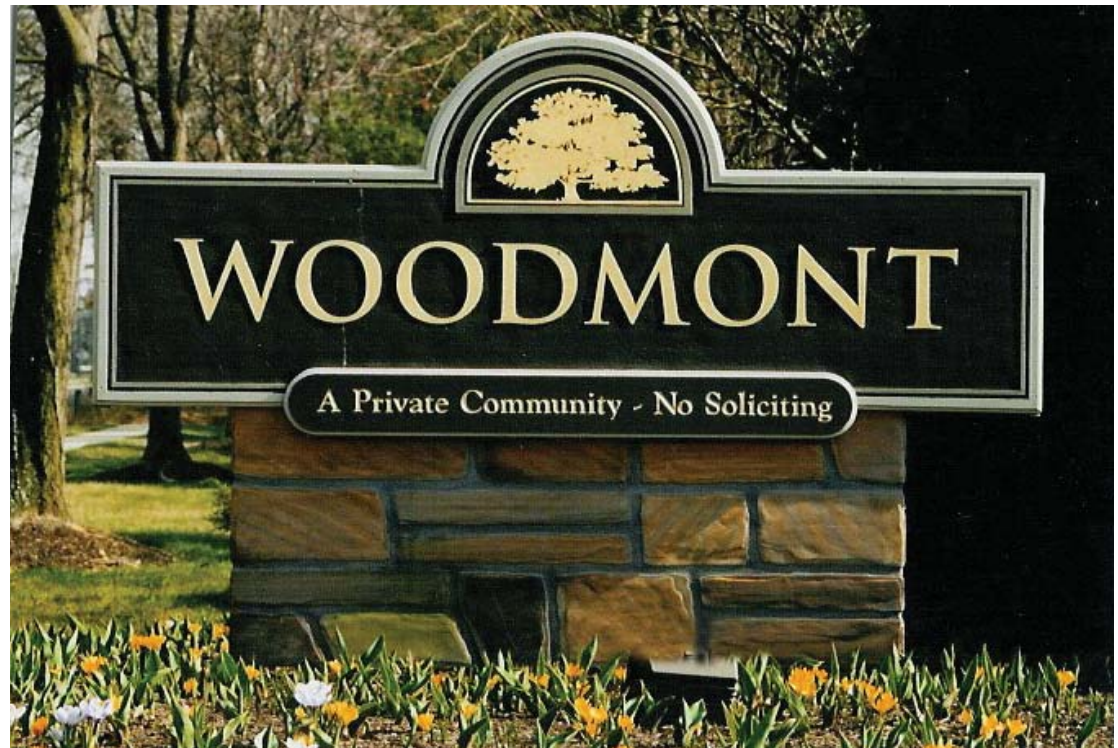
You can use this great-looking effect on posters, site signs, POP displays—you name it. And when you begin to work your layouts around images rather than just type, it looks more like advertising than signs.

So, sell advertising instead of signs. Not only

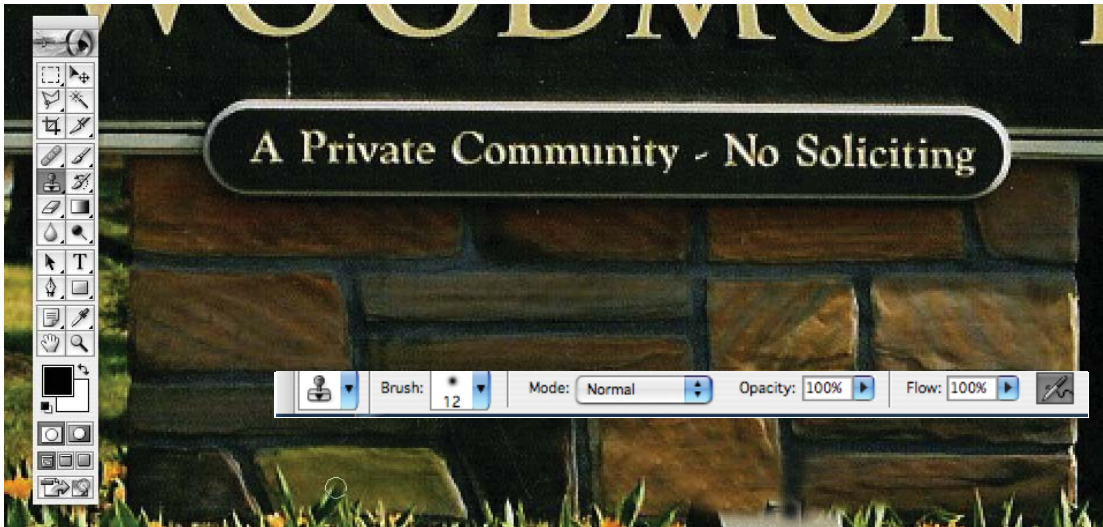
will your clients perceive your work much differently, you'll also make lot more money. Why? Because you're not selling a commodity; you're selling marketing strategy. It's all in the way you see yourself and the approach you use with your clients. •SC



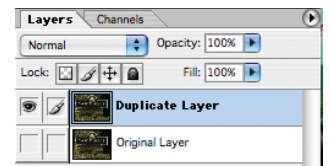
Dan Antonelli owns Graphic D-Signs, Inc. in Washington, New Jersey. He is the author of *Logo Design for Small Business I and II*. His Web site, [www.signshopmarketing.com](http://www.signshopmarketing.com) caters to the marketing needs of sign shops. He can be reached at [dan@graphicd-signs.com](mailto:dan@graphicd-signs.com).



This is a photo of a sign done by Larry Plumber at Designworks Signs [[www.designworkssigns.com](http://www.designworkssigns.com)]. It looks fine in a natural environment, but if it were to be used in an ad, it might have more drama if silhouetted.

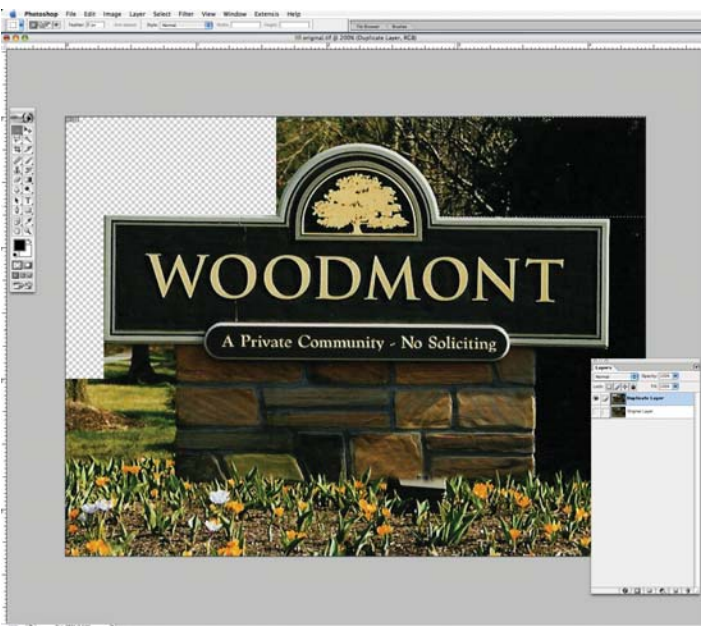


We started by opening the image from a digital camera and saving it as a layered TIFF. We duplicated the *Original Layer* or

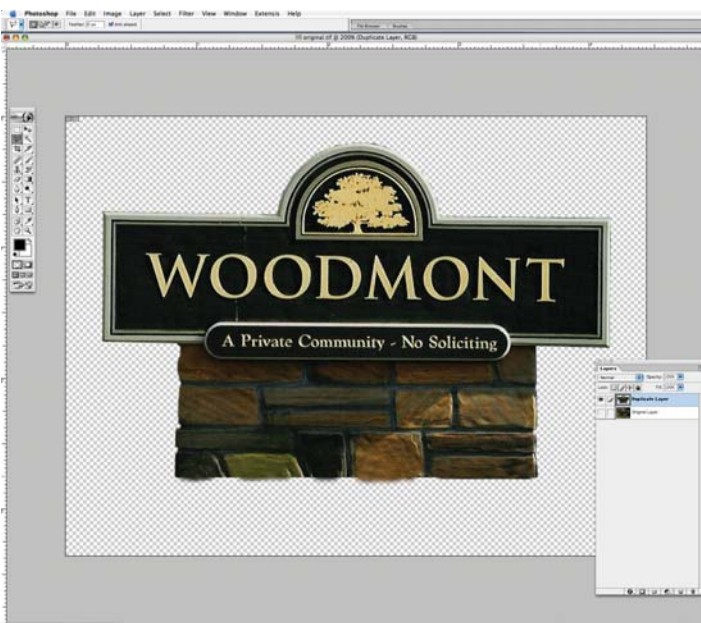


*Background*, then turned off that layer so that only the *Background Copy* layer was visible.

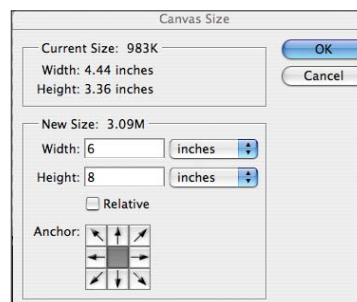
Let's get rid of some of the plant material on the bottom of the sign. Using the *Rubber Stamp* tool, with the brush set to 12 pixels, erase some of the plants off the bottom of the sign. Option-click over an area that you want to duplicate. Then, using your mouse, make your way across the bottom. We're going to add a shadow later, so this cleanup doesn't need to be perfect.



Now, we can start to make our silhouette. First using the *Rectangle Marquee*, delete the background around the square portions of the sign. Then use the *Polygonal Select* tool to work your way around the curved and irregular portions of the sign, like the top oval and down the sides along the stone. Once you've completely deleted the background, you can then start to add some realism to the photo, as if it might have been shot in a studio atmosphere.

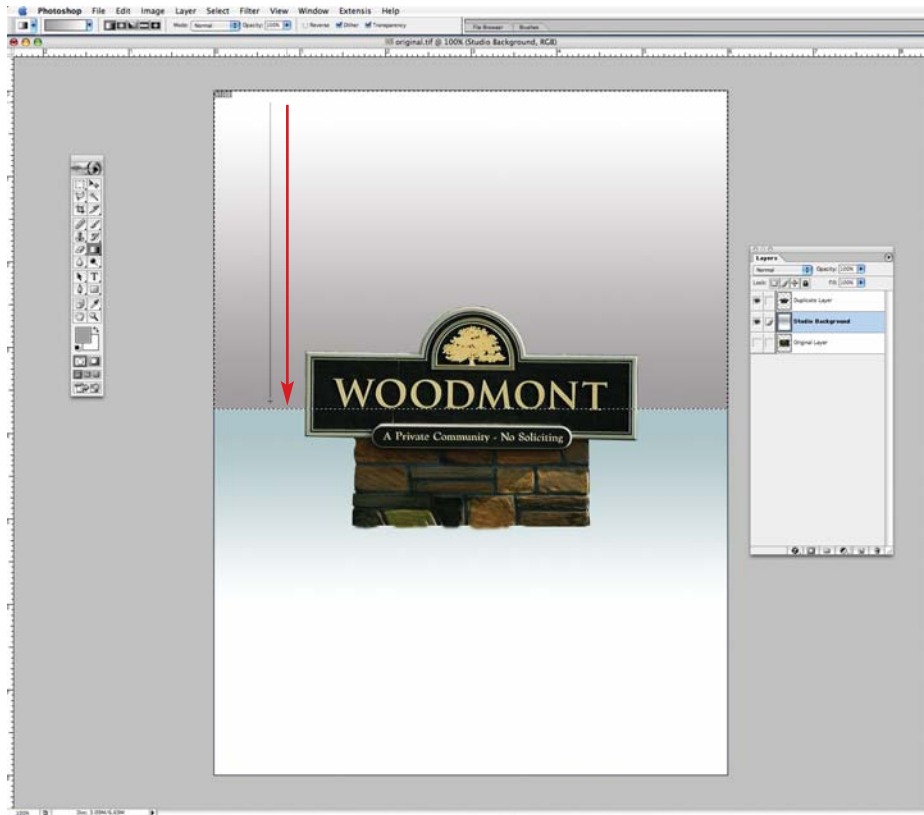


Here's the completed silhouette. On the bottom, where the plant material was, you can use the *Rubber Stamp* tool to clean up a little more of the stone. Since we're going to be using this in an ad, let's change the size of our document.



I've changed the canvas size to 6 by 8 inches, a nice format for an ad. Now, let's make a "studio background."

continued...

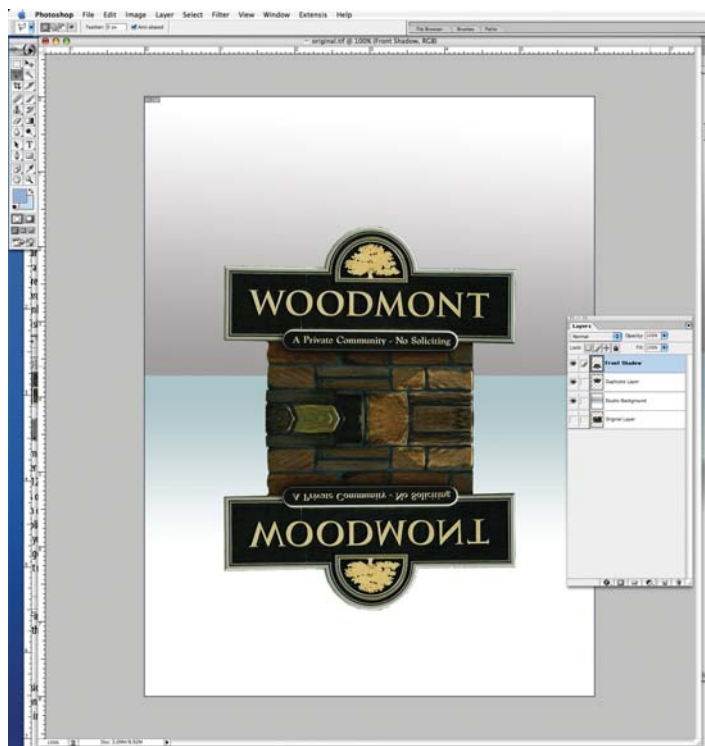


We'll start by adding a background to our image to give it some perspective. Create a new layer called *Studio Background*. Next, select the colors you want to use. In this instance, I choose a light grey to white fade for the "wall," and a light blue to white fade for the "floor." Choose these colors first, then select the area you're coloring. At left, you can see our selected area, in this case the wall is ready to have the fade inserted.



< Select the *Gradient* tool, and starting from the top, hold down the *Shift* key and click and drag the tool straight down. This creates the blend for the wall. Repeat these same steps for the floor.

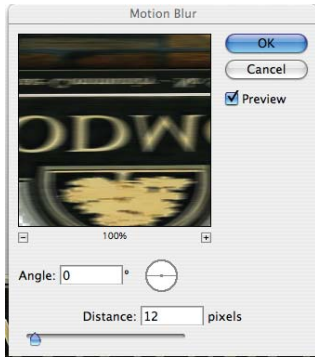
< Select the two colors of your fade here.



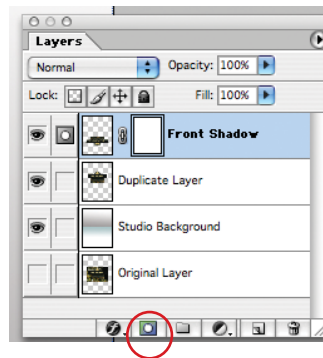
Now let's start building our front reflection. Move the sign up a bit on the page. Next, select the layer called *Duplicate Layer* and duplicate it using your *Layers* options. Select *Edit>Transform>Flip Vertical*. Rename this layer *Front Shadow*.



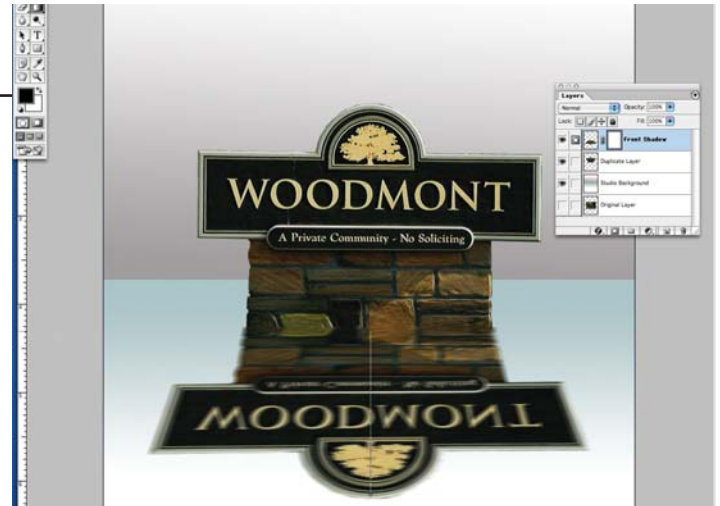
Create some perspective on our front reflection by again selecting *Edit>Free Transform*. This puts a bounding box on our front reflected image. Grab the middle bottom point, and drag it up to "squish" the image. Next, while holding down the *Option* key, grab the lower right-hand point and drag it to the right. Repeat this for the left side as well, creating a trapezoid.



Now, we need to blur the reflection in front of the sign. Select *Filter>Blur>Motion Blur*. I selected 12 pixels as the blur amount, but you can experiment with different settings.



Next, we must fade the top of the sign out of our reflection (which is now on the bottom). As the reflection moves further away from the point, it would tend to be more faded and less prominent. So we must first create a mask of our layer in order to fade it. On the *Layers* palette, select *Add a Layer Mask*.

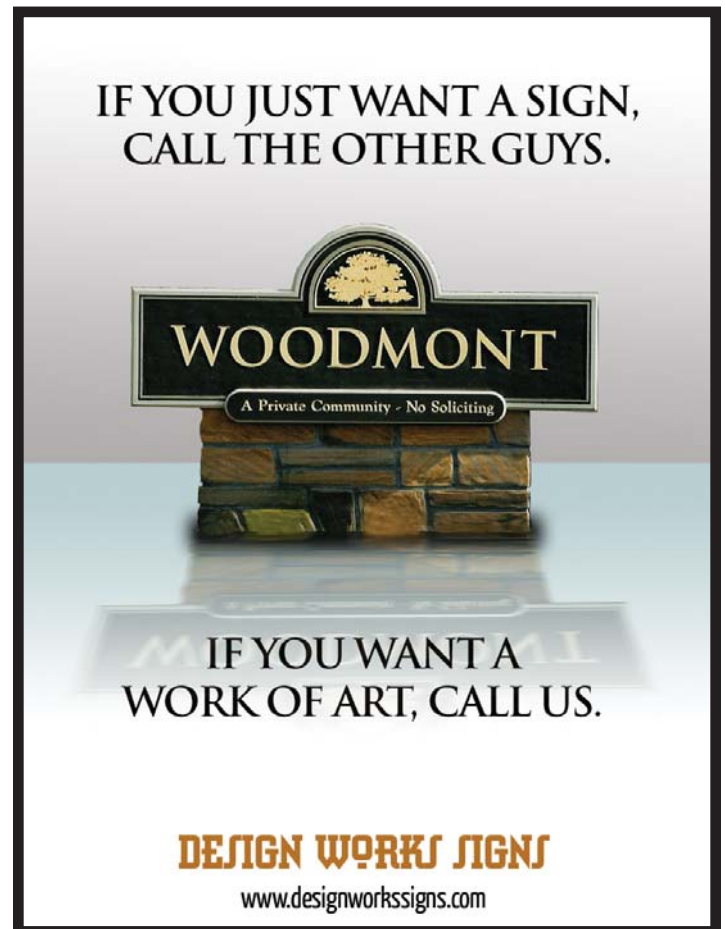


Using the *Gradient* tool, let's add our fade-out. Click and drag the mouse up towards the top. This will fade the bottom area. Experiment a few times until it looks natural.

Make sure your fading colors are Black and White as shown here.



Now we just need to add a little shading under and directly in front of the sign. Create a new layer called *Drop Shadow*. Draw a rectangle marquee. To soften it, choose *Select>Feather* and select 14 pixels. Fill with 100 percent black, using *Edit>Fill>100% Black*. This helps create a blurry meeting point of sign, floor and reflection. Place this layer behind the layer for the sign.



Here's the finished artwork with some mock copy and a border dropped in as it might for an ad or perhaps direct mail postcard. This simple but powerful ad seems to give a much bigger representation of the company. It also forces the viewer to focus on the product. This, after all, is what advertising is really all about. Try this effect on your next digitally printed site sign or A-frame—and watch your client's head spin!