

Beer Can Sign Adds to Image

BY AMANDA MCGRORY

Colorado brewery's sign captures unique product



Photos courtesy of Linda Cranston

The giant beer can sign represents Oskar Blues Brewery's uniquely packaged beers.



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CONSIDER THIS your crash course in Colorado culture: mountains and local hand-crafted beers. Yes, the Rocky Mountain lifestyle treats you well, and, as it turns out, Colorado's love of area microbreweries offered a unique opportunity to the signage industry. Oskar Blues Brewery, a popular beer manufacturer in Lyons, Colo., was opening its second restaurant, Oskar Blues Homemade Liquids & Solids in Longmont, Colo., and needed just the right eye-catching sign to capture its uniquely packaged ales.

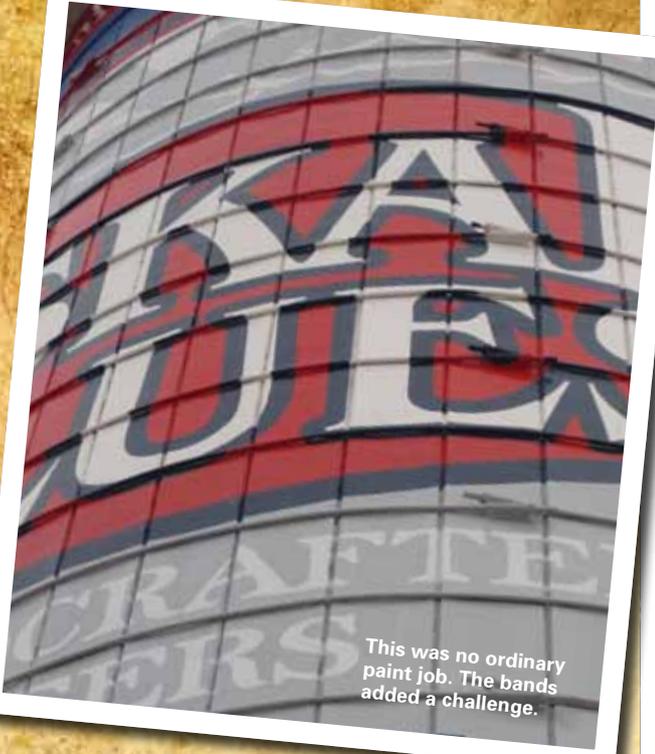
BEER CAN SIGN REFLECTS BREWERY'S IMAGE

With kegs as water fountains and beer cans as menu holders, Oskar Blues Homemade Liquids & Solids shows off a distinctive, targeted décor that demands similar outdoor signage, and standing in front of the building was a 68-year-old grain silo. To some, this silo appeared to be just that: a beaten storage tower. But turning that old, worn silo into a towering beer can sign felt instinctive, says Chad Melis, spokesman for Oskar Blues Brewery.

Though beer snobs may sneer at the thought of canned brews, Melis says Oskar Blues Brewery has challenged that notion by branding itself on premium ales delivered in a can. In fact, Oskar Blues Brewery established itself in 2002 as the first U.S. craft brewer to can its own beers and has won multiple awards, proving that canned ales achieve the same quality as other packaging methods.

The lofty sign takes on the look of Oskar Blues Brewery's popular Dale's

Photo courtesy of Linda Cranston



This was no ordinary paint job. The bands added a challenge.

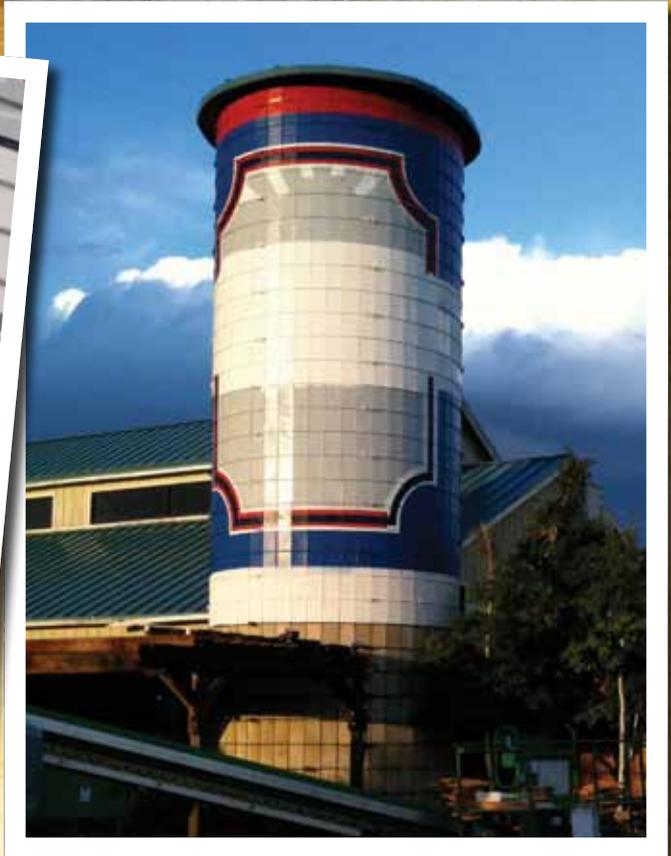


Photo courtesy of A+ Signs of the Times

The four colors were painted in layers: white, blue, silver and then red.

Pale Ale, a beer that, Melis adds, is the driving force in transforming the public perception about what's possible from canned beer. Oskar Blues Brewery's image is based on that irony, and Melis believes this sign was just the right medium to deliver the message.

"When I look at the silo, it's the only thing I 'can' see. The can has been a vehicle for our complex beers to rattle public perception and challenge the status quo; that fires us up," Melis says.

Although local sign codes prohibited the silo from listing Dale's Pale Ale by name, the color scheme imitated the model beer, and "Oskar Blues" replaced the original logo text while still projecting the look of that distinctive canned brew.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

To construct this sign, Oskar Blues Brewery hired A+ Signs of the Times, a full-service sign shop in Longmont. A+ Signs of the Times previously worked on the silo; however, with a graphic of only 160 square feet, the past project was not nearly on the same scale as the Oskar Blues Brewery sign, owner Mark Price says. In fact, this beer can sign features a graphic area more than four times the size of the previous image, measuring at 720 square feet.



Photo courtesy of A+ Signs of the Times

Price found outlining the perforated areas with a magic marker left a clearer, more readable line than his usual chalk application.



Photo courtesy of A+ Signs of the Times



Photo courtesy of A+ Signs of the Times



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Painting with a hand roller 40 feet in the air, with a nice view of Longmont.

The silo—fabricated of 15-inch tapered concrete tiles and a series of ¾-inch steel bands—was not a practical project for a wrap because of these intricate elements.

“[A wrap] would have been extremely difficult because the silo has no even areas to apply it to,” Price explains. “There are steel bands that wrap around the body of the silo, making vinyl application nearly impossible.”

Instead, A+ Signs of the Times opted for a classic paint job. Price and his team first power washed and primed the silo before the actual construction began, though the two components required different types of primer: The steel bands called for a type of primer to prevent rust while the porous concrete needed more of a sealant coat, Price says.

Using a 60-foot lift truck, painters Don Fasst and German Jurado applied the exterior enamels with spray guns as well as ¼-inch to 2-inch brushes. The four colors were painted in layers—white, blue, silver and then red—but this was no simple paint job.

Rounded, banded and tiled, the silo had multiple contours that required a special technique. Most people, of course, would look at the silo from the ground, and to appear symmetrical, the graphics had to be painted on a curve.

“The sign was almost dimensional in appearance, so you couldn’t just spray it like it would be seen from someone looking at it straight on, 40 feet in the air,” Price remarks. “It’s not the type of project where you simply paint ‘Oskar’ on there. You had to come in and realize there are four bands and a ¾-inch crack in the letter O.”

The pounce patterns and stencils for the logo work were created using an Ioline Super 88 plotter; however, the plotter could only create 36-inch patterns at a time. Price attached each 36-inch piece together and then taped the master pattern underneath the steel bands. Once the pounce patterns and stencils were secured, Price found outlining the perforated areas with a magic marker left a clearer, more readable line than his usual chalk application.

Complementing the beer can sign are two open-panned neon channel signs and a rustic monument, adorning the exterior walls on the east and west sides of the building. Oskar Blues Homemade Liquids & Solids serves

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Cajun-inspired dishes, and these signs were designed to echo that down-home Louisiana cuisine.

To create this provincial look, each sign underwent a three-paint process. The signs were first primed, topped with acid-wash paint and then finished with black enamel. As the acid-wash paint and black enamel mixed, the metals in the two coats caused a chemical reaction, giving the signs that timeworn appearance.

"We ended up with a product that will not age any more but, instead, will look aged from the beginning. It looks like the signs have been rusting for years, but it's done. The process is over," Price says.

BATTLE GROUNDS

Of course, engineering a signage system of this magnitude did not come without its problems, especially when considering city ordinances. The beer can sign, deemed too wide and tall, faced tougher code restrictions, Price says, because of its location in a scenic corridor at the entrance of Longmont and required a variance.

The city planning department recommended that the variance be denied; however, the planning and zoning commission unanimously approved it, despite the city's initial disapproval.

"The city council fought us long and hard, but we sold it pretty well at the variance meeting. They told us straight up, 'If this thing is going to look like a beer can, it sure better look like a good beer can,'" Price recalls.

Besides the city ordinance issues, the overall image was not enthusiastically embraced by some in the neighborhood. There were "some negative rumblings in a small part of the community," Price recounts, as some residents were not keen on beer representing their town. With pressure coming from both the city council and some unhappy residents, Price opened lines of communication by providing consistent progress reports, which he believes was a savvy business move.

"I turn in so many sign permits that I didn't want to do anything that wouldn't put me in the good graces of my local enforcement," Price says. "I called them on a regular basis, told them what I had and took pictures of the process. The pictures were even posted on our Web site for city officials and residents to monitor."

When considering the challenges A+ Signs of the Times faced, Price finds these road bumps made the finished project that much more gratifying. Price also notes that since he completed the beer can sign, community feedback has generally remained positive, regardless of the initial hesitation.

Now, with all the hard planning, design and construction behind him, Melis is ready to crack open one of those famous—and satisfying—canned beers while enjoying the view and attention the structure has brought to the restaurant.

"I think the sign stands tall as an invitation to hang your hat and celebrate the high-quality craft beers of Colorado and beyond," Melis says. **SDG**



Photos courtesy of Linda Cranston