

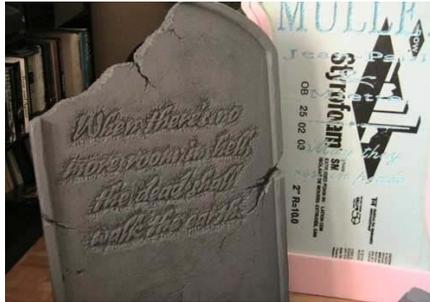


<http://www.hectorturner.com/halloween/tombstones.html>

Projects: Tombstones



Here are some shots of the tombstones I made. I used carved styrofoam insulation board as is pretty common now.



The only thing I think make mine stand out from some that I've seen on other sites is that I didn't want them to look too new.



I wanted the look of old, cracked and pitted. Like they had been forgotten in a run-down cemetery for ages.



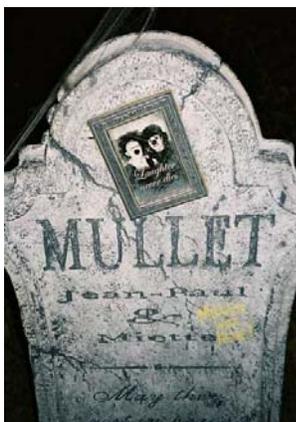
I even made two on angles as if they had settled and were going to tip over.



The painting was done in stages - a medium base coat followed by two coats, one light and one dark, applied with a sea sponge. Sort of like how people sponge paint their bathroom walls.



I was pretty pleased with how they turned out and plan on doing a few more every year. I'll make a point of taking more in-progress photos so I can do a proper step-by-step tutorial.



In 2006 I only tackled one tombstone but it was a bit more elaborate than the others. I'd like to build at least one tombstone a year to add to the cemetery. Some will be free-standing and some, I'm thinking, could be flats to stand against the fence and provide a bit interest in the background.



Below are a few in-progress shots I took to show some of the steps I take.



In this case I started with the basic shape and glued on a cheap plastic bat decoration I got in a Dollar Store.



The bat was hollow in the back so I filled the wings and body cavity with expanding foam like Great Stuff.

This gave the bat a lot more strength and rigidity as well as making it easier to glue to the tombstone.

Obtained from
marshhauntedtrail.com



I then did up the epitaph on my computer. I first went with Vlad Tepes Dracula - his proper name - but people kept asking what Tepes meant so I went with just Count to make it simpler. Once I'm happy with the Epitaph (in this case... **"Count Dracula - There are far worse things awaiting man than death"**)



I print it out the size I'll need. I try and not be limited to an 8.5" x 11" sheet as I've seen too many tombstones that look great but have really tiny looking epitaphs. I printed it to size and then pasted several sheets together to make it all one.



To transfer the lettering to the tombstone I used a wood-burning tool and traced the letters through the paper. The paper helped to cut the heat from the tool a bit so it only made a slight impression in the foam. If you burn through the paper, don't worry it doesn't matter.

Once it was traced I discarded the paper and then again using the wood-burning tool melted into the foam to carve out the letters. Make sure you work in a well-ventilated area as the fumes from this are toxic - you could get a bad headache or worse! I didn't worry too much about neatness as I wanted it to look old and craggy.

UPDATE!

I've been asked about how I make my cracks as I've been told they're quite realistic. Basically what I've done is use the same wood-burning tool I use to engrave the epitaphs. I think a knife of any kind would give a too refined cut to the cracks. I don't really draw the crack before-hand although you could. I think the key is to shake your hand a bit as you melt the crack to give it a ragged line - you don't want it straight. I vary the pressure I apply so the depth increases and decreases as I go. I think I've gotten better at it as I've made more tombstones - I look at my earlier attempts and they look too fake for me.

I was also asked to elaborate on my cutting methods... To cut out the general shape of the tombstone I use a long kitchen carving knife or a heavy duty utility knife - the kind with the breakaway blades. I use a new blade and extend it all the way out so I have a 3-4" blade and use several passes to cut all the way through even 2" foam. Give that a try. With the carving knife try and get one of the stay-sharp ones with the built in

sharpener in the case as the foam dulls the edge on the knife really fast. I cut using a sawing motion and ones it starts to squeak and bind I run it through the sharpener several times. That seems to work.

Here are photos of the two new 2007 tombstones in progress...



I added another sheet of foam to the back to build up the thickness and then added cracks and additional details.

I also built up a base for the tombstone out of more foam board and then glued the whole thing to a piece of plywood slightly larger than the base of the tombstone.



Drill at least three holes around the outside of the plywood and then two on the middle. In the two middle holes I drove a pair of 12" spikes up into the tombstone (make sure you go in straight so you don't come out in the middle of your carved epitaph!) and then glued them in place.

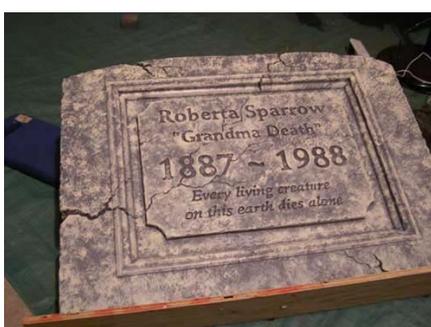
For glue I use Loctight PowerGrab Construction Adhesive. To plant the tombstone in the yard I drive 9-12" spikes through the holes drilled in the plywood into the ground. That and the spikes permanently embedded into the tombstone hold it very secure. I did end up bracing them in the high winds during set-up this year but I think they would have been OK without.

Here are photos showing the process...





Painting: Step-by-Step



I've come up with a painting process that is quick and easy but IMHO looks good. I didn't want to use any of the Flec Stone spray paints as they are terribly expensive and don't give enough 3D texture to be visible at any distance.

I always think they look too uniform and flat. I do carve and distress the foam of the tombstone before painting but I find the sponge painting method brings out those details and gives the illusion of real granite better than others I've tried.

The first step is to give the tombstones a overall flat base coat of a dark or medium grey. Other colours could be used to give variety to your graveyard but I find most colour gets washed out by the coloured floodlights so it really doesn't matter. I also have a number of gallon paint cans in my colours left over from previous projects so until they run out I'll just keep painting everything the same colours. :)

Next step is to sponge paint on a contrasting colour. This could be a lighter grey or tan, whatever. Use a natural sea sponge not a kitchen sponge as you'll get better results. You can find sea sponges in the painting section of most hardware stores.

I got mine at Home Depot. Rip and tear a piece off of the sponge to get ragged edges and then blot the sponge into your paint. Pat it on some paper towel to take some of the paint off and then start dabbing it on your tombstone using an up and down stroke. Don't smear the sponge across the surface, more like



you're poking at it. Practice on the back of the tombstone first to get the hang of it. Also, try to work in an irregular pattern - don't go across in straight line from top to bottom, it will look fake and man-made.



Even doing irregular it's hard to avoid patterns developing. You can hide these by going in with a 3rd colour and sponging here and there to break it up.

Tombstones for 2008

This year for my new tombstones I'm going to do a bunch of simple smaller stones to fill in among the larger ones. I'll be using scraps of broken foam I've salvaged off of construction sites. The one big tombstone I'll tackle will be a large celtic cross. I've wanted to do one of these for a while and got a better foam cutting tool to be able to cut out the intricate designs. .

Cemetery Photos for Reference



Below are photos taken from various actual cemeteries I've come across. This first one is the Churchville Cemetery here in Brampton. Some of the graves date back to the early 1800s and are quite ornate. The weathering and in particular the variation in weathering is really interesting. I'll have to make a note of them and vary my painting methods more from one stone to the next.

