Routed Address Sign

This address sign offers proof that home improvement projects don't have to be large or complex to have a big impact. The sign really dresses up my home's entryway, and it's much more visible than the stamped metal numbers it replaced.

Making the sign is easy and fun. It's just a board with a recessed field created by freehand routing around number patterns. The painted background color contrasts against the raised numbers and border, which remain the natural color of the wood.

If you haven't tried freehand routing before, the process may sound intimidating, but I bet you'll be surprised by the control you have. Just make sure your bits are sharp and take your time.
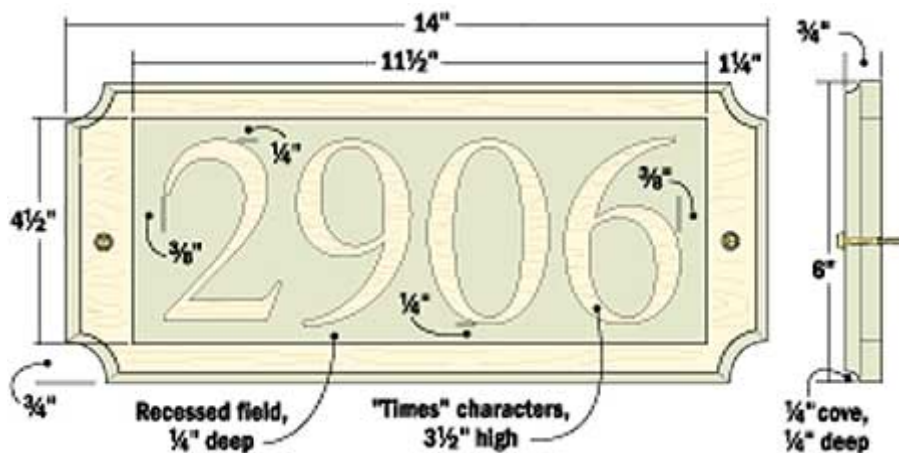
Materials Needed:
1x8 select-grade white pine, 2-ft. length
Spray paint
Polyurethane finish

Tools Needed:
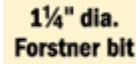Router and bits; 1/8" and 1/4" straight, and 1/4" cove.

Creating the Pattern

There are a variety of methods for creating your number patterns. You can look for number templates at art supply stores, or you can buy address numbers at a hardware store and trace around them. You can even draw numbers freehand if you prefer.

I used my computer's word processing program and created the pattern by printing numbers on letter-sized paper. You'll have to experiment with bumping up the font size until you get to the desired character height for your sign. I used characters
3-1/2" high. They're large enough to see from the street, but small enough to blend in with the overall character of your house. Avoid fonts with intricate details that will make routing difficult. I chose a font called "Times." If you're creating your patterns using store-bought numbers, use a photocopier to enlarge or reduce them to size.

Once you've got your number patterns set, you can lay them out to determine the sign's overall size. I marked boundaries for the recessed field 1/4" above and below the numbers and 3/8" to each side, and added 1-1/2" of width and 2-1/2" of length to make my sign 6"-wide by 14"-long.

Making the Sign

1

1¼" dia.
Forstner bit

Scrap backer board

Mark outside dimensions on the 1x8. Where the lines intersect, drill a 1-1/4"-diameter hole to form the sign's decorative corners.

Hint: A Forstner bit cuts cleaner holes than a spade bit.

2

Auxiliary miter gauge fence

Cut along outside of layout lines.

Cut the sign to size along the outside dimensions you marked in step one. Now you can mark the inside boundaries of the border. Make these layout lines dark so you'll be able to see them when you start routing the recessed field.

Hint: Rip the sign to final width first, then crosscut it to length using an auxiliary fence attached to your miter gauge.

3

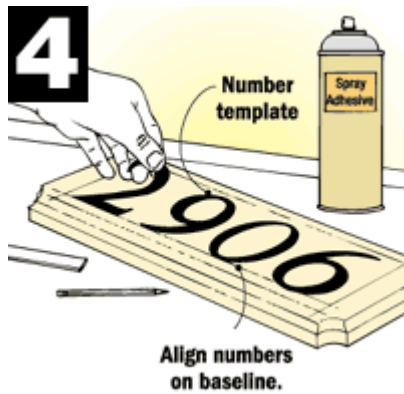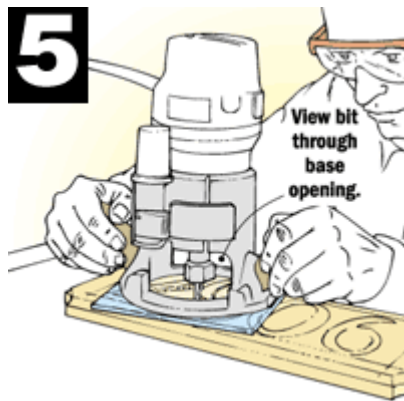¼" cove, ¼" deep

¾" stock

Rout ends first.

Route a 1/4" cove around the sign to create a decorative edge. This also provides a paintable surface that frames the sign.

4 **Lay your pattern** on the sign. You can place each number on the wood and trace around it, but I found it easier to glue the numbers in place using artist's spray adhesive.
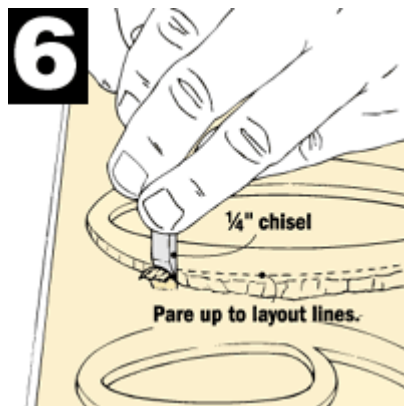
Hint: Draw a baseline to help align the number patterns, then stick them in place with spray adhesive.

5 **Start routing** with the 1/4"-dia. straight bit. If you're working with pine, as I was, you can set the bit for the full 1/4" depth-of-cut. Then ease the bit into the wood anywhere in the area of the field you'll be removing. Rout as close as you comfortably can to the numbers and the edges of the border.

Hint: Wear eye and ear protection!

6 **For the final pass** switch to the 1/8"-dia. straight bit. If you don't feel steady routing right up to the layout lines, stay 1/8" outside, then finish up with a chisel.

Hint: For absolutely clean edges along the numbers and border, use a 1/4" chisel to pare up to your layout lines.

7 **Remove the patterns** and sand away any whiskers left by the router. Spray a couple of light coats of paint to seal the wood, followed by one or two heavier coats.

Hint: Use a dark color of paint. This will make the numbers more visable on the finished sign.

8

Sand raised areas
until all paint is removed.

After the paint dries, sand the paint off the raised surfaces to expose the bare wood. Wipe a liberal coat of household bleach on the bare wood, let it dry, then lightly hand sand to remove any raised grain.

Finally, coat the sign with exterior polyurethane. This process protects the sign from the elements, but also gives the exposed wood an aged, sun-bleached look that adds contrast and character.

Hint: An electric sander and 120-grit paper quickly removes paint from the sign's raised surfaces, exposing the wood.
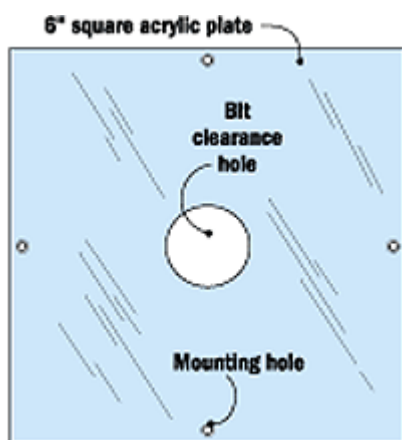
Tips & Techniques

To finish and preserve the sign, I tried a technique learned from Workbench reader Clifford Hicks. He makes signs from white pine because he likes how the wood, if left unfinished, weathers to a bleached-white color over time. But bare wood invites mildew and rot. Finishing the wood improves its longevity, but most exterior top coats inhibit sun-bleaching.

When Mr. Hicks accidentally spilled bleach on a piece of pine stock, he had his solution — bleach the wood to speed the weathering process, then protect the sign with finish.

Let your imagination roam. Choose any size, shape, and character style you want. You can even add your name, or the name of your street. For a different look, try recessing the numbers instead of the field.

However you do it, this sign lets you experiment, have fun, and see that even simple projects can be big home improvements.

View layout lines more easily by replacing your router's standard baseplate with a plate made from 1/4"-thick clear acrylic. Use your existing plate as a pattern for the bit hole and mounting screw holes.