

Make My Day

The Clint Eastwood Shadow Box

by Bryan R. Staley

The Hollywood legend of Dirty Harry and his .44 Magnum revolvers is an all time American favorite I couldn't pass up. The idea for creating this piece came to me from my Dirty Harry-fanatic roommate. He's been a Clint Eastwood fan for as long as he can remember. Our house is engulfed with Hollywood memorabilia regarding the "Make My Day" legend, including a portrait of Eastwood hanging above the fireplace, which didn't quite have the look it deserved. This is when I took over.

I removed the autographed 18" x 24" double-matted piece from the mantle and started sketching different layouts on how to construct the new centerpiece. After a long walk in the park, two sketchpads, and an overly anxious roommate, I had finally put together the pieces that were to make up the Clint Eastwood centerpiece. The pieces were to include the autographed portrait of Clint Eastwood, two .44 Magnum revolvers, and a miniature no-name cigar. These artifacts, I felt, best summed up the Hollywood legend.

The construction began by carefully removing the original piece from its existing frame. I then began laying out the artifacts as they were featured in the sketch I'd drawn. I put the portrait in the top center of the shadow box, with the .44 Magnums

towards the bottom with the cigar mounted between the two pistols on a pedestal.

Each of the pieces had to undergo a transformation to get the most realistic look possible. After contemplating .44 Magnum replicas, I decided to go with the plastic versions for

sandpaper to eliminate the more coarse strokes that the medium sandpaper left behind. The sanding portion took quite a while due to the various shapes and sizes of each piece, but created the natural cold, hard steel look of a real .44 Magnum. When the sanding was com-



Staley added Dirty Harry "artifacts," two .44 Magnums and a cigar, to complete the framing.

safety reasons as well as cost. After days of searching, I finally ran across the perfect pair of plastic replicas; however, to bring out the realism of these handguns it was going to take a true test of my creativity.

I began by taking them apart and separating them into their respective pieces. I hand-sanded each piece with medium sandpaper to remove the emblems and overall plastic look. I finished up with fine

plete, I sprayed the guns with several coats of a water-soluble clear base to give them a smooth, wet look. Once completed, they looked unmistakably real to the untrained eye.

I then moved on to Dirty Harry's signature cigar. I knew I wanted the cigar to have as much character as the guns now had. When I finally found the cigar I was looking for I tried to create a "here and now" presentation for it, as



As the centerpiece of the living room, this framed portrait didn't have the framing it deserved until Staley created this shadowbox. Black suede matboard lines the box, with the portrait and objects "float" mounted.

This, I felt, needed its own presentation, so I decided not to border it. Instead, I created a reverse bevel to the rag foam board. This technique elevates the portrait and creates a clean look.

Now that the pieces were complete, the shadow box could begin. The materials I chose for the shadow box were a black suede rag mat and $\frac{3}{16}$ " rag foam board for the mounting and backing, with conservation UV-protective glass and a $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep black satin finish frame.

I began the construction with the assembly of the frame. I lined the inner edges of the frame with the rag foam board to provide a base for the backing. Following this, I covered the rag foam board with the black suede

though it had just been smoked. To do this, I lit the cigar to give it a good size ash on the end and chewed the other end as though Dirty Harry himself had just

smoked it. To finish it, I applied the water-soluble clear coat to the entire cigar to keep the ash and cigar intact. Once these items were complete, I had only the portrait left.

mat to give it a deeper look and added support. Then came the mounting of the guns. I wanted the guns to float within the piece to give them a more ominous look. To do

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this, I used high tension fishing line at the end of the barrel and handle in order to provide enough support. For the cigar, I created a platform made from a piece of the black suede mat and used the high tension fishing line for further support.

Next came the portrait. The portrait was attached to the black suede mat with a small piece of ATG tape at the top and bottom of its backing. I allowed a 5" border to surround the portrait and give it more of a centerpiece feel. Now that all of the pieces had been put into place, it was time for the assembly.

The glass went in first, and I was extra careful not to score the frame. I

gave it a good cleaning to remove any fingerprints or dust. Now came the placement of the mountings. The black suede was put into the frame very carefully as to not disturb any of the mountings.

After the placement of the portrait was complete, a second piece of plain rag mat was added for the finished backing. The backing was kept in place by using framing brads to provide the support the piece will need for years to come. The backing was then finished off with brown kraft paper. The support came from a two-hole wire loom on each side of the frame with $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 6 button head screws and a 40-pound plastic-coat-

ed framing wire.

This once ordinary portrait is now complete. When the completed piece was unveiled, my roommate's jaw dropped, his eyes widened, and a wave of awe came over him. He loved it.

This 28" x 52" shadow box towers the original and provides the mantel with the true centerpiece it deserves. I am now in the process of completing the remainder of his collection, some in shadow box, others in print, but no matter what is completed from here forward, the one piece that will stand out, will be Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry and his .44 Magnums. ■