

## MURALS TRANSFORM WATER TANKS INTO A WELLSPRING OF CREATIVITY

Although the artwork of Donna and Rodney Hennig won't be found in any art gallery or museum, their award-winning mural designs are viewed every day by thousands of people. Since 1986, the Hennigs have been turning heads with their water tank murals of desert landscapes in the southwest, and pastoral and timberland scenes in the Pacific Northwest.

"People tell us they can't believe that something as utilitarian as a water tank can be made to fit in with the environment," according to Rodney Hennig. "Where a water tank is nestled in trees, we typically design a mural to mimic what's there and make it look like its part of the forest scene. We've done some tanks in open fields where there are no trees around, so we've created more of a scenic design."



The Hennigs' murals appear on both new water tanks and existing structures, such as the 2-million-gallon and 500,000-gallon tanks in Oak Harbor, Wash., which had their original coatings stripped and replaced with a new protective coating system. "When the owner contacted us, they had a choice of designs, between a very simple silhouette tree pattern, or one with a little more detail that made it look more realistic, which they chose," Hennig shared. "Once we determined the design, we provided our artists with a mock-up of the tank in its surroundings. We use the rendering as a guide, but after the artists were at the site and could see what's around them, they recreated the scene that would be there if there wasn't a tank."

The Hennigs' water tank murals have evolved since their first project in Bellevue, Wash. "Back then, the trees were pretty plain, but now our designs are much more realistic and more artistic," Hennig acknowledged. "The difference is we're using artists to paint art on tanks. And most of the artwork we do now is with rollers instead of paint brushes, which were much slower to work with. At first, we used nine-inch rollers, and then a few years later switched to the skinny rollers that are seven inches long. Although the seven-inch rollers don't hold as much paint, they're much easier on your hand and some of them feature an adjustable handle so the artist can reach farther without stopping to attach an extension. The artists use the edge of the roller to create reference lines for the tree tops and limbs."

A typical water tank mural for the Hennigs is between 40 and 80 feet tall and as much as 660 feet in diameter, requiring the artists to work from a manlift boom. "It's much quicker to use a manlift than it is to use spider staging," explained Hennig. "We've had some projects that were too high to use a manlift, so the artist was required to work from rigging, which was difficult. The detail of the work requires the artist to be stable and keep movement to a minimum, which isn't always easy with spider staging."

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“The biggest challenge is always the weather,” Hennig conceded. “Accessibility is another big issue. We had a tank we did for a casino in California where part of the tank was inaccessible to our manlift, so we had to work from rolling scaffolding that was set up by the contractor.”



The tank murals are applied over a protective coating system consisting of Series 91 H2O Hydro-Zinc, a moisture-cured, zinc-rich urethane primer, followed by an intermediate coat of Series N69 Hi-Build Epoxoline II, an advanced generation polyamidoamine epoxy. The finish coat is Series 740 UVX, an advanced technology polyurethane, which offers superior color and gloss retention and a low level of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Series 740 is also used for the murals. Coating systems for the tank’s interior steel consist of a primer coat of Series 91-H2O and Series 141 Epoxoline, a high-solids modified polyamine epoxy, which is certified in accordance with ANSI/NSF Std. 61 for use in potable water.

“We’ve done more than 75 tanks since 1986 and 95 percent of them have used Tnemec coatings,” Hennig noted. “What I like about Tnemec coatings is they provide one-coat coverage. If we use a light color over one that’s darker, it will cover with one coat. Another advantage with Tnemec is we can come back years later and add a design if necessary.”



The Hennigs have had tanks with their murals recognized by industry associations. In 2006, the Steel Plate Fabricator’s Association selected a 5-million-gallon reservoir tank in Lynden, Wash., as its Tank of the Year. For that tank, the Hennigs designed a mural with grazing cows against a backdrop of trees. A second tank near Lynden featured mountains, fields, farm buildings, cows and other details found within the community. The Steel Plate Fabricator’s Association also named a tank owned by the Yucaipa Valley Water District and designed with a Hennig mural as Tank of the Year in 2002.

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