



How to Laser Cut a Portrait

By Tom Buzz Bernard at LaserBuzz

Ever wanted to cut a portrait of someone? Maybe it's for a birthday, anniversary, wedding, or just something special for the next family reunion. Actually, a family reunion is just what prompted me to see how easy it was to do a portrait.

We have an annual family reunion each year. This reunion is on my father's side - his parents (my grandparents). The event consists of all his brothers, sisters and extended family members. My father is the oldest and I think there is/was seven kids. My grandparents have long gone home, but I remember them fondly. I thought: wouldn't it be nice to make a clock with my grandparents (cut out) for a gift to the kids (for my aunts and uncles). Something so unique it would make them say: "WOW! How did you do that?" I do like the WOW factor when giving presents and this gift made many of them cry. Nothing more fulfilling than bringing tears of joy - smiles of laughter with a heartfelt gift!

First let me say that some may think this is too difficult or that it isn't worth your time, especially if you want to make money with the idea. You may be right on that last point, but we all need to challenge ourselves and each time we do this, it becomes easier. You learn from trying new things. I bet the first time you designed a logo you found it hard. It does become easier and almost mundane the thousandth time you do it. Portraits could be a value-added product that gets your business noticed by many. Rastering a photo can sometimes be like looking at a simple black and white image that could've been done with much more flare using dye sublimation or some other printing method. Cutting out a photo is not something you will see any printer simulate. Unique works get talked about and can lead your business in a new profitable direction. At the very least you are learning from challenging yourself! You challenged yourself the first time you made a logo and which is easier to make: a logo or a portrait? You may surprise yourself.

It is my belief, because you have creative license, that it is easier making portraits. When you do a logo you have to make sure every detail is there. The trick to cutting a portrait is not putting in as much detail. There really isn't much work to it.

Here, let me show you. I took a picture of Normer, a friend of mine. This photo was taken right in my office. You can see our designs in the background.



Photo preparation is the key to making your portrait easy to create. First I take the photo, open it in Corel Photo Paint, and erase all the background (using the eraser tool). You don't have to get it perfect. This is just so you can see the detail you want to draw.

Next, I like to change the image colour (I don't like to work in gray scale). I tend to use a purple, or a more red hue. I lighten the picture to eliminate detail, leaving the shadows so I can decide what I want to use for my portrait. Note: the picture you see was done in Corel Photo Paint X4 using the 'Image Adjustment Lab' under the 'Adjust tab' on the top task bar. I have done this using other methods so don't think you must have X4 to do this. I did a live demonstration using Corel 10 and the results were the same.



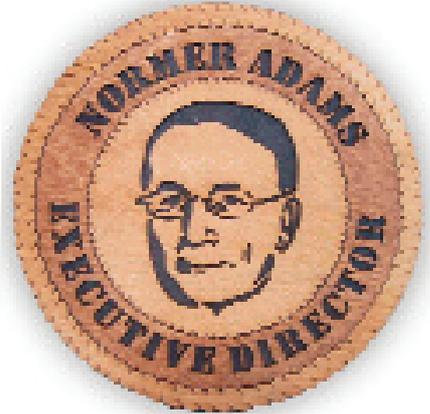
Take note of the detail that is left - 'shadows'. Now all I have to do is capture some of the shadows to get my portrait. Warning: Here is where some may stumble. Do not try to capture too much detail. It is not necessary in order to get good results. See the darkness under the chin, cheek, glasses and hairline? Remember that you are cutting, so some spaces must be left for the substrate to stay intact. You can draw right over the picture to make it easier. I used the Free hand tool in CorelDRAW to draw the lines and then the shape tool to bend, move and curve the lines as needed.

Check out the picture of what I drew (on the next page). I did a colour fill so you can see the finished look. If you look closely there is not much detail and I left spaces near the glasses and ears for the wood to stay intact.





For doing portraits, these pictures will tell the whole story over anything I could write, so let's look at the finished product. I did a wall tribute to hang in Normer's office and I did 60 ornaments for his birthday party. Go check the original photo and see if you can see my friend in the laser-cut image. I think we nailed it!



I tricked Normer on taking his picture. I told him I needed his photo for this article (true not a lie) and I knew he wanted something for his office, but I also wanted to WOW his guests at his surprise birthday party. His wife asked me to make these, but now says it is creepy because he has them hanging all over the house - oh well!

For more information on LaserBuzz please visit the website at www.laserbuzz.com.