

Guide to Building Good Columns for Less \$\$\$

Jeremy Schwartz

At some point, you'll have a show where you have to build fluted columns. Of course, this can be done with great difficulty using overlay methods such as chicken wire or hardware cloth. It can also be done at great expense with Plexiglas panels designed for the purpose. However, I've found a solution online that save money and time, and come out looking great.

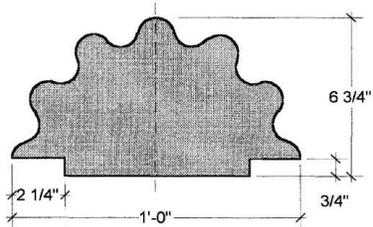
The technique comes from Ken Bunn at the FSU School of Theater. The page can be found at: http://info.nwmissouri.edu/~pimmel/usitt/source_guide/issue33.htm but I've summarized most of his information here. The described method is for creating half-round columns, though i see no reason why the technique can't be generalized to any angle sweep. If you're making full round columns, you should consider doing two half-round segments for ease of construction.

Ken's discovery was that corrugated PVC roofing panels happened to be spaced quite nicely, and look just like columns when they are bent in a curve. Further, Since the material is PVC, it has a number of qualities that we like. It's light it's flexible, it's tough. It can be rolled into a tube 8 inches across without cracking (also anything smaller than 12 inches will start to look out of proportion). It can be glued and stapled just fine to plywood. Most stage paints stick nicely to PVC. And, of course, it's cheap. Ken found it for \$7.50 for a

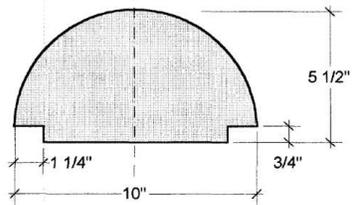
sheet 2'-8" wide by 8'-0" long. (A 2'-8" wide sheet will fit halfway around a 20" column.)

To support the column in this technique, you should cut a bunch of half-round pieces of plywood. At the top and bottom, you'll need to actually cut plywood to match the flutes, which is labor-intensive. However, for the rest of the column, the plywood is just support, so it needn't be form-fitting. To attach the plywood, the recommendation is a minimum of hardware fasteners, instead relying on the glue to hold the plywood in. The fasteners tend to be hard to cover up. I've attached the schematic found on Ken's web page.

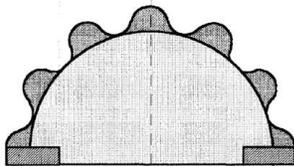
For the capital toppers, Ken managed to find pedestals that were made of two Corinthian capitals smacked end to end. He cut them up, put a plywood back on, and attached them to the rest of his piece. If you're not so lucky, you can buy a negative cast and use expandable foam to make the capitals.



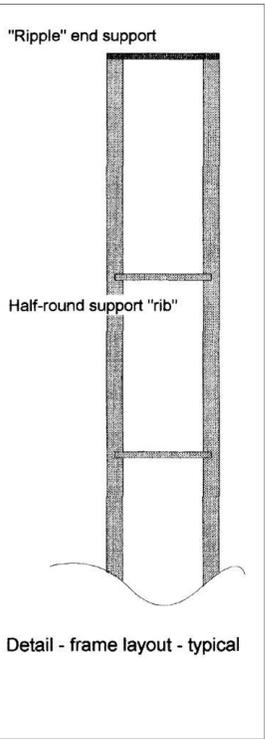
End support -3/4" ply
2 per unit, one each end



Support ribs -3/4" ply
place every 24 to 30 inches



Assembled Section view
Note: 1x2 pine frame members
on each edge



Detail - frame layout - typical

Drawing by Ken Bunne	
FSU SoT	Column frames
Date:6/2/98	# 1