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ABSTRACT

Detailed, illustrated instructions are given for construction and decoration of an indoor foreign language kiosk to promote interest in foreign languages among students and teachers. The kiosk can be constructed in a home shop or possibly by a college theater department, high school woodworking department, or institutional physical plant. Once constructed, the kiosk can be painted and posted with materials such as travel posters, magazine advertising, and other foreign language-related materials, with attention given to highlighting the foreign language and cultural aspects and to the stimulation provided by graphics and layout. It is recommended that the kiosk be designated only for foreign languages and be placed in a position of high visibility, in a busy hallway or large entryway, and carried to other locations as needed. (MSE)

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An Exercise in Exciting Visuals: Building and Displaying on a Foreign Language Kiosk

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Introduction

Foreign language teachers have long recognized the importance of interesting visuals. Travel posters from the various target language countries have adorned foreign language classrooms for as long as most of us can remember. Large posters from various government tourist bureaus are all right as far as they go, but their primary purpose is to motivate the viewer to visit the country, and to do so on the basis of preconceived, even stereotyped expectations, not learn the language. Posters of Loire Chateaux, castles in Spain, or onion-steepled Bavarian churches seldom have any French, Spanish, or German on them, are uninnovative in their visual layout, and sometimes project an image of what in German would be called museal (adjective of museum), or having all the liveliness of a plaster bust of Goethe.

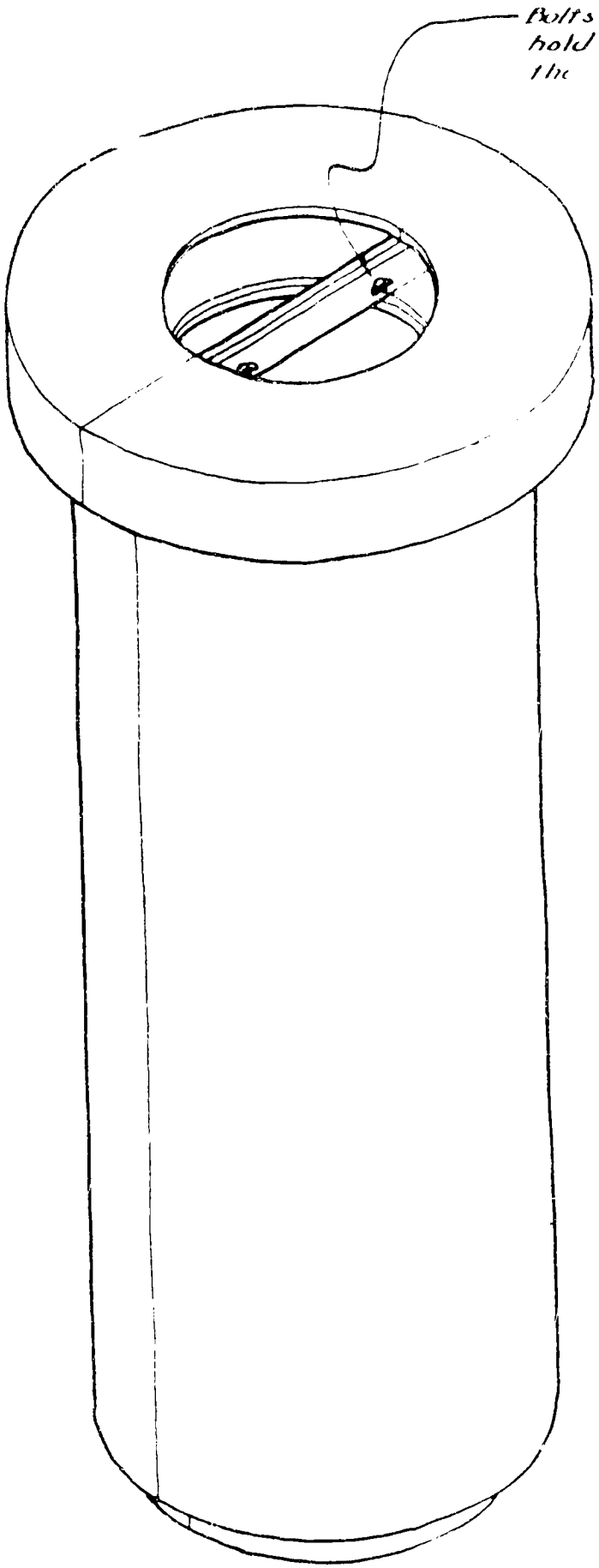
More up-to-date and visually exciting are authentic full-color ads with a few words of text in the target language. One of the most innovative and eye-catching ways of displaying a collage of such material is on a kiosk. Some German teachers of Lide's acquaintance have been able to wheedle posters out of the German outdoor advertising agencies responsible for posting materials on kiosks. Such posters originally meant for kiosks are ideal, but in the absence of them you can collect suitable full- or double-page color spreads from slick-paper magazines and post them instead. Placed in a spot with heavy student traffic, such material has the potential for presenting foreign languages in a favorable contemporary light, for piquing the curiosities of students and colleagues to figure out what the texts of

the ads mean within the visual contexts created by their respective graphic layouts. In short, exciting visuals effectively displayed on a kiosk are an excellent vehicle for image building and for enhancing public awareness of foreign languages.

The major obstacle lies in acquiring a suitable kiosk. Most foreign language teachers would probably love to have such a structure but, being academics, lack the skills to design and build one. Nor could we find any references to foreign language kiosks in the professional literature. The kiosk depicted on Figure 1 was designed by Karl Ruling, a technical theater specialist, and built in the theater shop of Michigan Technological University. The kiosk can be built for between $50 and $75, depending on the cost of materials used, which can vary widely among localities. Using these plans, it can be built by any reasonably handy person in a home workshop. The minimal needs in terms of equipment and tools are a workbench or the makeshift equivalent with sawhorses, a saber saw, a circular saw, an electric drill, and an assortment of clamps. A table saw or radial arms saw would, however, be helpful. The kiosk can also be built in a high school woodworking shop, or in a theater or physical-plant shop of a college or university campus.

The kiosk is designed for indoor use. It is constructed in two vertical half sections that can be disassembled for easy portability, and for fitting through doors. For visual effect, it has three horizontal sections: a large midsection for the posted material, a narrower base, and a cap that overhangs the midsection. It can be used effectively in classrooms, hallways, or large entryways, and it can be carried into ballrooms or other public rooms where foreign language festivals are held.

If the following instructions seem long and complex, remember that all



Completed kiosk is 7'-1½" tall.

Figure 1.

descriptions of physical processes require many words in relation to what is actually done. Also, the instructions are written for an audience with little experience with this type of project and are therefore more detailed than would otherwise be necessary.

Construction

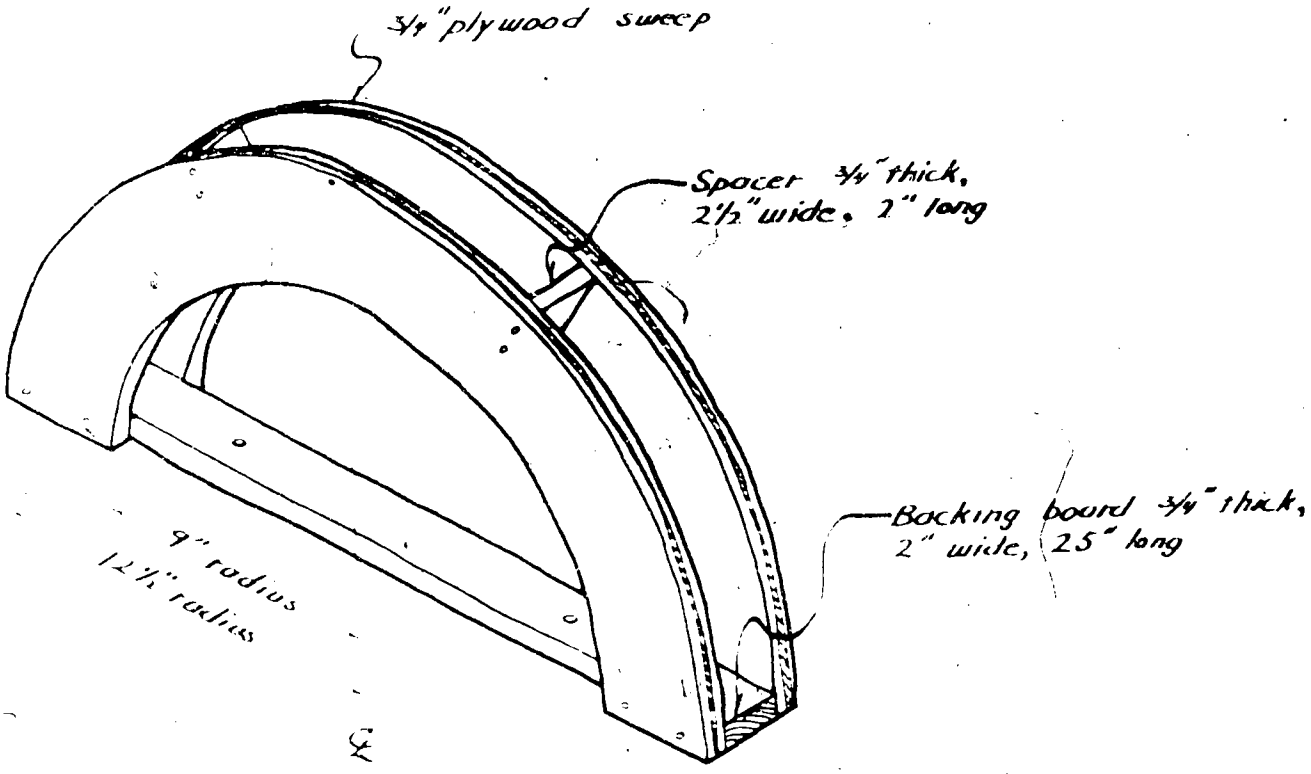
Materials. For the facing, two 4x8' sheets of one of the following: Upson board (Upsonite), 1/8" lauan plywood (the material used to cover hollow doors), 1/8" regular (untempered) hardboard (Masonite). For the framework, two 4x8 sheets of C-D grade 3/4" plywood or an equivalent amount of scrap. (Three-quarter ply is needed for an edge wide enough to glue and to nail the facing onto.) Eight 1x3s, 8' long, with no large, structurally weakening knots across the width of the boards (banana knots). Enough 1x lumber to cut two pieces each, 25" long and 2" wide, and 38" long and 4 1/2" wide. Other materials: white glue, 6d cement-coat box nails for the frame, 28 No. 10 2" wood screws, and four 3/8" carriage bolts x 1/3" long, with washers and wing nuts.

Cutting and sweeps: The 3/4" plywood is used for the "sweeps," the twelve semicircular horizontal pieces of the frame around which the facing is bent. Start with the smallest sweeps for the base. Draw a line 1" from the edge of the sheet of plywood and parallel to it. Using trammel points (a large woodworker's compass), draw a semicircle 12 1/2" in radius, placing the pivot point on the line 1" from the edge of the sheet. Do not omit the step of marking the line and anchoring the pivot point on it. You will not be able to mark and cut two semicircles that will fit together accurately if you attempt to hold the pivot against the edge of the panel, or to anchor it only slightly away from the edge. A satisfactory compass can be improvised by driving a small nail through a 1/2" strip of scrap lumber and clamping a

flat carpenter's pencil to the scribing end with a small C-clamp. A compass rigged from a nail, a piece of string, and a pencil is not accurate enough. Next, mark a semicircle with a 9" radius within the larger semicircle. Cut the outside circle and then accurately trim off the 1" from the flat side (done most easily with a table saw). Then clamp the sweep to a work surface and cut out the inner semicircle. This inner cutout, which has the same radius for all three sizes of sweep, has three functions: (1) it lightens the construction; (2) it provides the reference for lining up the base, the cap, and the center section of each half tube of the assembled kiosk; (3) it provides for access to the interior of the kiosk so that the two halves can be assembled and disassembled.

The marking and cutting process can now be repeated for the three remaining sweeps of the same size, or the subsequent sweeps can be traced from the pattern of the first. If you decide to trace, use the same sweep for tracing all three times, line up the base of the pattern sweep flush with the edge of the panel, trace the mark as closely as possible to the pattern, and make sure that the kerf of the saber saw takes out the marked lines. Check for fit. If you trace, it will be more convenient to cut out the inner semicircle first. Repeat the process, cutting four sweeps with a 15" outer radius for the center section and four with a radius of 19" for the cap.

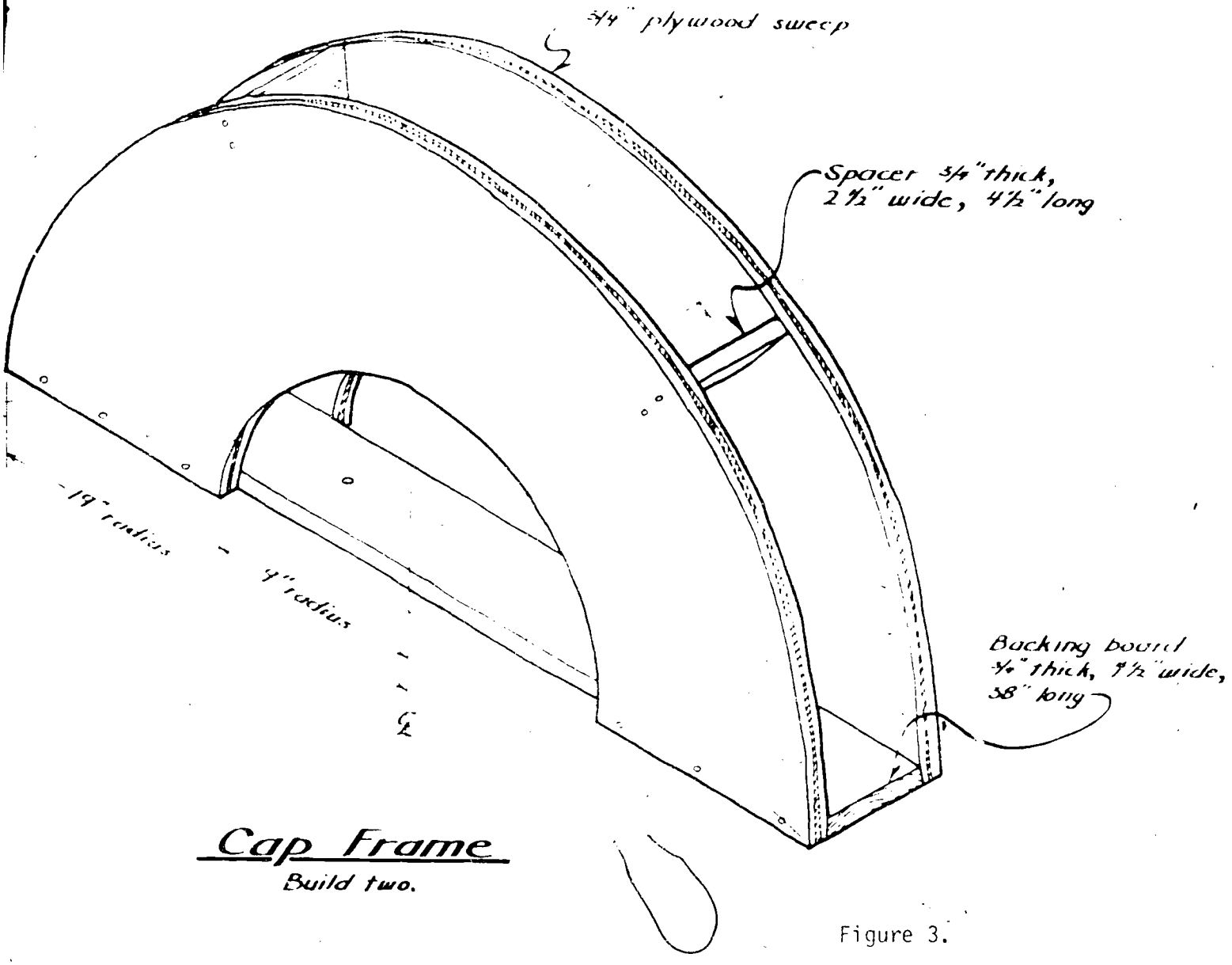
Framing the base and cap. (See Figures 2 and 3.) Cut the 1x3s to 74 1/2". From the trimmed ends, cut four pieces 2" long as spacers for the base and four pieces 4 1/2" long for the cap. On the outside edge of all four sweeps for the base, mark two equidistant points, dividing the circumference of each semicircle into thirds. Cut two pieces of 1x lumber 2" wide and 25" long as backing boards. Line the backing boards up flush with each other, clamp, and drill two mating holes approximately 8" on



Base Frame

Build two.

Figure 2.



Cap Frame

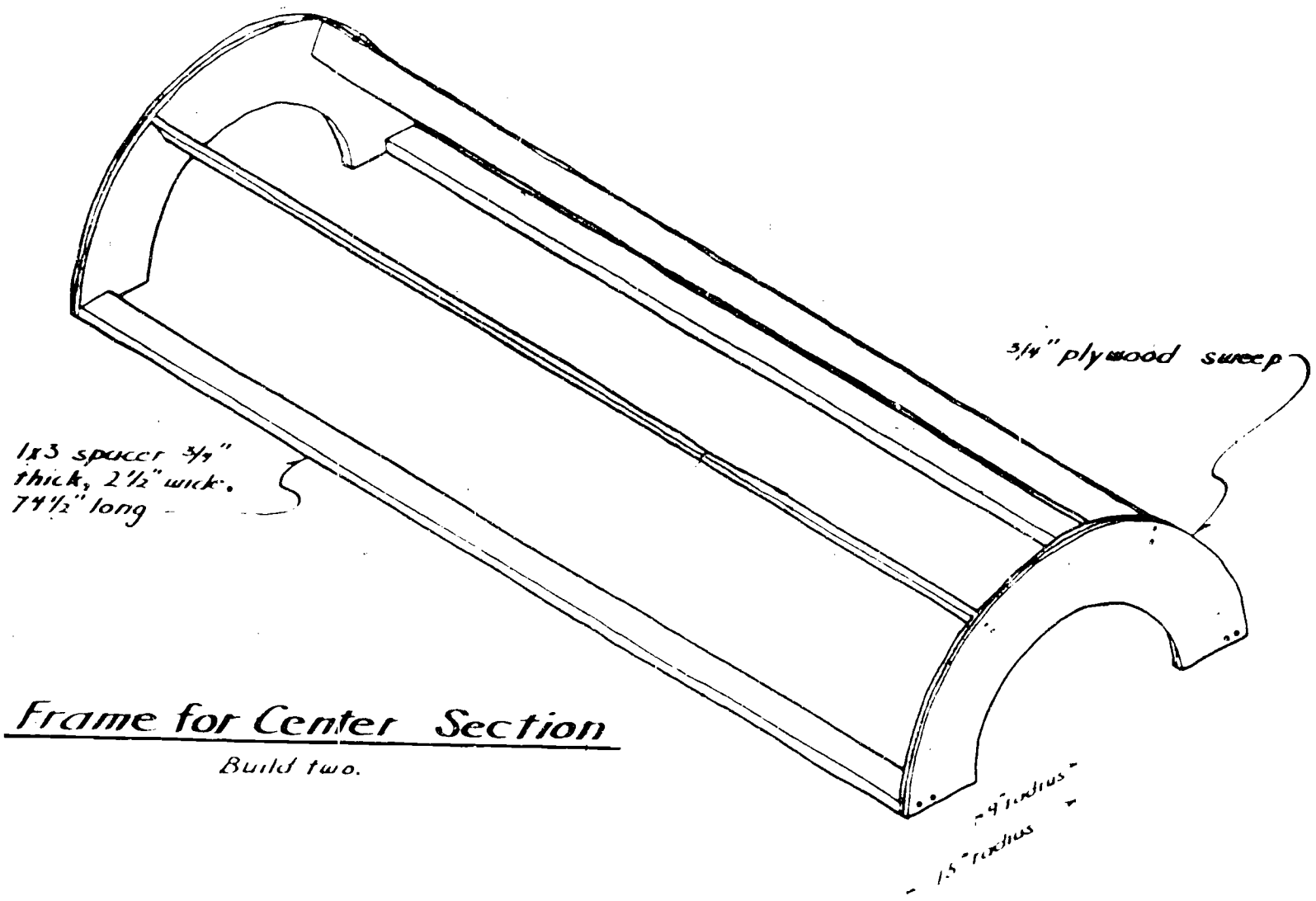
Build two.

Figure 3.

either side of the center for the bolts that will mate the two tubes. Bolt together and check for accuracy and fit. Unbolt. Nail one sweep flush with the top edge of one of the backing boards. Nail two spacers at the equidistant points marked flush with the outside edge. Complete the frame by attaching the other sweep on the other side of the backing board and spacers. The process is repeated for the cap, but with 4 1/2" 1x3 spacers and with backing boards 4 1/2" wide and 38" long. (Note: When constructing the frames for the cap, make sure that the better side of the plywood is facing outward; part of the lower sweep on the cap will be visible on the finished kiosk.)

Framing the center section. Mark two equidistant points along the outside edge of each of the four sweeps for the center section. Set one sweep straight side down flush with two edges of the work surface and lay two 1x3s flat on the surface flush with the edge of the sweep. Attach each of these 1x3s to the sweep with two 2" No. 10 wood screws, countersunk. (We recommend screws rather than nails because these joints will be subjected to considerable twisting stress when the facing material is bent around the frame.) Repeat with the other sweep at the other end of the 1x3s. Using 6d box nails, attach a 1x3 at each of the equidistant points flush with the outside edge of the sweep. You will now have half of a tubular frame to bend the facing material over. Repeat for the second frame.

Covering the base and cap. With a straight-edged board as a guide, use a circular saw to cut the 4x8 sheets of facing material to 76". From the material trimmed off, cut two strips 3 1/2" wide as facing for the base (most convenient to do with a table saw). Cover each half frame of the base, starting at one side of the semicircle, applying white glue, fastening with 3d nails at approximately 4" intervals, and bending, nailing, and gluing around the entire semicircle. After the glue dries, use a saber- or



Frame for Center Section

Build two.

Figure 4.

handsaw to trim off all excess facing flush with the back of the frame. Repeat with the other semicircle. Check for accuracy and fit, rasping off all excess facing.

The facing for the cap poses a slight problem because a single strip 6" wide cut from the 4' side of a 4x8 panel (i.e., from the material left over when the panels were trimmed to 76") will not be long enough to cover each half frame, which measures approximately 5' in circumference. There are two solutions. The simplest is to buy an additional panel and cut two 6" strips off the long side, or to buy a scrap panel big enough to cut two pieces from, 6" wide and at least 5' long. If you want to make do with two panels of facing, cut three 6" strips from the amount trimmed off one of the panels when they were cut to 76" and one strip from that trimmed off the other. Then start at one of the equidistant spacers of the cap frame and work toward each edge with a separate piece, trimming off the excess. The seam at the spacer can be at least partially concealed with painter's caulk or wood putty before the cap is painted. With either method, check for fit and make neater by rasping off the top and bottom edges at a slight bevel.

Covering the center section. Temporarily fasten one of the center-section frames flat side down on the work surface with the top and one side almost flush with the edge. Apply white glue liberally to one corner of the frame and down the adjoining 1x3. Place a corner of the panel cut at the factory at this corner of the frame and start gluing, bending, and nailing (ca. 4" intervals), working down one 1x3 and then across the curve of the two sweeps. The glue is to keep the tension exerted on the facing from working out the nails later. As you bend, glue, and nail, pound with a hammer and tug to make sure the facing remains flush with the sweep. Any slight overage can be rasped off later. Do not attempt to nail the facing to the 1x3s that divide the half tube into thirds; the tension on the facing

alone will produce a satisfactory curvature. As the bending and fastening nears the opposite end, the increased tension must be dealt with. Set the section on the rounded end and use all available bar clamps, C-clamps, screw clamps, or web clamps to pull the facing against the edge of the opposite corners of the sweeps and that of the opposite 1x3. Nail between the clamps, moving them as necessary as you do so. Remove the clamps when the glue has dried. Repeat the entire process for the other half section.

Assembly. Set the two halves of the center section upright and check for fit. Trim off any major excess length at the side of each half section by cutting with a saber saw along a mark made by a chalk line. Smaller problems of fit can be taken care of with a rasp. Strap the two halves of the center section together securely with web clamps or straps. (The equivalent of web clamps can be improvised by tying together strips of old inner tubes.) Bolt together the two halves of the base and center them on top of the center section by aligning the cutouts in the sweeps. Make sure that the seams of the two sections of the base are aligned with those of the center section. Fasten the base to the center section with six 2" No. 10 screws. Turn the kiosk over and repeat the process with the cap. Check for satisfactory disassembly and reassembly of the two vertical halves. The seams between each half tube will become less noticeable when covered with 2" kraft package sealing tape (water tape) and then posted over.

Painting and Posting

Painting. Prime the entire structure with an acrylic, latex, or vinyl primer; then paint in the desired colors. We used black for the base and the overhang of the cap. The body of the kiosk was painted a deep green. We decided to identify the structure indirectly as a foreign language kiosk--as opposed to a place for posting campus announcements--by decorating

the cap with the ubiquitous Cinzano logo.

Posting. You can post materials on the kiosk either by tacking or by using adhesives. Your options will depend on what you have used as a facing. Thumb tacks and push pins can be put into lauan plywood or Upson board, but Masonite is too hard to tack into. Since we built our kiosk with a facing of Masonite, we decided to go the authentic route with paste, but you can also experiment with various types of double-stick adhesive. For posting with paste, you need an inexpensive wallpapering kit and some kind of surface on which to spread the paste on the posters. Pasting posters is much easier than wallpapering because the individual pieces are so much smaller. Unlike the professional kiosk paperers in Europe, you will be using paper stocks of varying thickness and delicacy. The stiff brushes used to smooth out wallpaper will scar the shiny, clay-impregnated paper on which full-color magazine ads are printed. Such material is best smoothed out by hand. Don't be too much the perfectionist however. Lide has recently had the opportunity to observe the work of professionals in Berlin and Munich, where the posters tend to blister in the rain and moisture. The important thing is to have a colorful and varied display.

A final word about suitable materials. Obviously, any magazine ads should not be offensive to women and minorities. Nor should they be so culturally specific in their contexts and allusions as to appear silly to American viewers. The graphic layout should be attractive and attention getting and should have some foreign language text. The language need not be one that is taught in a particular program; Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, and the Scandinavian languages would all work fine. The text, however, should be linguistically simple enough or have enough cognates that the viewer with little or no background in that language can understand at least part of the message. Happy posting. Foreign language teachers need to become more aware of the potential of exciting visuals.