

Monster Mailbox

As this century draws to a close, the communications revolution means FedEx, fax machines, the Internet and interactive video. But a century ago, the US Postal Service changed the way most Americans worked, thought and related with the its introduction of rural free delivery in 1896. Imagine the excitement as the Sears, Roebuck catalogue came directly to a mailbox at the farm, eliminating a 10 mile walk to a post office to pick up the mail. In those days, a farmer might put out anything, even an old can or a cigar box, as a mail depository.

By 1901, the proliferation of ad hoc mailboxes led Congress to set up a Postal Commission to regularize curbside mailboxes and issue standards for material, workmanship, size, and accessibility. The commission approved 14 out of 63 competing designs and raised an uproar from citizens concerned that the government was creating a monopoly market. Those original designs are shrouded in mystery, but by 1915 Roy Joroleman a draftsman at the Postal Service codified what became the traditional "breadloaf" or "tunnel" design.

Today the natural hazards that a mailbox must defeat are minor compared to the gratuitous vandalism from rebellious teenagers whose idea of a good time after a Friday high school football game is to cruise the neighborhood and smash mailboxes with a baseball bat. Residents of some suburban areas today need to replace their mailboxes two or three times a year.

In 1979, at the behest of a neighbor whose mailbox was run over by juveniles being chased by the police, a journalist and "shade tree mechanic" in Cincinnati, Jonathan Magro designed a mail box that redefines the term "sturdy." Constructed out of MIG welded, 10 gauge (1/8 inch) thick steel that was formed around a telephone pole, his mailbox would take most abuse short of a stick of dynamite. After making a several for admirers, an architect saw it and it was written about in the Cincinnati Inquirer leading to enough demand for Magro to quit his day job.

Magro came out with a newer version in 1984. That T304 stainless steel model well displays the purity of the traditional form and the beauty of the modern craftsmanship. In an age of synthetics and cost containment, the Veeders mailbox is an comforting anomaly. Everything about this 62 pound mailbox has a satisfying durability to last as long as the house it serves. The rounded top sheds water. The welded seams are invisible. The hinge on the door is elegantly discrete, but will not shear off under load. The side flag accent signals the expectation of glad tidings following a postal visit. This is a mailbox that Ben Franklin, the first US Postmaster, would have been proud to own.

Veeders Mailboxes
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