

Tutorial

[illustration] McFaul, www.mcfaul.net

CREATE A TASTY SKATE DECK GRAPHIC

From rough sketch through to perfect vectorised artwork, illustrator John McFaul gets reminiscent about designing and preparing a vibrant graphic fit for any plank...

You have to, don't you? You can't help it. It's only natural. For a designer anyway... to just slip away into that strange little world, where there are smiles, swings and roundabouts, open fields, bikes, skateboards, sweetsies, designer toys, and all things fun. Where the grass is always greener and the sky is that deeper shade of blue only found in your best dreams. It's a vehicle for all our needs and wants. Not, I hasten to add, that our day jobs are a grind — far from it! We love them too.

We harbour a wonderful existence, making the world more fabulous, but there is always a need for a better, more amazing place, a place where we are free to explore our own unusual minds and dreams. It's not all rainbows and butterflies you know... it's a world in day-to-day change, with mushrooms, beards, spaghetti and worms too, and many other things depending on our mood. It's so easy to do, that's the thing. Getting your work onto skate decks or T-shirts

just isn't as difficult as you might think, and the rewards from seeing your own handiwork on a different platform are huge.

We've been in and around the skate scene for what seems like forever. Some might say we're a bit too old for all that now and I know the old McFaul bones aren't what they used to be, but Ollie, our Lead Designer, still does a mean 360 flip. It seemed only natural to design our own decks, because we knew we could cook up something cool if we put our minds to it. McFaul was branching out anyway, and we were (and still are) totally committed to seeing our work in other outputs. It's a great time for illustrators and designers right now, with so many opportunities available to them. Anyway, I digress... we're now riding round on our own decks and it makes skating even more fun. You can create your own designs too, using the following ingredients: 2 different size Fineliners, 1 tracing pad, 1 computer, 1 printer, 1 scanner, 1 mouse, 1 brain, and 5 hours. ➤



Expertise provided by McFaul. Find out more about this UK illustrator at www.mcfaul.net and over on page 35.

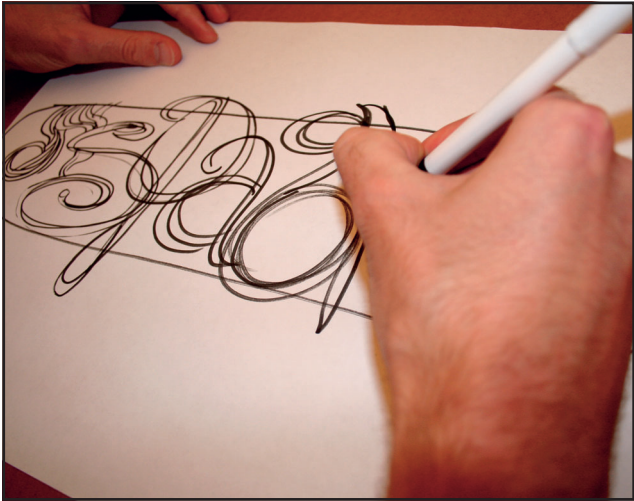


All the files you need to complete this tutorial can be found on the *Computer Arts Projects* CD90 in the DiscContent\Tutorials\Tutorial Files\Board design folder.

Part 1: Cooking up a rough

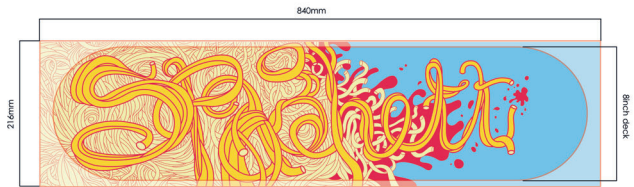
Start by printing out a template and sketching your deck design...

1 We wanted to create a theme for our new range of skate decks, so we decided to make a list of words that we felt could be illustrated in a humorous and visually stunning way. For this tutorial, we want to demonstrate the processes used to design our spaghetti deck.



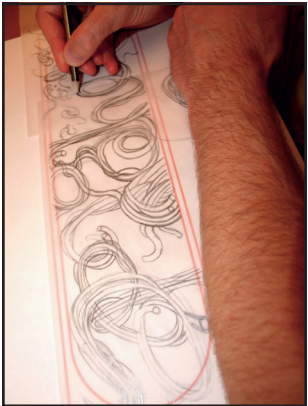
2 Before even switching on our Macs we go straight to our pens and paper. We do this for every image we create. Although the Mac offers a fast way of working, drawing out ideas on paper is much quicker when developing a composition. Always sit next to the bin at this point. After a few pieces of paper get launched in its direction, we normally come up with something we're happy with.

3 Once you're happy with your very rough sketch, it's time to draw up a more advanced version. We print out a skate deck template as a guide for our final drawing. You can use the template found in the Templates folder on CD90 or you can create your own, as shown in the next step.



4 In order that your skateboard graphic meets with factory requirements, you'll need to be aware of the bleed needed, which is much more than the usual 3mm bleed used for print. The actual amount, however, depends on the width of the skate decks you wish to have made up. The widest we got made in our latest range was eight inches, which is fairly wide for a modern street/park deck. For that size of board our document is set at 216mm high and 840mm wide, and the graphic needs to fill this entire area. This allows roughly 8mm either side on the width and it leaves plenty of room on either end too.

5 Using your initial rough for reference (along with any other run-outs of relevant imagery) begin drawing your design. You'll find two parts of our spaghetti rough drawing on CD90 in the 'Board design' folder. Use tracing paper overlaid on your template run-out, and make sure the spaghetti lineage fills the area. In this design there is a hierarchy of line. The lines that make up the word spaghetti are going to be in a heavier weight, while the background lines are finer. When drawing, try to show this contrast because it will help later on. For this process, you might find that it helps to sketch in pencil first.



6 Once you're happy with your pencil drawing, you need to go back over your lines with a Fineliner. This takes time, but it's worth doing well.



Part 2: Fire up the hob

Scan your drawing and trace all the line work in *Photoshop*...

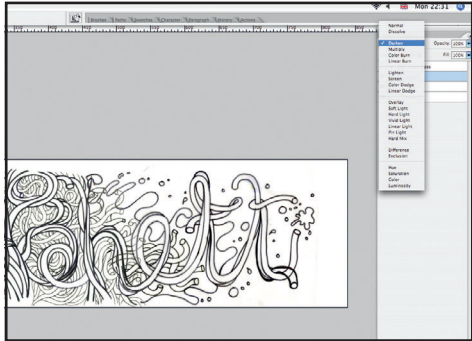


1 Now it's time to power up the technology, so get your Mac or PC warmed up and put the scanner on the boil. Scan in your final drawing.

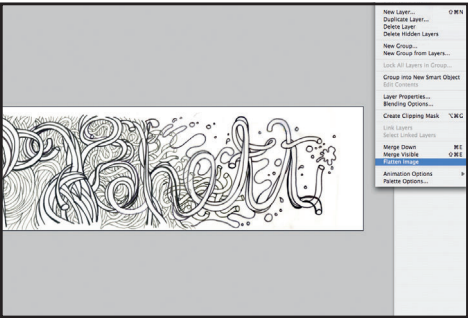
Tracing tips
A useful key command when tracing is: holding Ctrl (PC) or Cmnd (Mac) to activate the Selection tool while using the Pen tool. This allows you to select and move things quickly when tracing. If you incorrectly place a point when tracing, hold the spacebar for easy repositioning – this only works if you haven't yet released the mouse button.



2 If you've drawn your design at A3 size, you'll have to make two scans and join them together in *Photoshop*.



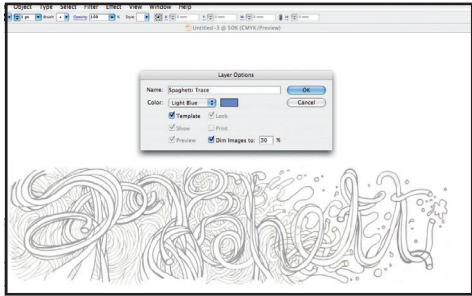
3 Create a new document in *Photoshop* (216mm high and 840mm wide) and copy and paste both of your scans into the new document. Set one of them to darken and adjust the scans so that they fit together perfectly.



4 Once you've positioned the two halves so that you can't see a join, flatten the image by choosing the Flatten Image option. Take this opportunity to grab yourself a coffee, because the next stage of the process could take some time...



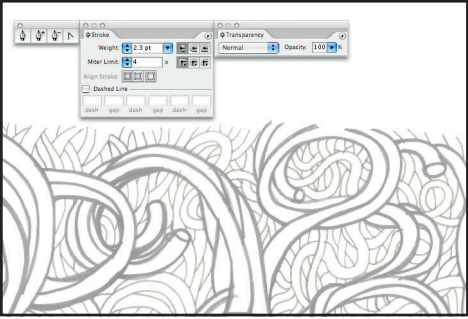
5 Next you need to painstakingly trace the lines of the entire drawing. This needs to be done to create perfectly weighted lines and also so you have the flexibility of altering different sets of lines together. Save out a flattened TIFF and then open Adobe *Illustrator*.



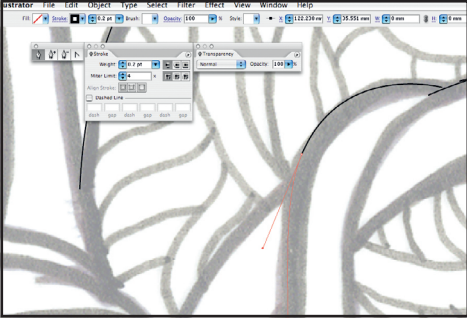
6 Create a new document in *Illustrator* and save it as Spaghetti Trace. Go to File>Place, locate your drawing and place it into your new document. Double-click the layer that your placed drawing is on and set the layer to Template with a Dim value of 30 per cent.

Part 3: Cooked to perfection

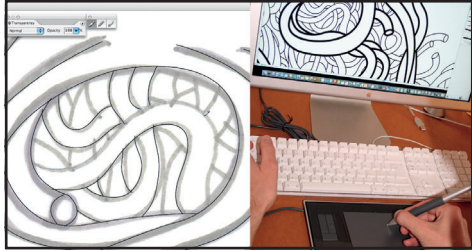
Accuracy and patience make for the production of perfect spaghetti...



1 Start by tracing the heavier lines that will make up the word spaghetti. We find it helpful to open up all the useful sub-menu palettes when tracing drawings, because this makes the process a little quicker.

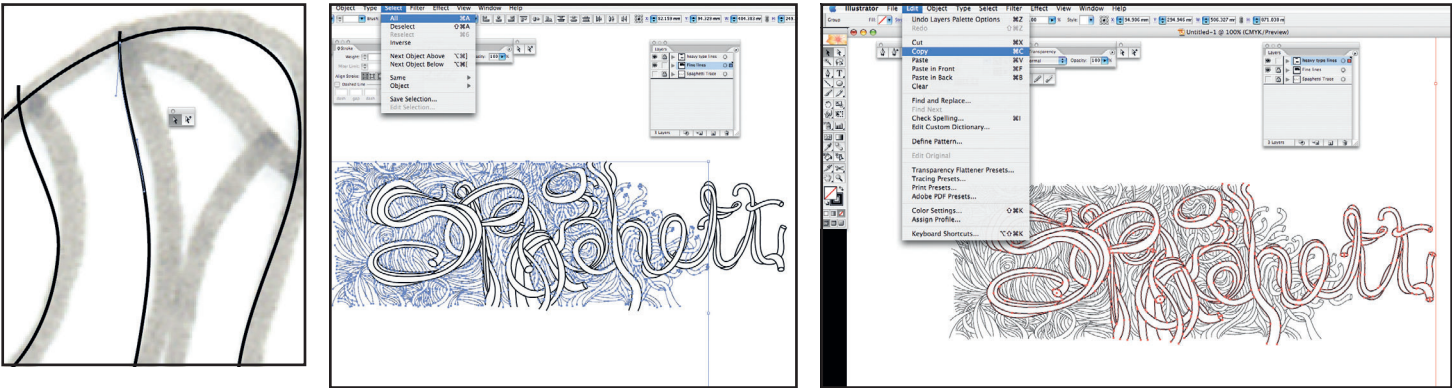


2 Create a new layer and call it Heavy Type Lines. Select the Pen tool and set the line Weight to 0.1/0.2. Make sure you've got no fill selected and begin tracing out all of the heavy lines that make up your spaghetti type.



3 Once all the heavy lines have been traced, select everything on that layer and set the line Weight to around 2.5. You now need to repeat the previous step, but this time tracing all of the finer lines. Do this on a new layer named Fine Lines. You may find it easier to use the Pencil tool, again with the line Weight set to 0.2. The use of a tablet can be handy when tracing all of these tiny lines.

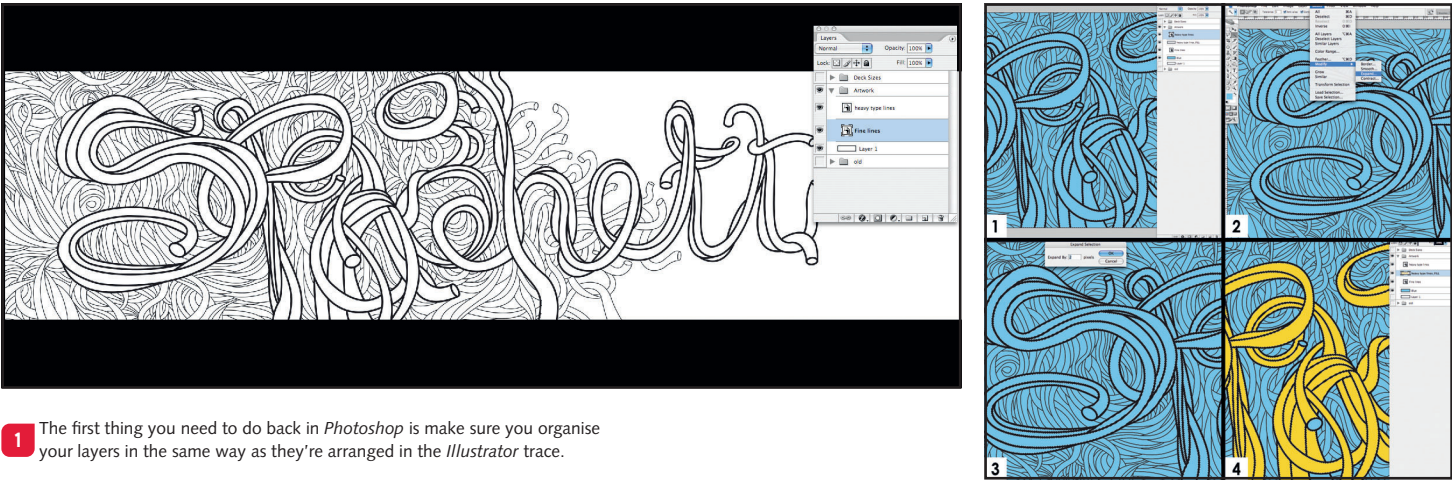
Cooked to perfection continued...



- 4 Once you've put all your lines in, it's likely (especially if using a tablet) that you'll have to go round and tidy up areas where some lines have crossed over. Use the Direct Selection tool to adjust the position of your points.
- 5 After positioning the lines, set the Fine Lines to a Weight of 0.8. Hide the Spaghetti Trace layer and, making sure that the Heavy Type Lines layer is locked, select all (Select>Select All) on the Fine Lines layer then press Ctrl/Cmnd+G to group the set of lines.
- 6 Do the same for the Heavy Type Lines layer, making sure that the Fine Lines layer is locked. Once you've selected all the heavy lines, group them. You're now ready to copy the lines and bring the artwork into *Photoshop* for colouring. Select each set of lines, press Ctrl/Cmnd+C or Edit>Copy to copy them and move them over to *Photoshop*.

Part 4: Add a splash of sauce

With the lines completed in *Illustrator*, move to *Photoshop* to add colour...



- 1 The first thing you need to do back in *Photoshop* is make sure you organise your layers in the same way as they're arranged in the *Illustrator* trace.

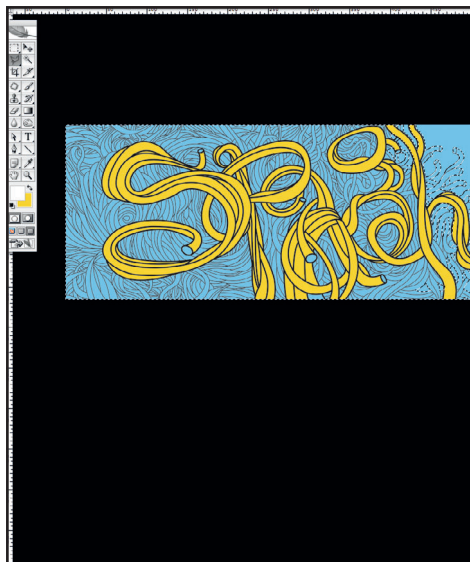


- 2 Making sure that you don't have any particular layer selected, go to Select>Select and then go to Image>Crop.

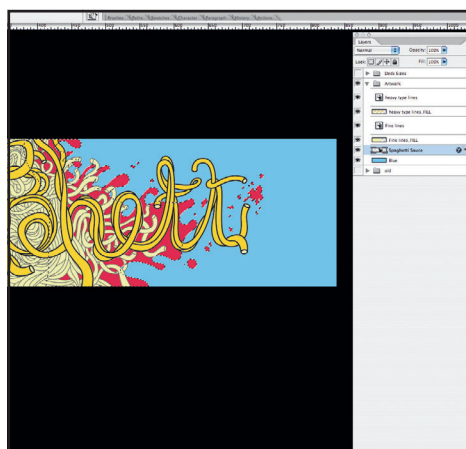
Choosing colours

When creating an image which is as busy as this, it's advisable to choose a limited palette and stick to using just these few colours. This will give the image a strong graphic element without clutter, and help you to achieve a bold and striking final illustration.

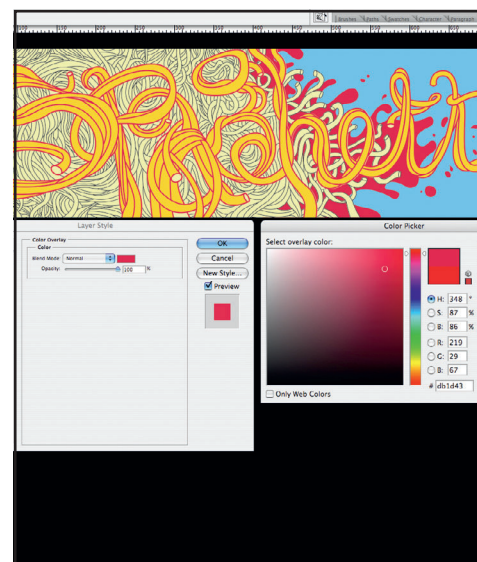
- 3 Now that you have all the layers of your deck graphic prepared, you're ready to add some colour. Create a new layer, select all and fill it with a bright blue, making sure that this layer is at the bottom. Now, one by one, use the Magic Wand tool to select the blank areas that are between the spaghetti type layer. Once all areas are selected, go to Select>Modify>Expand and enter a value of 2 pixels. Press OK and then create a new layer. Fill this layer with a bright yellow and make sure it sits behind the Heavy Type Lines layer. Name your new layer: Heavy Type Lines_Fill.



4 Use the Polygonal Lasso tool on the Fine Lines layer to create a selection that goes all the way around the area you need to fill with colour.



5 Again, create a new layer and place it behind the Fine Lines layer. We use a pale cream colour for the fine spaghetti layer. For the spaghetti sauce we created a shape freely in *Illustrator* and copy and pasted in into *Photoshop*. If you don't feel comfortable drawing straight into *Illustrator*, you could always do a run-out of your design so far and draw in the sauce area. Scan your drawing and repeat the tracing process. We choose a zingy red for our spaghetti sauce.



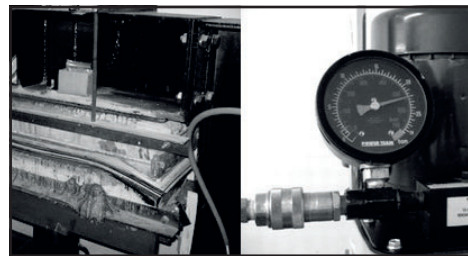
6 Finally, all of our spaghetti lines are coloured using the Colour Overlay Layer Style option. We colour-picked the same colour as the sauce for our spaghetti lines.

Part 5: The secret ingredients

Find out how your design is transferred onto a skateboard...



1 We used athirdfoot.co.uk to produce our decks. It's the only UK-based factory that presses its own decks. We thought we would enlighten you on the process of producing a ready-to-roll skate deck. First, 7-ply ready-cut sheets are sanded and dyed. Next, three boards are glued at a time. PVA with a catalyst is used, which is imported from America. The glue bites into the wood to ensure great pop.



2 The boards are then pressed three boards at a time. The pressure and temperature is constantly monitored during pressing to maintain consistency.



3 The decks are then cured in curing stacks, where they are left to stand for three weeks.



4 Boards are then drilled and band-sawn using a shape template. The edges are then routed.



5 They are then given a final cure to ensure an even moisture level.



6 The boards are then sprayed with a lacquer. Finally, for our decks, the graphics were applied using a transfer process. This involves running the board through a transfer machine that passes the board between two rollers (one of them heated) at certain pressures. ➤

Part 6: Grip up

Fancy a career designing skateboards? Then having some skating skills will definitely come in handy...



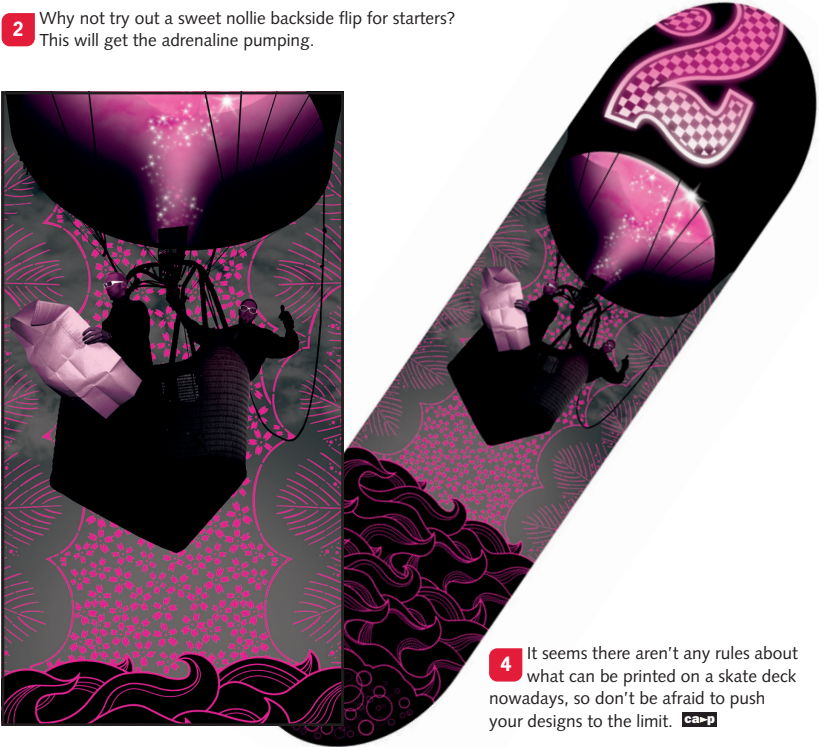
1 Here's the spaghetti skateboard in action. Once you have your own customised skate deck, you'll be ready to hit the park.



2 Why not try out a sweet nollie backside flip for starters? This will get the adrenaline pumping.



3 Then for main course take on a huge switch heelflip on a mungus steep bank as demonstrated here on our worms skate deck.



4 It seems there aren't any rules about what can be printed on a skate deck nowadays, so don't be afraid to push your designs to the limit. **CAP**

Expert profile: McFaul

As well as his skate graphics project, McFaul has recently been decorating a Liverpool apartment block and a KidRobot Dunny...



BACKGROUND:

After ten years making pretty pictures, UK illustrator McFaul now captains a "small but perfectly formed design team into new and exciting waters".

YEARS PRACTISING AS A CREATIVE:

Eleven.

CLIENTS:

These include Vodafone, Orange, Penguin, Nike, IBM, PlayStation, Virgin, Casio and KidRobot.

MISSION STATEMENT:

"When we're not building the biggest and baddest sand castles around our seaside studio, we're regularly bringing dazzling visual fervour to an impressive list of clients," begins McFaul.

"The work, both self-initiated and client-based, in print, in animation, on wall... and wheels is gaining an ever-increasing global audience, with admirers and collectors all over the world, and representation now in London, New York, Los Angeles and Dubai."

WEBSITE:

www.mcfaul.net

Top: McFaul's custom 20-inch Dunny created for KidRobot's Paint Ball initiative for the Save the Children Federation.

Right: A recent project saw McFaul and co embellishing 50 metres of wall at The Albany apartment block in Liverpool.

