

Decorating Your Pavilion

Being a brief introduction to various period-style pavilion embellishments

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Period-style pavilions do a lot to dress up an event but they do require some significant commitment in finances and resources (eg storage, maintenance, transport, tent erection crew etc). There are things you can do to “dress” your basic canvas tent or pop-up to help make them look a tad more period. Here’s a quick survey of some simple ideas, using examples primarily from 14-16th century Western Europe.

Painting/Embroidery

Some tents in period were plastered with decorations across their entire surface; it’s hard to tell whether painted or embroidered. (Yes, they did embroider tents – I have seen a castle’s entire stairwell hung with embroidered material said to have been made from the red tents at the Field of Cloth of Gold!) Perhaps the most commonly seen, and copied, decoration is the “Gothic” approach, with thin lines running vertically down the tent walls (along seam lines), horizontal lines along the roof and ridge line. Some tents have bands of Gothic-style tracery and other elements decorating the roof and top edge of the walls.

Applied Decoration

Instead of painting or embroidering your entire tent, smaller elements can be added to provide interest and a means of disguising their mundane origin.

Valences around the top of the walls don’t have to be sewn to the tent itself, but can be a wall-length strip of canvas/calico/ heavy cotton attached via grommets or loops to the poles along the sides. Many SCA tent vendors promote some form of dagging, but this is surprisingly rare in period depictions; the bulk of valences appearing to have straight edges, sometimes decorated, sometimes fringed. Some may have simple repeating patterns or basic blocks of colour (painted or of coloured cloth), others have leaf scrolls, motifs or personal mottoes. Colours that contrast with the main body of the tent are popular.

In counting 70+ period examples, the Dragonwing pavilion people concluded that the vast majority of tents had at least a ball or finial poking up from the main poles; roughly half also had a pennant pole or spike for stiffened flags/banners. Dowel or spare pop-up metal poles can sit over pole ends for a finial pole; curtain rail finials or polystyrene/wooden balls (from Bunnings, Spotlight, Lincraft), add the finishing feature.

Heraldic elements turn up in different ways:

- shields on tent roofs (painted, possibly appliquéd or could be attached separately)
- solid/stiffened banners or flags flying from roof spikes, rectangular, square, swallow-tailed; some had different arms on each side (consider having yours and your group/Kingdom/Guild)
- pennants attached to finials; suits the longer, narrower forms, though small squares were popular

Papier-mache animals, especially if a personal/heraldic charge, can look great. Consider painting suitably shaped toys or craft mache animals (eg from Bunnings or Hands) and stick them on a spike! The Field of Cloth of Gold tents provide an extreme example of this embellishment!

Make cloth “pole warmers” for your pop-up’s legs; tie on an internal painted “ceiling” sheet to cover the metal frame; add a drop cloth wall to store all your stuff behind (easiest if you have sloping external walls to start with). Electrical tape provides a quick way to add stripes or a spiral to poles.

Look at period illuminations from your time/place and see what ideas you can come up with!

References

Period Information/Images:

Period Images (13-16 century): <http://www.greydragon.org/library/tentpics/index.html>

Medieval Pavilions: Tent Gallery: <http://www.currentmiddleages.org/tents/artgallery.htm>

The Pavilion of Heraclius: <http://willscommonplacebook.blogspot.co.nz/2011/02/pavilion-of-heraclius.html>

Tents in Il Libro del Sarto, 1540: <http://willscommonplacebook.blogspot.co.nz/2012/05/tents-in-il-libro-del-sarto.html>

King of Hungary in his tent: <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IIIID=28439>

Details of Medieval Tent Construction: <http://midtown.net/dragonwing/col9805.htm>

Movable Palaces — tents in the Arab world and Central Asia :<https://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/201004/movable.palaces.htm>

More pictures: <http://home.adelphi.edu/sbloch/sca/tents/pictures/bl/index.shtml>

SCA Information/Suggestions:

Decorating Pavilions in a Medieval Fashion: <http://www.greydragon.org/library/decoratingpavilions.html>

Get Medieval on Your Pop-Up: <http://www.moirandalls.com/popup/index.htm>

Toward a (More) Period Encampment: <http://midtown.net/dragonwing/periodencampment.htm>

Embarking on a "Period" Medieval Encampment : <http://home.earthlink.net/~cantaire/period-camping.html>

Renaissance Faire set design: http://themedfairedesign.blogspot.co.nz/2012_05_01_archive.html (and June, July entries)

Death and Rebirth of a Pavilion: <http://www.housemorien.org/diaries/paviliondiary.htm>



Codex René d'Anjou, *Le Livre du Coeur d'amour épris*, 16C
http://www.greydragon.org/library/tentpics/kr_honors_tent.gif
Seam lines, straight valence, mottoe, finial caps and flags.

Das Epos des Burgunder Reiches, 16th century
<http://www.greydragon.org/library/tentpics/figure33.jpg>
Gothic tracery, display of arms, finial points.



Tents at the Battle of Solent, Cowdray 1545.
A profusion of wall and roof treatments.



Tent Designs for the Field of Cloth of Gold, 1520: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/henryviii/militmap/tentdes/index.html>
Lots of heraldic elements and fabulous decoration in gold across all surfaces.
Also consider the potential in adding different pavilions together using shared walls, awnings or different-shaped tentage..