Adobe Illustrator CC How-To Guide

Reality Reborn

By Don Clark, Invisible Creature, Inc.

From an early love of skateboarding and snowboarding to founding a punk rock band with his brother in the 1990s, Don Clark has moved through life embracing his passions. As his interests changed, so did his direction, and after eight years as a songwriter and rhythm guitarist for the band Demon Hunter, Don turned his attention to another form of artistic expression he'd also been cultivating over the years: design. It was, after all, in his DNA, with his grandfather having worked as a popular NASA illustrator who created a vast library of schematics and concept art, as well as loose, fun cartoony editorial illustrations.

In 2000, Don and his brother again joined forces: this time bringing their creative vision and illustrators' touch to developing album covers, posters, and logos for many of the musicians they'd met throughout their music careers. 13 years later, Don still does some work on music packaging—even having garnered Grammy nominations along the way— but that's now just part of the focus of Invisible Creature, the highly successful creative firm Don runs with his brother.

The firm's client list reads like a who's who in business, including leaders such as Target, Nike, Hasbro, Google, Nordstrom, *The New York Times*, and dozens of others. For Don, one of the coolest parts of his work is the diversity of his clients and the variety of projects coming his way. He really never knows who's going to call—so he might be working with a hip hop artist in the morning and end the day working on a mural for Facebook or a gift card design for Target.

How I work

I never studied design, but I had an initial base of skills I learned growing up. My grandfather inspired me, of course, but my dad bought a Mac in 1984 and we had MacPaint, so I started dabbling in digital illustration as a teenager.

I am a big mid-century modernism fan. It was a time of simplified forms and firsts in design, architecture, and automobiles. I have folders filled with characters, environments, advertising, my grandpa's illustrations—it's a large arsenal of inspiration, all from an era 40 to 50 years ago.

Modernism and bright, highly contrasting colors have always moved me, as do wonderful typefaces. I like fun, ornate, handmade type like you would see in a circus or festival. I also love texture. I add texture last, using brushes, or experimenting with masking and layering colors and textures.
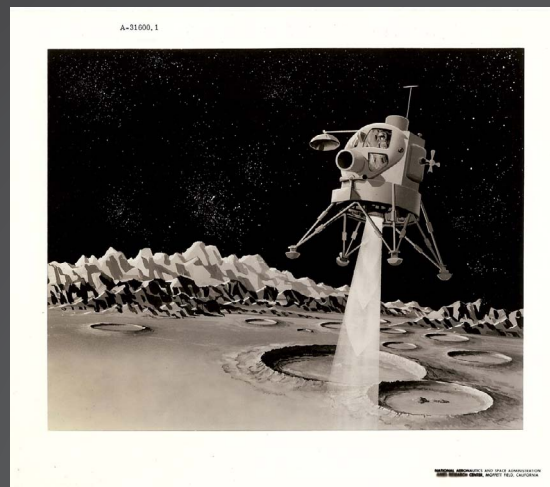
NASA illustration by Don's grandfather.
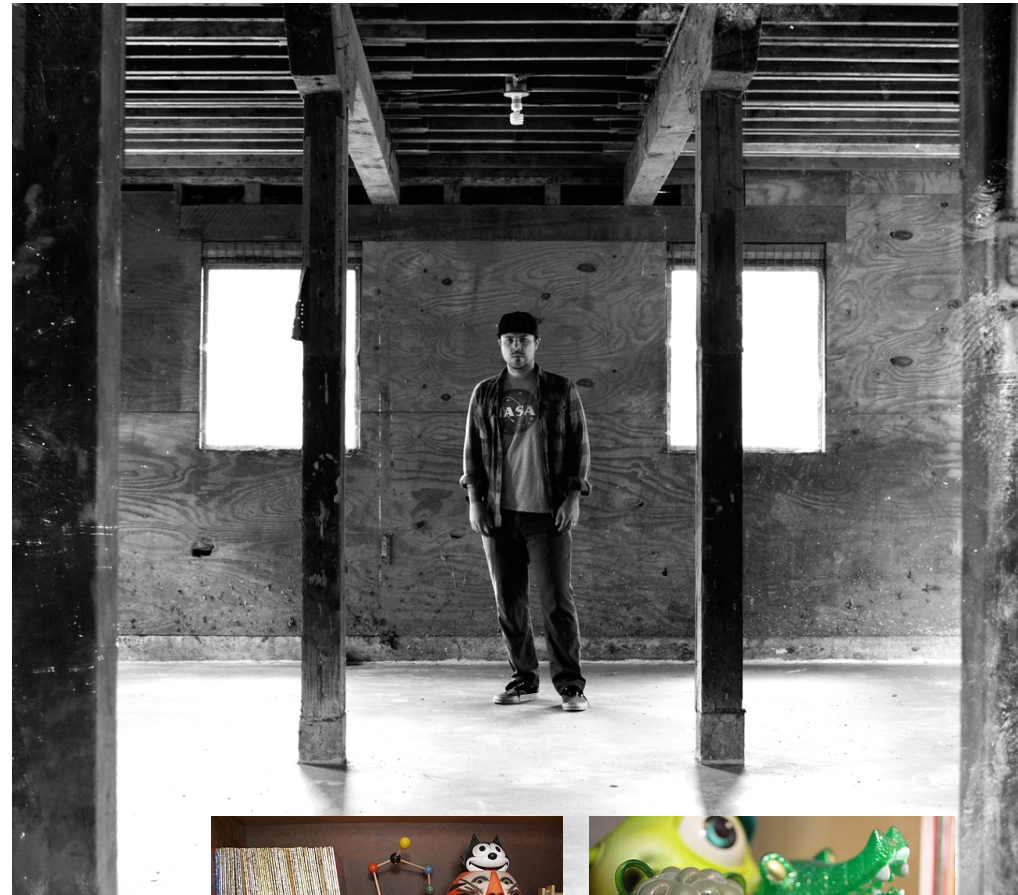
"What excites me most is my diverse client base. One moment I'm working for a hip-hop artist, and the next I'm working on a gift card for Target. The moment I get off the phone with a client I'm buzzing with excitement about the possibilities."
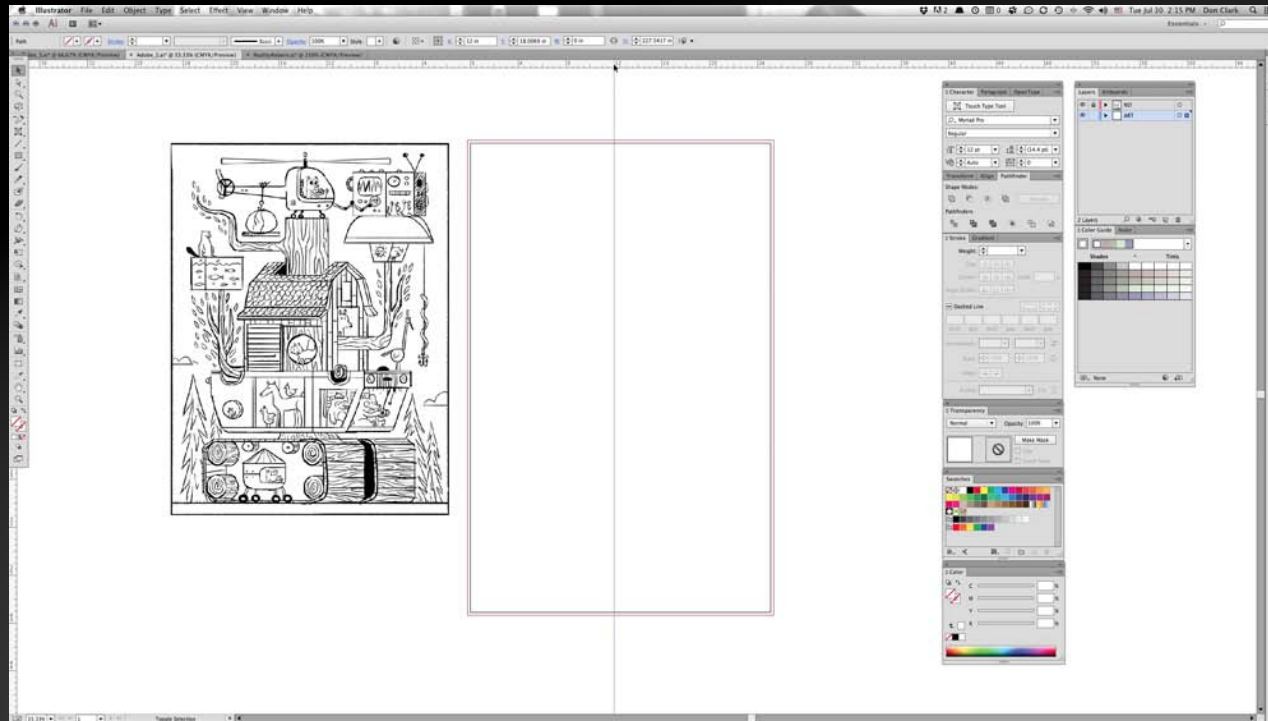
Getting started

When Adobe first contacted me about this project, the concept was wide open. I had a few keywords for inspiration, but it was ultimately up to me.

Since I just recently bought a 10-acre farm, I thought it would be fun to incorporate our family's new lifestyle into my concept for this project. One of the keywords that Adobe gave me was the word "reborn." The optimism and thrill of something new, both generated by the exciting features of Illustrator CC and our new life in the country, inspired me to create *Reality Reborn*.

My initial sketching phase is usually pretty loose. I didn't spend too much time dialing in the details for *Reality Reborn*. First, I focused on the rough concept and composition. My process between sketch and final art is a bit different than most artists. Instead of tracing my sketches, I use them as a starting point, keeping them off to the side of my artboard for reference.

The content evolved quite a bit over the course of the illustration, but the concept stayed intact. That's pretty normal for me because my illustrations tend to take on a life of their own as I'm working. I don't like to be locked into the sketch too firmly. New ideas come to me as I'm working on final art and color, and many times the illustration needs to be rethought a bit. That clarity doesn't always happen for me in the sketching phase.

Because my concept was vertical in layout and mostly symmetrical, I established the center of my artboard by using the new enhancements to guides in Illustrator CC. I was able to just hold down the shift key while double-clicking the center point in my ruler. I ended up creating all my guides this way. So there's no more need to drag guides from the top and side of the screen.

Taking shape

The next step was blocking out shapes. I finished the base of the main vehicle or structure, and came up with a pretty good idea of the colors I'd be using. I did away with the helicopter I had in the original sketch and replaced it with a tractor, which is much more fitting for the piece. These kinds of decisions happened throughout the final drawing process.
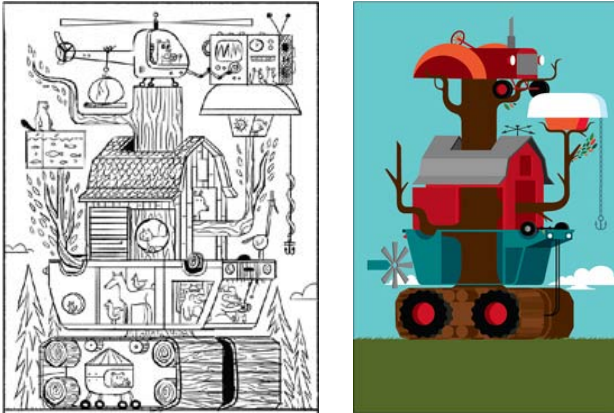

Getting down to details

I began to fill out the piece with branches, a silo, and a fish tank, and then started adding in more detail. A roofline and treetop were added to give the illustration proper weight and balance. My artboard also became much more vertical and I realized that the poster was a whopping 46" x 25".

Once my overall structure was complete, the next step was to add life to the illustration by populating it with all of the characters. I also made some tweaks by removing items that didn't fit right.

Then I was ready for the "ink-and-paint" phase: shading, lighting, and line work. This phase is essentially my point of no return. I spend a great deal of time dialing in the details with textures and brushes, so it's best to get client approval at this stage before diving head first into finishing the piece.

For this phase, the pattern making capabilities in Illustrator CC are great, as is the Touch Type tool so I can manipulate type without creating outlines. It's so freeing to make changes while keeping everything editable. I use Adobe InDesign® CC, Photoshop® CC, and Illustrator CC all day, and the seamless integration among all three is huge. I use my Wacom Cintiq for any painting, and then easily move between the desktop and the Cintiq as needed.
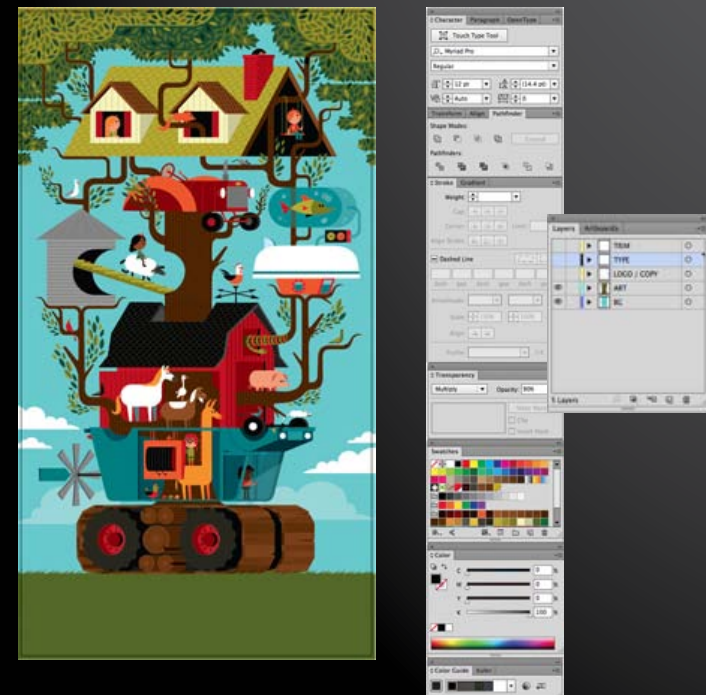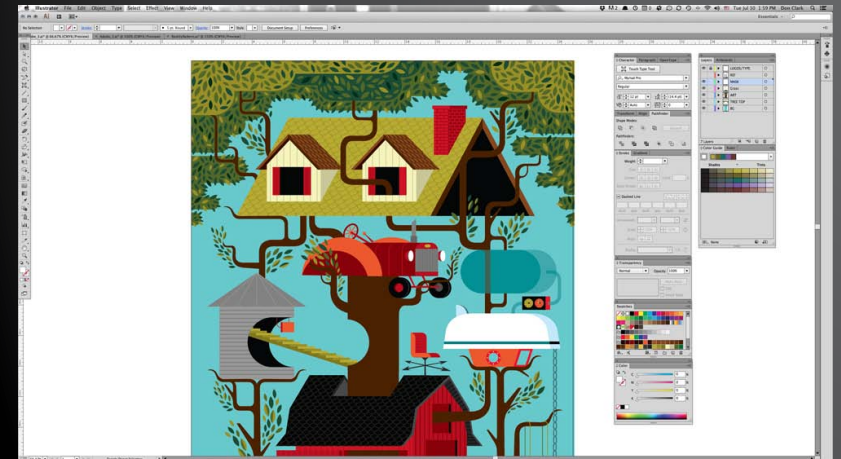
The right texture and tone

For this specific piece, I used Illustrator CC from start to finish. Often, I'll finish my illustration in Photoshop at this point. However, I decided to create three halftone patterns in Photoshop and place them in Illustrator to use as my shadows. To create these textures, I started with three shapes: a rectangle, a reverse circle, and a circle. I used these shapes for every angle that I would be shading.

To generate the desired effect I was looking for, I went to Filter > Blur > Guassian Blur. I double-checked that my Image Mode was set to Grayscale.

Next I went to Filter > Pixelate > Color Halftone. Once I had the desired gradient I wanted, I saved these three images as bitmap TIFF files.
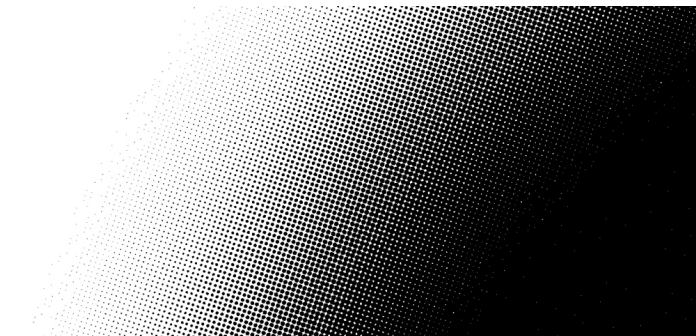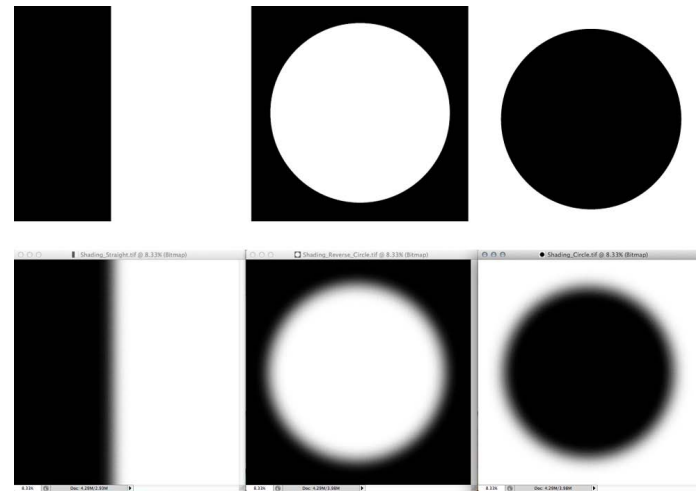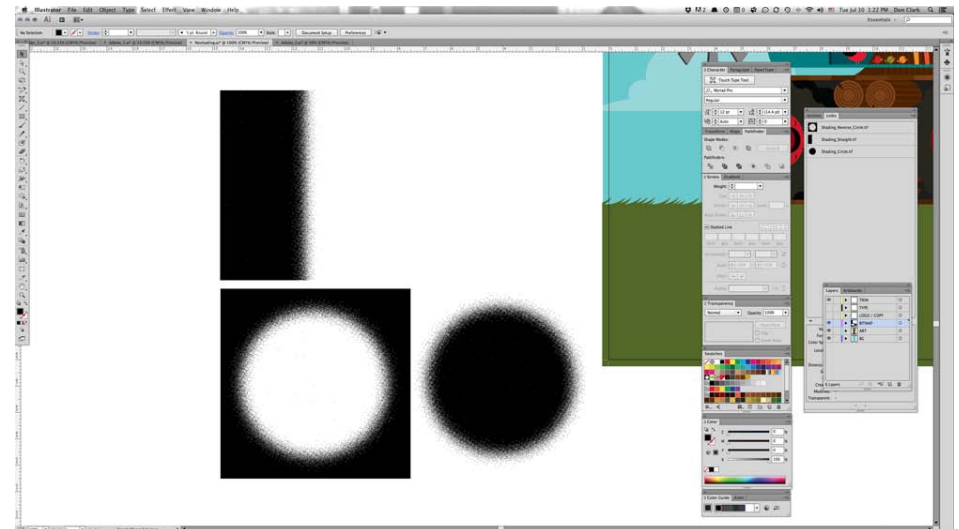
Placement and adjustment

Next I placed all three bitmap textures into my document at the same time using the new Multiple-file place in Illustrator CC.
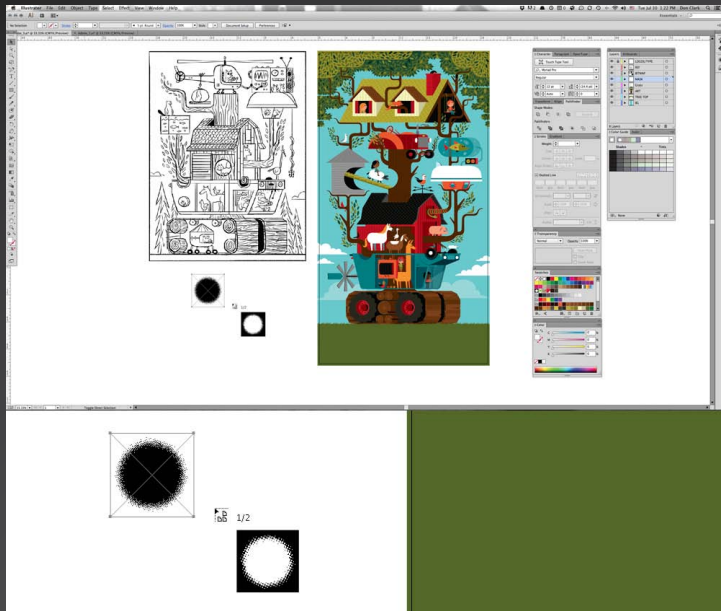

Once I had the three textures dropped into my document, each on its own layer, I could then freely copy and paste them throughout my piece as needed.

"One of the coolest parts of the new Multiple-file place in Illustrator CC is that you can also adjust the size of the placed file before you drop it onto your artboard."

Shading tips

When shading, the first step was to copy, paste, and color one of my bitmap files.
I used the Eyedropper tool or the Color panel to choose the color I wanted.
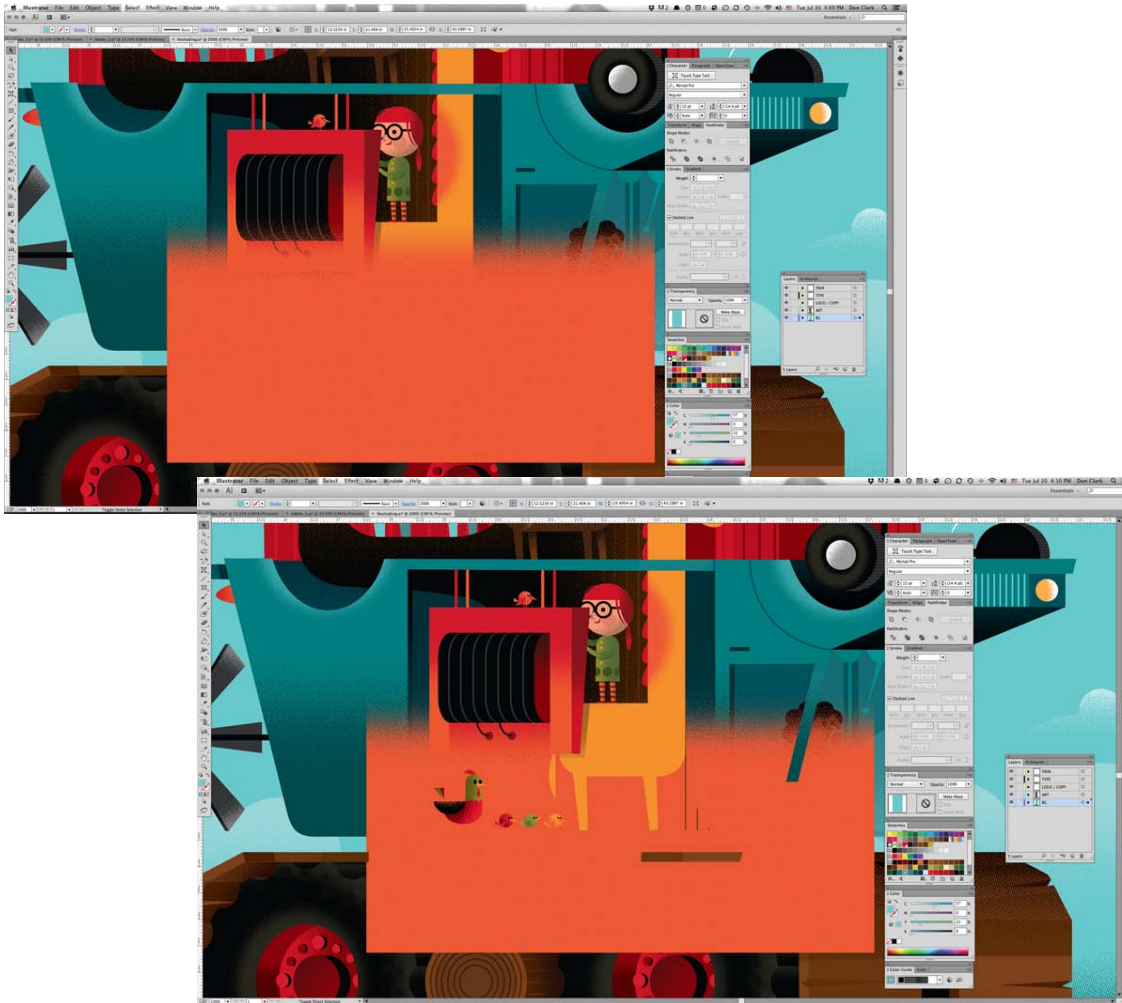
I then repeated this step for every object that I wanted to shade.

I wanted to place the texture inside the llama, which meant creating a clipping mask so only the texture inside the llama shape would be visible. To do this quickly, I copied the newly colored shading file, selected the llama shape, and with the drawing mode set to Draw Inside (Shift+D on the keyboard cycles through the drawing modes), I pasted the texture inside the shape.
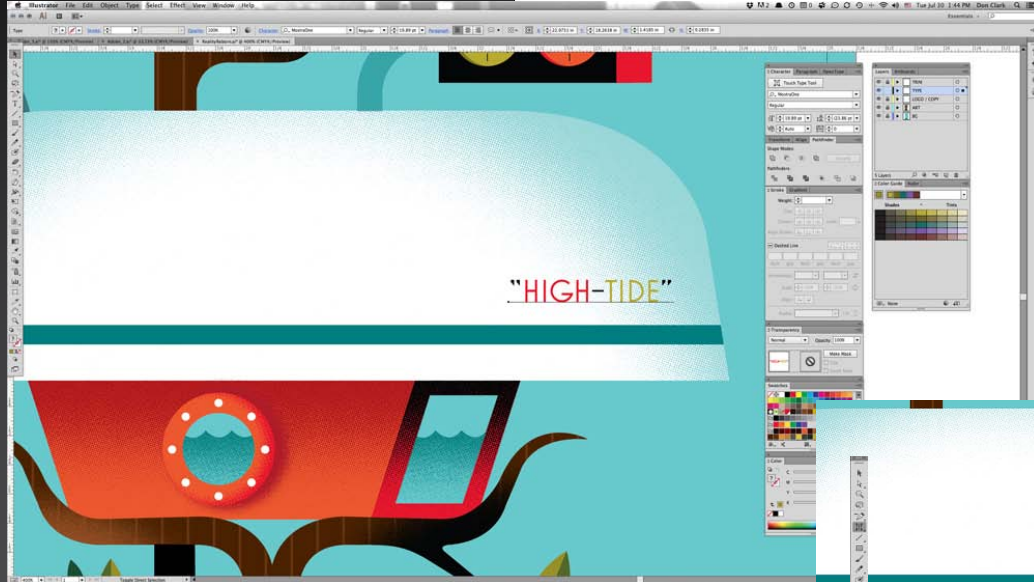
Type editing with ease

For the type on the capsized boat, I used a cool new feature in Illustrator CC: the Touch Type tool. You can now manipulate and edit individual characters without creating outlines!

I went to the Tools panel and selected and held down the Type tool to access the Touch Type tool (Shift T). I wanted to adjust the baseline of a few characters in my word, so I clicked on the "I" in the word HIGH and nudged it up a bit.
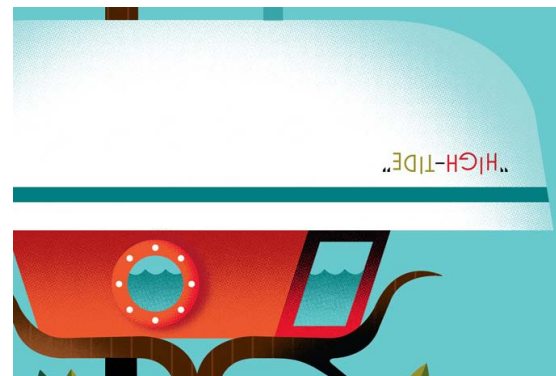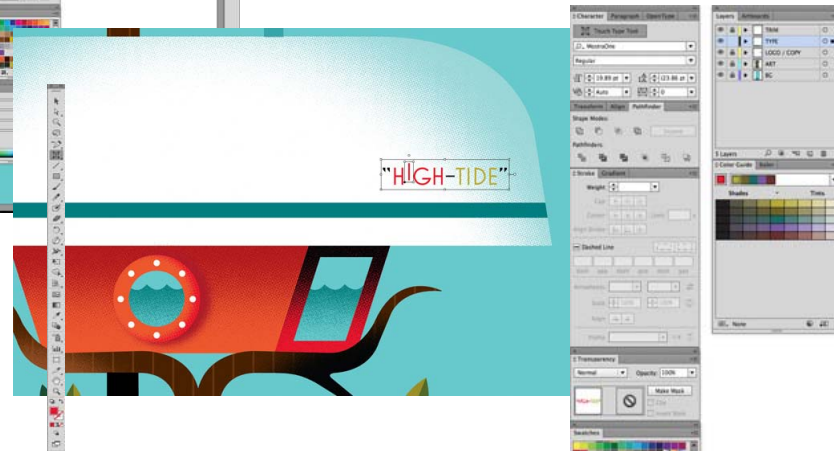

I repeated this step a few more times and flipped the word upside down. Everything was still editable in case I want to go back and change anything.

Once the illustration was finished, the final steps were to add the title, copy, and logos.

Last but not least, I used one more new Illustrator CC feature: File packaging. Instead of embedding all of my bitmaps and manually dragging fonts to folders, I went to File > Package to quickly prep my document for printing.

Reality Reborn by Don Clark was commissioned by
Adobe and created using Adobe Illustrator CC.
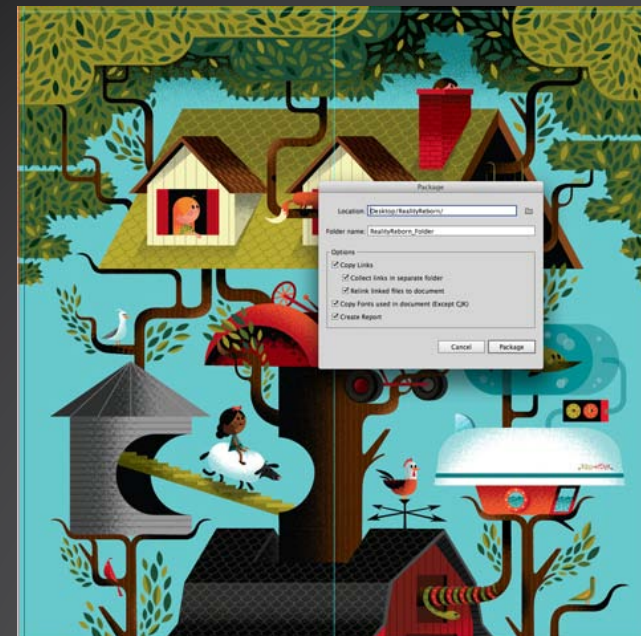
*"I'm not usually one to change my workflow based
on software updates, but I can honestly say the new
features in Adobe Illustrator CC are fantastic and
have made my life easier as an illustrator."*

For more information
Product details:
www.adobe.com/illustrator