

Wayfinding is all about improving how a building works for its users and visitors; helping them to navigate through what may be unfamiliar territory, while also giving it an identity. Incorporating wayfinding into the design of a building has never been more important, be it for legislative or for cultural reasons.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) part 3 serves to ensure that all buildings used by the public are fully accessible to everyone. This means not only facilitating straightforward entry to the building but also making easy the physical negotiation of different levels and spaces, including transitional ones such as corridors and

doorways, as well as enabling users to access information and assistance in moving around the building. The Act is backed up by Approved Document Part M (Access to and Use of Buildings), which states that reasonable provision should be made to ensure that buildings are accessible to all who wish to use them, while the Charter Mark Criterion 3 goes further by saying that particular attention should be paid to those with special needs. Meanwhile, BS 8300 provides details in implementing methods in accessibility.

Additionally, with the enlargement of the European Union in the past three years, as well as migration from many other parts of the world, the British workforce is now

truly multicultural and multilingual, so clear (and often non-verbal) signage is vital, especially in public buildings such as stores, hospitals and council offices.

'Wayfinding tools include not just well-designed functional signs and interior layouts but also the organisation of approach landscaping, altering lighting and maps and online strategies which enhance the psychological interpretation of an organisation before you arrive, as well as the physical interpretation of the building once you're there.' So says Nicholas Haworth of the Cambridge-based Wayfinding Consultants, which has carried out projects for schools, stately homes, a number of city and county councils, the Port of Dover Authority, the Museum of Oxford and several Cambridge colleges.

'The development of a wayfinding strategy helps a building to greet its users, explain anything they may need to know about accessing services within it, and give them directions,' he says. 'Wayfinding enables choice in a controlled manner. The design of the signs, maps and wayfinding tools can give a building a unique identity - which it needs to communicate the options available to the user - plus usability that works in harmony with the architecture and building use. This enhances the visitor experience, creating a better image of the building and organisation.'

Another wayfinding specialist is Endpoint, set up by Gideon Wilkinson and fellow industrial designer Paul Veness in 1999.

The agency's tasks include translating 2D designs into branded environments and helping designers and architects realise their conceptual thinking. Its team of 18 consists of product designers, wayfinding experts, engineers and 'the odd sign industry buff'.

Wilkinson says that the creation of wayfinding systems for department stores is particularly challenging, because the designer is competing with thousands of branded items, all vying for the customer's attention.

'In short, you must generate clear signals that will cut through the noise, but at the same time use the merchandise as your ally. Space is at a premium, especially on the ground floor, and there are numerous legal requirements, particularly regarding exit and fire hazard signage. Logic accounts for 95 per cent of branding, and yet all too often it is left to people who do not understand design. We set up Endpoint to bridge the gap between designers and contractors, policing guidelines and keeping things consistent.'



WAYFINDING CAN MAKE OR BREAK A BUILDING IN TERMS OF IMAGE. WALK THIS WAY FOR THE SUCCESS STORIES

f WORDS: RUTH LING



#1 and #2 When GMW Architects refurbished 99 Bishopsgate in London in 2007 for the developer Hammerson, it retained and updated the rod-based reception directory installed by Signbox 12 years earlier because with 25 office floors to navigate, visitors need a system that conveys information as simply as possible, yet offers flexibility as occupants change.



f PROJECT: CASTLE HOWARD, NORTH YORKSHIRE
f WAYFINDING: WAYFINDING CONSULTANTS

Well known as the location for the televisionisation of *Brideshead Revisited*, the Palladian country house Castle Howard, near York, was designed in 1700 by Sir John Vanbrugh for the third Earl of Carlisle. An extensive restoration programme reached its climax last year, as part of which an intelligent and considerate approach to wayfinding was considered necessary, to consolidate the building's new mark identity.

After interviewing employees and visitors to the Grade I listed house and grounds, in order to identify needs and problems, Wayfinding Consultants decided to develop a cohesive system comprising four main elements: a simple colour combination sign system (above) to denote the different interests at Castle Howard; mapping of routes to direct pram and wheelchair users away from uneven ground; mapping of grounds and woods and creation of child-friendly information points; and development of paper hand-held plans for visitors, which key into architectural and landscaping features, thereby cutting down on the number of signs required.

In the first season since implementation, staff have noticed fewer visitors asking for directions, while the child-friendly information points have made exploration of the estate a family activity.

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