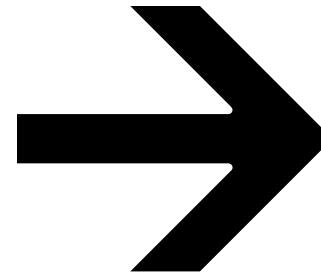
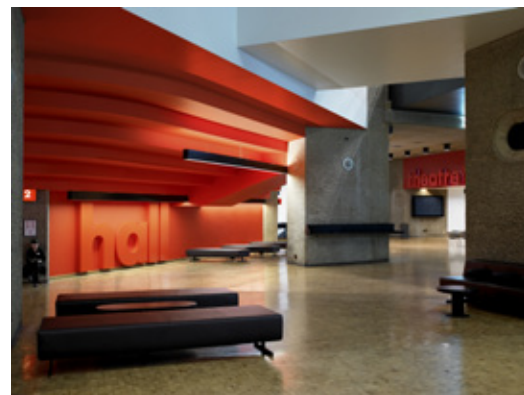


DISAPPEARING INFORMATION

Disapi Inform

Mark Sinclair talks to Ian Cartlidge
of London studio, Cartlidge Levene.
Photographs by Marcus Ginns,
Richard Learoyd & Tim Soar.



"I think we have done a good job if the result is silence," says Ian Cartlidge of the London studio Cartlidge Levene. As a designer of way-finding systems for museums, art galleries, a newspaper office, and one of the city's most famous department stores, he says the success of a project can be measured in "a drop-off in complaints rather than a barrage of praise." When a way-finding system works, it gets us from A to B with minimal fuss, then quietly melts away into the building. But it's a subtle, vital aspect of our experience of structures and public space. "As way-finding consultants," Cartlidge says, "we can become as integral to the building team as the structural engineer."

Just as we decipher cityscapes in order to navigate around them, we "read" buildings. Architects give much consideration to how we move through and engage with space—the living flow within the built environment—and way-finding systems help us

important sight lines, declutter—all fundamentals to building an intuitive way-finding system," he says. "Signage is often the final layer that we apply to help people make the right decisions at key points in the journey."

Indeed, any museum or arts center requires a strategy for delivering information across many channels of communication. "This might begin with information provided on a website, through to physical signage in the building, digital technologies, right down to the minute detail of exhibit labels," Cartlidge says. "Stepping back, considering how these communication elements work together can greatly influence how people read and experience a place."

Though way finding is based in theory, the observation of behavioral patterns, and rigorous testing, each of Cartlidge Levene's clients requires a system tailored to its particular environment. A museumgoer has different needs from an office worker or a shopper, for example. Moreover, Cartlidge explains, different types of visitors to the same building have different needs and routines. "To test our strategies, we construct 'journey scenarios' that provide a narrative of movement through space, revealing what the visitor experiences at certain points," he says. "The effectiveness of way-finding systems is quantifiable: Our clients can see evidence that our strategies and interventions work."

There are other considerations, especially when it comes to displaying information. "Legibility is

"As way-finding consultants, we can become as integral to the building team as the structural engineer."

to mentally map an area in the most efficient way. "Way finding begins with the architecture, and successful systems can be found in buildings which are intuitive to navigate," Cartlidge says. "These types of buildings, if managed correctly, will then require the minimum number of signs."

But signage is just one element of the way-finding strategy, or the "wider user experience," as Cartlidge has it. It's the integration of design and information within the architectural fabric that is key. "We might enhance certain architectural features, open up

paramount," Cartlidge says. "Font, size, contrast, and letter spacing are all crucially important. Information on signs has to be simple, unambiguous, and easily understood." For London's Barbican arts center, which is set over a number of warrenlike levels and notoriously difficult to navigate, Cartlidge Levene worked closely with both fellow designers (Studio Myerscough) and architects (AHMM). The result, a series of bold, large-scale floor numerals and cleverly positioned information points, changed the nature of the building completely.

1/ BARBICAN ARTS CENTRE, LONDON
BOLD GRAPHIC INTERVENTIONS ARE CAREFULLY INTEGRATED INTO THE ARCHITECTURE ACTING AS WAYFINDING BEACONS AND EMPHASISING NEW OPENINGS AND SIGHT LINES. SIMPLE DIRECTIONAL SIGNS COMBINE WITH LARGE SCALE DESTINATION GRAPHICS TO CREATE A LEGIBLE AND WELCOMING FOYER SPACE.

2/ MICHAEL FARADAY COMMUNITY SCHOOL, SOUTHWARK, LONDON
WAYFINDING FOR A NEW-BUILD PRIMARY SCHOOL IN SOUTH LONDON, DELIVERED IN A FUN AND LIVELY MANNER WHICH IS HIGHLY VISIBLE AND ENGAGES THE SCHOOL CHILDREN.



3/ SELFRIDGES & CO, OXFORD STREET, LONDON
CALM, ELEGANT TOTEMS AND HANGING SIGNS ARE DESIGNED TO SEPARATE THE WAYFINDING FROM THE MULTITUDE OF IN-STORE BRANDING. THE PERMANENT LOOKING SIGNAGE IS EASILY UPDATABLE TO CATER FOR THE FAST-CHANGING RETAIL ENVIRONMENT.



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For the Selfridges store on Oxford Street, the firm's solution was to make the best of what was already there in order to help people orient themselves. It also installed an elegant system of fully updatable standing totems and hanging signage. "Department stores are generally large boxes with no daylight or visible edges," says Cartlidge. "Once inside, you quickly lose any sense of direction, so we introduced a whole layer of ideas to improve people's ability to read the space, including the removal of merchandising around escalator cores, freeing up areas to allow customers to switch modes from shopping to way finding and back again."

But with digital technology enabling more flexible, richer visitor experiences, won't analog signs soon be out of date? "How the physical and digital worlds dovetail together will be the big story over the next few years," Cartlidge says. "It's a logical step to see GPS and augmented reality moving into buildings, and digital technology can personalize

"How the physical and digital worlds dovetail together will be the big story over the next few years"

information to the individual visitor's likes and dislikes. This technology exists today, and clients just need to harness it. However, I think there will always be the need for physical signage, regardless of how pervasive digital way-finding tools become."

Perhaps more important, there's the psychological issue of trust. A sign that looks temporary is unreliable. "If it seems as if it's been hastily updated, it begins to erode the authority of the information," says Cartlidge. "So we design signage which looks permanent, even if it has to be easily updated. Stores like Selfridges are dynamic environments with a high frequency of change. What's most pleasing is that after four years of operation, with the store changing the location of departments many times in that period, the system is still absolutely intact."



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4/ CERAMICS GALLERY, VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON
NAVIGATING A PIECE OF FURNITURE! – THE SAME PRINCIPLES AT WORK AS NAVIGATING A BUILDING. A UNIQUE PIECE OF LOW-TECH INTERACTIVE FURNITURE WHICH EXPLAINS THE PROCESS OF MAKING CERAMICS.

5/ BRISTOL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY
ELEGANT, PAINTED TIMBER, LEANING PANELS HAVE MINIMUM IMPACT ON THE LISTED BUILDING STONEMWORK AND PROVIDE A CONTEMPORARY, BUT SENSITIVE, NEW LAYER IN AN EDWARDIAN INTERIOR.

6/ GUARDIAN NEWS & MEDIA, KINGS PLACE, LONDON
LOW ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT WAS A KEY PART OF THE BRIEF FOR THE GUARDIAN'S NEW OFFICES. CARTLIDGE LEVENE'S RESPONSE WAS TO MAKE THE DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE SYSTEM ENTIRELY OUT OF CARDBOARD.