

PROFILE

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA **AN INTEGRATED REVIEW OF SPATIAL NEEDS AND FUNCTION FOR THE STATE LIBRARY**

Wayfinding signage, site branding, architectural and spatial analysis in partnership with Grieve Gillet Andersen.

Wayfinding projects start with an obvious requirement to facilitate the movement of people within and around a site with some degree of autonomy. The role of signage has typically been to achieve this with a high degree of invisibility or passiveness – whereby the signs and prompts are not noticed until needed. Contemporary wayfinding strategies include the option for the signage to become more active within the site to the point where it will deliberately engage the users, both direct and entertain and contribute to their experience of the site or space. Can we do both?

The wayfinding project for the State Library began with a question about spatial organisation and coherence of function: the library had grown over the years in an ad hoc fashion with architectural interventions made to accommodate growing collections; the role of the library within the digital sphere was evolving, changing public requirements and a broader precinct wide mandate to increase patronage, better engage the public and tourists. The approach was seamlessly dovetailed between the GGA team and Working Images whereby architectural considerations and graphic considerations centred on and revolved around the question of the spatial. A granular process developed jointly by the team led a broad collaborative inquiry canvassing input from a range of user groups across staff and management and public. Observations of day-to-day activity was supported by informal interviews with working staff that provided valuable anecdotes. Statistical information on user groups spanning the past decade was also reviewed providing great insight into the needs and expectations of the primary users.

On the balance of this inquiry process the team went to work on the development of an architectural / spatial / graphic scheme that sought to address the concerns within the spaces. This body of research provided two key insights that largely informed the scheme. The first insight was that approximately 90% of the visitors to the State Library were repeat visitors. The implications here being that the first time user will have high requirements on branding (site identification) and directional signage (navigation) on their first visit and then having familiarised themselves with the spaces the need for signage becomes redundant. The second key insight was that the State Library is the most poorly visible on the North Terrace Cultural Promenade with an entry that looks least like an entry. The basics of wayfinding lies not with signage but in the architectural response which indicated a significant opportunity to resolve. Surveys conducted by tourism and the library affirmed that many people were not recognising the entry and therefore what lay beyond.

From a graphic perspective our first task was understanding and mapping circulation within the spaces and to appreciate the correlation between the statistical insights and user needs. As an important part of this process destinations and the nomenclature is critical. The question being: are the names of the places well understood? Are they confusing and do they mean what they say? This review led us to propose a significant rationalisation and reordering of destinations within the space. The nett effect of this is not limited to wayfinding as the greatest insights for this exercise came from the website.

In considering a signage scheme we weighed carefully the nature, character, purpose and psychology of the visitations to the library and determined apparently conflicting functional requirements: the branding and site identification demanded a bold graphic response (active scheme) that would engage purposefully and deliberately and create a new street prominent frontage. And as the user moved into the space the character and presence of the signage would diminish and become less visible (passive). We saw also that signage within a space such as this has the potential to become – boring. In our informal conversations with staff we came to appreciate that most of the inquiries at the front desk were for directions to the toilets.. and in response the staff would say 'over here' or 'up there'. Contradicting all rational approaches to wayfinding we entertained just for a moment the idea of introducing a series of very informal directional prompts mimicking the casual directions provide by staff. And we shared it with a few people and got a great response. And then tabled the idea with staff and then management. It attracted a great deal of support and excitement. We found that it brought a freshness to the idea of wayfinding by harnessing the most basic human gestures. On this basis we extrapolated the gestural directional system and tested it throughout the site discovering to our surprise that it was viable.

The success of this project lies not just in the highly creative outcomes but in the partnering of design teams that were seamlessly aligned in their thinking, intent and approach. It lies also in the rigorous research, the clarity of a shared process, the high levels of collaborative inquiry and through the willingness to abandon the clever solution in pursuit of the human response.

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