

Making an Impact - How Signage Affects the Guest's Experience

by Ernest Dwight

Whether an historic mountain retreat, an all-inclusive tropical paradise, or a chic new time-share property near attractions and amusement parks, resorts around the world provide visitors with a break from their regular way of life. To make guests feel at home, resorts strive to provide guests with a sense of comfort while minimizing frustration. A resort's sign program can play a major role in guests' enjoyment of the property, directly impacting the ease with which guests move around and use the property, as well as enhancing the resort's appearance.

Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, NY, was built in 1869 on the shore of Lake Mohonk. The traditional-style hotel with a castle-like design has grown over the years with the continual addition of wings and amenity spaces built as needed on the wooded, natural landscape to become the 265-room resort that it

is today. Due to the successive expansions and renovation, the sprawling mountain retreat (visited primarily by regional guests who drive to the resort), had become a labyrinth of hallways, stairways, rooms, and common areas that confused guests attempting to navigate the interior spaces. In addition, after 140 years, Mohonk was ready for an improved visual first impression to greet and guide visitors to and around the property.

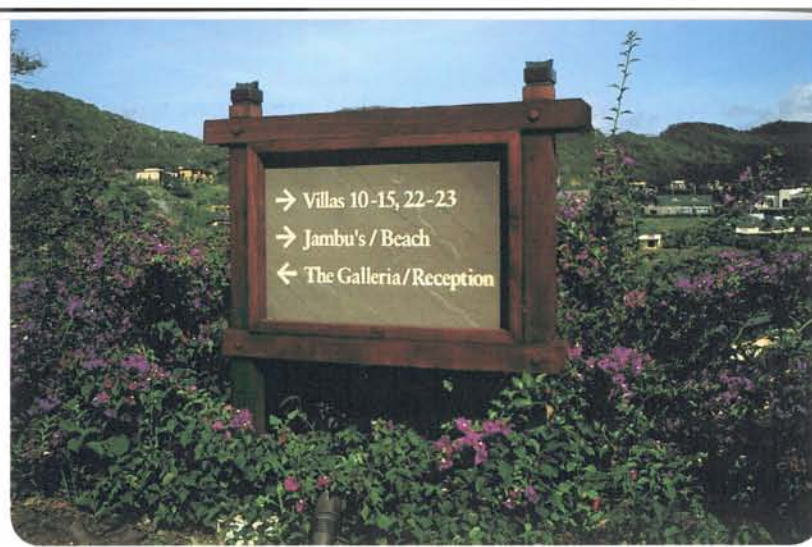
signage addressed the varied needs of the different types of visitors and guests while helping to maintain the sense of grace, elegance, and charm that had always defined Mohonk.

In contrast, the new Marriott's Grand Vista Resort in Orlando, FL, required a sign program to make its facility family-friendly and easily usable for the time-share guests vacationing near

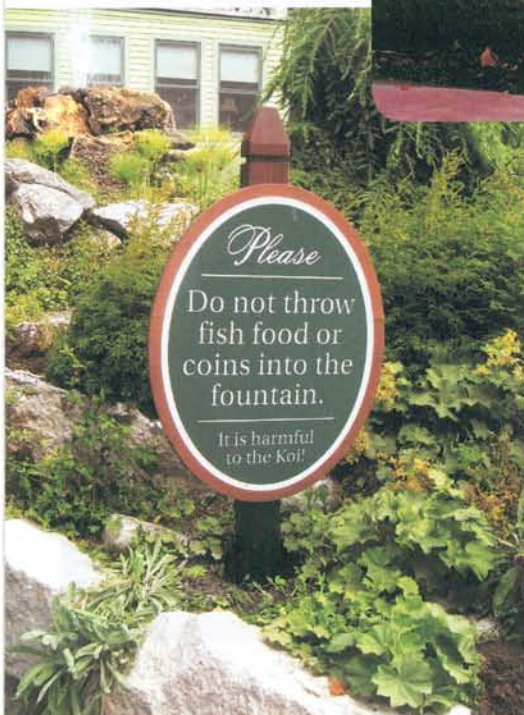
Disney World. Grand Vista was focused on the same goals for wayfinding, branding, and visual appeal as those addressed by Mohonk, but visitors to Grand Vista fly often into Orlando and rent a car or take shuttle transportation to the resort. They needed to easily navigate the resort, find the many amenities desired, and quickly get directions for questions about sightseeing and visiting local

attractions. Usually repeat users, most guests stay at the Grand Vista for a week or more.

The property wanted a uniquely designed sign program with simple, clear information to help guide the many kinds of guests who visit the 1,790-unit stand-alone destination resort. The completed sign program provides constant brand reinforcement while augmenting the lush, tranquil, Spanish-influenced design intent of the property. As a new property, Grand Vista's architectural flavor is more consistent than Mohonk's, creating



To update the property and provide more ease of use for guests, Mohonk initiated a resigning program that included an extensive wayfinding review to identify new directional signs, and newly-designed identification signage. The new sign program polished the 140-year-old resort's well-established branding while underscoring the historic architecture. It also alleviated the navigational frustration guests often experienced within the maze of building additions. Mohonk has had to adapt to visitors coming for a multitude of uses: vacations, weddings, luncheons, conferences, and receptions. The new



a unified information system that is transparent while the guests are engaged in their activities and obvious when they require directions or other information during their stay.

Raffles Canouan (The Grenadines) Resort, an all-inclusive resort on an isolated island in the Caribbean, implemented a new sign program to help rebrand their existing resort and reposition the property. Visitors fly to Canouan, take a shuttle to the property, and are given a golf cart to get around the 300-acre resort. The resort's 156 villas and large complement of luxury amenities allow for everything a visitor may desire. Guests have access to a casino, a European gourmet restaurant, and destination wedding accommodations.

The new sign program created a visual language for the extended property. It integrated the complex facility and provided guests with the sense that they were vacationing on their own private island paradise. The program encompassed exterior vehicular traffic signs for the golf cart users, signage for pedestrian guests on the resort property, and interior signage for guests staying in the villas and enjoying the amenities. Each sign reinforced the new branding and strengthened the new positioning, helping the property remake itself.

While each of the resorts detailed above is very different, they all seek to provide the guest with a comfortable, enjoyable experience. Their sign programs contribute to this experience. Each had unique signage challenges requiring unique solutions, and each found ways to provide guests with a more positive experience through their sign programs by making the resort unified and easier to navigate, and by giving guests clear, comprehensible information. In addition, each property used their sign programs as a subtle marketing tool to enhance their brand and image and improve the visual condition and appeal of the resort.

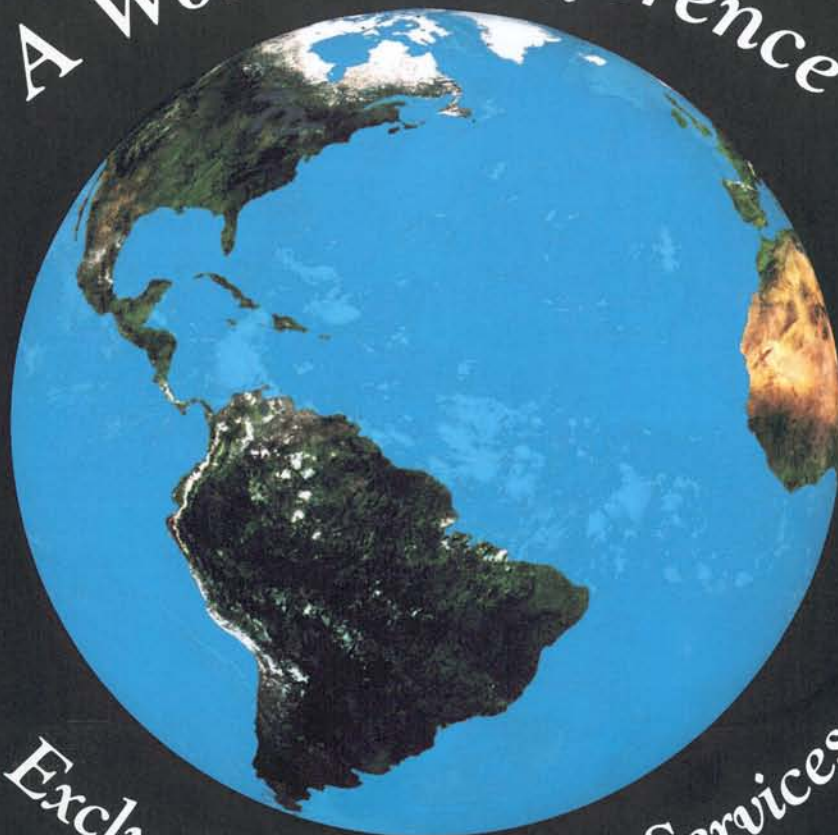
Ernest Dwight is president of SouthWood Corporation, which specializes in the creation and implementation of image-conscious signage and graphics. Call 800-727-6884 or visit www.southwoodcorp.com for more information.



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