Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand 30, Open

Forgotten Modern

Repositioning the Branded Interior in Twentieth-Century Architectural Historiography

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In the post-war period, with the rise of the affluent middle class and both local and international travel, the branding of the experience of travel as both a modern and desirable pursuit began to manifest itself in the developing typology of the tourist office in Sydney, Australia's most important tourist hub.

This paper will examine the emergence and post-war development of the tourist office typology in Sydney through the contemporary lens of the concept of branded environments. As a process of marketing, branded environments aim to communicate the physical embodiment of a brand in three dimensional space through graphics, lighting, furniture and other interior elements.

The paper aims to contribute to the repositioning of the branded interior in twentieth-century architectural historiography through an examination of the way in which the tourist experience in post-war Sydney tourist offices was spatialised, commodified and branded as modern and desirable, focussing on key interiors by leading designers including Douglas B. Snelling, Bunning and Madden, Gordon Andrews and Hans Peter Oser.

The Growth of the New South Wales Tourism Industry and the Emergence of the Tourist Office Typology

In Australia, organised tourism began with the establishment of the offices of Thomas Cook in Melbourne in 1887 and later in other major cities, including Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Hobart. By the early 1900s, colonial governments had begun to recognise the importance of travel and tourism to their local economies. In 1893, the Tasmanian government established the Tasmanian Tourist Association in association with Thomas

Cook, developing promotional material and establishing accommodation in new sites to stimulate tourist visitation and further private investment. In 1901, New Zealand established the world's first ministry of tourism, the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts, whose functions developed initially from travel advice and later to the establishment of booking systems and the operation of tourist accommodation. While the business of advertising and marketing was still in its infancy, these early government bodies began to develop the techniques to entice, advertise and persuade people to use their leisure time to travel.

In 1905, the New South Wales government, prompted by the initiatives in Tasmania and New Zealand and concerned about a potential decline in post-Federation population growth, established the curiously named Intelligence Department as the central agency for the gathering and dissemination of information about NSW, as well as publicising its tourist potential. Centrally located in offices in Martin Place, the Intelligence Department was charged with "multifarious duties, all designed to make the attractions and possibilities of the State better known at home and abroad, to promote settlement on the land and to encourage immigration."[1] A subset of the Department, located on the ground floor of Challis House, Martin Place was named the Tourist Bureau whose task it was to "disseminate information relative to the tourist attractions and facilities for travel, prepare literature and advertisements for that purpose, prepare itineraries for individuals or groups, control Hotel Kosciusko, Caves Accommodation Houses, and various cave systems, place literature on all outgoing vessels, and arrange for the display of exhibits from the State at exhibitions overseas."[2] The Bureau was primarily concerned with attracting new settlers and income to NSW, however, it also promoted the benefits of tourism to all, particularly in terms of health benefits. In 1919, immigration matters were transferred to the Ministry for Labour and Industry and the Tourist Bureau to the Chief Secretary. The Tourist Bureau had now become a separate government agency and functioned as a one-stop shop, not only for government-owned services such as railways and trams but also for Government-run or private accommodation and chauffeur-driven motoring tours, ferry trips and other entertainments. Following the example of Tasmania and New South Wales, other states established government operated tourist bureaus and by the 1920s, all state governments had created agencies to promote travel and tourism and encourage migration and had established themselves as the major point of call for tourist trans-

1. Intelligence Department (1905-1908), Immigration and Tourist Bureau (1908-1919), http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/Entity.aspx?Path=%5CAgency%5C1680 (accessed December 5, 2012).

2. Intelligence Department (1905-1908), Immigration and Tourist Bureau (1908-1919), http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/Entity.aspx?Path=%5CAgency%5C1680 (accessed December 5, 2012).

3. Peter Spearitt, *State of Play: 100 Years of Tourism in New South Wales 1905-2005* (Sydney: Tourism New South Wales, 2005), 20.

port and accommodation. By the late 1930s, with the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the rising popularity of surf bathing and the 1938 Sesquicentenary celebrations and British Empire Games focussed in the NSW capital, Sydney had become Australia's tourist hub.[3]

The post-war boom in tourist activity, fuelled by both the access to leisure and the motor car, cemented the role of the NSW Tourist Bureau as a major partner of the private tourism industry in New South Wales. From its early beginnings the Bureau had pioneered the opening up of new areas for tourism in New South Wales through the ownership and operation of grand hotels such as the Hotel Kosciusko and Caves House at Jenolan Caves. In the post-war period, the Bureau continued to maintain this entrepreneurial role.

The developing New South Wales tourism industry was also impacted by initiatives at the national level, the most significant being the establishment of the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA) in 1929, formed as a "means of introducing new capital, stimulating trade and settlement, and would advertise Australia overseas by inducing people to see the Commonwealth for themselves."[4] Despite the establishment of ANTA, however, interstate rivalries meant that all state governments maintained their individual tourist bureaus which continued to operate independently in the 1950s to 60s. The state tourist bureaus were primarily concerned with meeting the demand for tourist accommodation, maintaining transport links and promoting their distinctive state attractions.

4. "Tourist Trade", *Canberra Times*, May 2 1929, p 4, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1003031, (accessed April 18, 2013).

The earliest tourist resorts in New South Wales were located in mountain regions where the purity of the air was seen as a healthy and desirable relief from the stresses of urban life. The development of private guest houses in the Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves catered for this growing need. Prior to the 1950s, Australians had limited leisure time and tourist destinations such as mountains, parks and beaches that were within 100 kilometres or one hour by train or tram, were most popular. The NSW Government Tourist Bureau promoted and sold these destinations.

Drawings from 1906 show the Tourist Bureau located on the upper ground, ground and lower ground floors of Challis House. Window displays are located on the street frontage and a large tourist display greeted visitors on entry from the street. The booking office was located on the lower ground floor. Drawings

from 1926 show the booking office relocated to the ground floor entry area, combining both display and ticketing functions. The design of the NSW Government Tourist Bureau would in this form until the 1960's.

The early development of the tourist office typology is therefore marked by a focus on the transactions of obtaining information and purchasing tickets. Spaces are designed from a functional basis with the focus of the interior on the design of joinery and counters to mediate the processes of obtaining information, selling and buying. Travel and leisure as a distinctive brand of experience will not emerge as a focus of the design of the tourist office until the post-war holiday boom of the 1950's and 60's.

Branded Environments and the Interior as a Marketing Tool

A brand can be understood as anything that can be bought or sold as an idea or artefact. Through marketing and advertising, the image of the brand is identified and sold to the public. In the retail environment, the interior emulates the aspirations of the brand values and qualities in order to enhance the relationship between the space and the message.

The concept of branded environments developed out of a movement within the practice of interior design in the 1990's that recognised that brand equity i.e., the perceived value of the distinguishing characteristics of an organisation, could be applied to three-dimensional environments.[5] In architectural history, retail spaces that were designed as total environments have a longer history than the concept of branded environments. Precedents such as Adolf Loos' Knize tailor boutique of 1905 and Robert Mallet-Stevens Bally shoe store of 1928 for example, indicate the ways in which interior elements such as materials, graphics and lighting were beginning to be utilized to create a specific brand of experience.

5. Caren S. Martin and Denise A. Guerin, *The Interior Design Profession's Body of Knowledge*, http://www.idbok.org/PDFs/IDBOK_2005.pdf (accessed December 5, 2012).

While the concept of branded environments is relatively new, it is based on a longer history of the understanding of consumer behaviour and marketing that emerged in the 1970s. Processes of consumption became to be understood from this time, as involving not just the tangible product but the total product ie., including associated elements such as service, packaging, advertising and the design of the interior space. This early understanding of the

6. Phillip Kotler, "Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool", *Journal of Retailing* 49, no 4, (1974), p 48.

importance of the physical and sensory dynamics of the retail environment for example, is described by Phillip Kotler as the "atmospherics" of the place,[6] ie., the experience of a place as mediated by the five senses.

Environmental branding builds on these early understandings of consumer behavior by using space as a physical embodiment of the brand to create a "brand space." This three-dimensional communication of a brand aims to create a positive customer experience that is based on the perceived distinctive characteristics of the brand, its brand equity. The physical embodiment of the brand is achieved through architectural and interior elements including form, space, lighting, graphics, and materials. The interior space creates a physical, sensory and emotional relationship with the customer that is able to communicate the brand message.

In terms of the branding of the tourist experience, with the focus on domestic travel prior to the 1940s, the tourist office typology as previously noted, was focused primarily on the transactions involved in travel. In the post-war period however, with the rise of the affluent middle class and both local and international travel, the branding of the experience of travel as both a modern and desirable pursuit, began to manifest itself in the developing typology of the tourist office.

The following case studies examine the post-war development of the tourist office typology in Sydney through the contemporary lens of the concept of branded environments and examines the way in which the tourist experience in post-war Sydney tourist offices was spatialised, commodified and branded as modern and desirable.

Matson Shipping Line Office, Berger House, Elizabeth Street, Sydney, 1956

Designed by Douglas Snelling, the 1956 design for the Matson Shipping Line Office in Elizabeth Street aimed primarily to convey a sense of openness and a feeling of the South Seas, the focus of the company's passenger routes. During the 1950s and 60s, The Matson Line was one of the key players in the shipping industry, focussing on touring the South Pacific with destinations including New Zealand, Fiji, Tahiti, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The offices accommodated passenger booking func-

tions and support services, utilising brightly painted screens and planter boxes as spatial dividers rather than partition walls and doors. The selection of finishes and furniture reinforced the light and airy character of the interior through the use of thin-legged furniture lifted off the floor and brightly coloured fabric. Exotic elements were used throughout—white vinyl floor tiles flecked with blue-grey imported from Sweden, plants from the tropics and Japan, luminous paints from Germany and American chairs.[7]

7. "Shipping Offices, Sydney, N.S.W.", *Architecture in Australia July-September* (1956): 43.

The ceiling plane was designed as key expression of a sense of openness. A passenger reception office was located to the right of the main entry and treated as a distinct area defined by an undulating ceiling constructed of half-round battens to form free-flowing curves. This ceiling was the most striking element of the interior, helping to establish the exotic, tropical branding of the space. In contrast to the playful reception ceiling, the main office ceiling appeared as a continuous illuminated gridded plane.

In the Matson Line Shipping Office, artificial lighting is the focus, rather than daylighting. The main wall behind the reception desk was finished in luminescent paint, activated by black light. This unusual, almost theatrical feature, described by Building: Lighting: Engineering as the first use of luminescent paint in Australia, is a key architectural design element[8] that further added to the visual spaciousness of the interior and acknowledged the marketing potential of the night-time shopfront.

8. "The Matson Line: New Booking Office, Berger House, Elizabeth Street, Sydney", *Building: Lighting: Engineering*, April 24 1956, 27.

Pan American Airways Booking Office, Berger House, Elizabeth Street Sydney, 1956

Snelling's design for the Pan American Airways Booking Office in 1956 accommodated a similar brief to the Matson Shipping Line Office with five interview desks, storage for travel records and ticketing and a public reception area with seating. The overall design brief required the space to "give an atmosphere of travel and to appear uncrowded and as visually large as possible."[9] The offices were located directly opposite to the Matson Shipping Line Office but used a diagonal rather than orthogonal internal organisation to maximise the visual impression of space. The perimeter wall arrangement of desks allowed for a continuous line of sight from the street to the rear. In contrast to the Matson Shipping Line Office, the Pan American Airways Office was designed as an

9. "Airways Booking Office", *Architecture and Arts*, July 1956, 26.

open plan with no internal subdivision or partition walls, further accentuating visual and spatial continuity. Similar to the Matson Shipping Line Office, the ceiling was treated as the most important design element with its exposed beam structure directing the eye deep into the spatial composition. The sense of openness is consistent with Snelling's architectural influences, grounded in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and organic architecture and widely acknowledged as Australia's most significant interpreter of California modern design.[10]

10. Davina Jackson in ed. Philip Goad and Julie Willis, *The Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 637.

The use of daylighting was a key architectural device in the design of the Pan American Airways Booking Office. At the rear of the office area, existing fire resistant windows were removed and the sills cut down and replaced with sliding glass windows. Spatially, this light well became an extension of the main internal space, with a new internal garden enclosed by a redwood wall creating a visual termination and focal point to the space. The garden was lit by daylight during the day, providing additional lighting in the interior and more importantly, drew the eye to the rear of the spatial composition.

The overall material palette was dominated by the use of white marble floors in the public areas and grey vinyl tiles in the office areas. This was accented with the use of redwood joinery and a limited colour scheme of two tones of grey with yellow and white, giving the space a calm and sophisticated character. This, combined with the use of exposed redwood beams, planter boxes and internal planting around the reception desk and in the rear lightwell, created a sense of a calm oasis and a branding of the travel experience as an escape from the mundane.

Liner House Shipping Chamber, Bridge Street, Sydney, 1959

Designed by architects Bunning and Madden in 1959, Liner House functioned as the headquarters of the Wilh Wilhemson Agency Pty Ltd, Norway's largest shipping organisation and the agency for the American Pioneer Line, the United States Lines Company, Australia West Pacific Line and the Scandinavian Airlines System.[11] The ground floor functioned as the main shipping chamber and public reception area. The double height space was overlooked by a mezzanine floor accommodating offices for

11. Bridge Street Heritage Streetscape, NSW Department of Environment and Heritage, http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=2424714, (accessed December 9, 2012).

passenger interviews. A spiral staircase of steel frame construction with terrazzo treads and open risers was cantilevered off a central steel column and formed a dramatic spatial element in the space.

Along with the spiral staircase, the most prominent feature of the Shipping Chamber was a metal mural screen which acted as a semi-transparent wall visible from the street and all public parts of the ground and mezzanine floors. The screen formed an enclosing wall to the mezzanine Passenger Department and functioned as a decorative and space defining element. Formed of 160 different shapes in brass, copper, aluminium and stainless steel and composed of various concave and convex, solid and perforated and beaten and patterned units, the screen provided the space with sombre richness, theatrically lit by artificial light at night. The spaciousness of the interior and the key architectural elements of the stair and decorative mural screen combined to brand the experience of travel as privileged and sophisticated.

NSW Government Tourist Bureau, Challis House, Martin Place Sydney, 1963

Designed by Gordon Andrews in association with architects Edwards Madigan Torzillo in 1963, the offices for the NSW Government Tourist Bureau provided for a large public area and office accommodation with additional mezzanine office. The existing interior of Challis House was completely removed in order to provide better organized and generous spaces to cater for an increasing volume of clients and to provide a more spacious customer experience.

The aim of the design was to create an integrated visual environment, independent of the building fabric and immediate street context. It should be noted that at this time, Martin Place was still a busy vehicular street and the limited visual and physical connection to the immediate street context was consistent with creating a focussed, calm interior environment. Windows to the street were screened off using vertical polished cedar battens, supported on polished brass blocks. In the windows facing the street was located discrete signage and advertising.

The transformation of the interior was signalled from the street entry with openings filled with armour-plate glass doors and transom lights, and flanked with a lining of white Sicilian marble, creating a sophisticated and luxurious introduction to the interior:

> To those who have known the New South Wales Government Tourist Bureau in Challis House, Martin Place, Sydney, over the years, it was just another office for there was nothing specific to single it out from the average city establishment. It has recently been completely remodelled and, today,

to pass through its armour-plate doors is virtually to enter another world—a modern, attractive and exciting world – such as those who journey overseas will encounter in Rome, Paris, Copenhagen and New York.[12]

This "exciting world" of travel was branded most strikingly through the dramatic undulating ceiling. Made from fibrous plaster cowls fixed to a suspended timber grid, the ceiling appears as a diaphanous cloud floating across the main reception space. The cowls are formed from three different moulded curved forms, fixed in an irregular arrangement to create a waving, undulating ceiling form. Within each cowl is housed one incandescent lamp providing a soft diffused light to the public area. According to Andrews, the design for the ceiling began with a scribble, suggesting an "indefinite form like a bright cloud over the Bureau hall which would floodlit the space"[13] that was both "entertaining"[14] as well, as functional.

Another defining element of the interior were the public counters designed as an extension of the tiled floor. The steel frame was clad in a sculpted resin skin and appeared as an organic form growing out of the floor. With countertops of Tasmanian blackwood and linking panels of one-inch thick armour plate glass, the counters were elegant sculptures within the space, the void beneath them enhancing a sense of spaciousness and openness in the interior. The most significant aspect of the counter design however, was the way in which it created a different form of interaction between staff and clients. The relationship became less formal through the disappearance of the barrier of the counter, more akin to a boutique retail experience where the focus is on the customer experience rather than the transaction. Individual interactions also became shorter in duration due to the absence of seating.

Immediately opposite the main entrance was located a two-storey photographic mural composed of images of materials and textures evocative of landscapes and travel. The mural also housed built-in cabinetry for travel brochures and other material. In determining the choice of images, Andrews refers to his experience with Achille Olivetti—"Achille explained to me that Olivetti's policy was to give some entertainment to window shoppers. 'Don't try to push the product make the viewer feel comfortable whether they are buying or not.'"[15] The selected black and white images therefore avoid the conventional pictures of holidaymakers and instead use a variety of abstract images to "trigger the imagination."[16]

12. "New South Wales Government Tourist Bureau: Remodelling Transforms Building", Engineering: Building: Lighting June (1961): 26.

13. Gordon Andrews, *A Designer's Life*, (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1993), 121

14. Andrews, *A Designer's Life*, 121.

15. Andrews, *A Designer's Life*, 66.

16. Andrews, *A Designer's Life*, 118.

BOAC Booking Office, Castlereagh Street, Sydney, 1963

Designed by architects Oser Fombertaux and Associates in 1963, BOAC House functioned as the Australian Headquarters for the British Overseas Airways Corporation. The project involved extensive refurbishment and modification of the 1915 Usher's Metropolitan Hotel, providing for a BOAC showroom and shop-front on the ground floor, provision of new lifts, fire stairs and renewal of services and extensive alternations and modernisation to create new office space.

The ground floor shopfront was recessed from the street with a continuous glass frontage. The original ground floor façade of the building was supported by an arrangement of six brick columns. In order to open up the facade to the street and convey a sense of openness, the redesign incorporated new steel beams, allowing for the removal of four columns and a clear span of over 11 metres. A reception area providing lounge seating and counter stools acted as a stage to the street with private offices and passenger inter-view desks located behind the main reception wall.

The Miesian simplicity of the design creates a dramatic compo-sition of floating planes and transparency, consistent with Oser's domestic and commercial work which "is marked by a sophis-tication of form and composition within an informed modernist style."[17] A continuous gridded illuminated ceiling stretches across the reception area and the main building lobby.

The branding of the space as a travel centre is subtle. Reception walls feature city silhouette panels in metalwork and a model of a BOAC airplane is suspended over a small pool of water, symboli-cally communicating the idea of flight, and departures and arrival over Australian waters.[18]

17. Goad and Julie Willis (eds), The *Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture*, 520.

18. "Sir William Oliver Opens B.O.A.C. House: Dramatic Sydney Rebuilding Operation", *Building: Lighting: Engineering*, July 1963, 19.

Alitalia Airlines Booking Office, AGC Building, corner Phillip & Hunter Streets, Sydney, 1964

Designed by architects Bunning and Madden in 1964, the offices for Alitalia Airlines accommodated a public seating and display area at entry with interview counters and offices located at the rear. The offices were designed with all public areas directly visible to the street through full width glazing on the front facade. An overall sense of transparency and spaciousness is conveyed in the simple orthogonal layout of the space.

Spatial drama was created through the use of theatrical lighting effects. The most dramatic feature of the space is the ceiling which comprised twenty-four parallel lines of lighting elements, stretching from the entry to the rear of the space. The lighting elements were canted upwards at each end facing the side walls of the space, conveying a sense of dynamic upward lift. Extending beyond the public area to the partitioned-off private office areas behind, the ceiling conveyed a sense of an endless sky.

The theatrical use of lighting is continued in the design of desks and counters which incorporated lighting underneath. The counters, which are lowered to provide a more intimate relationship between staff and client, appear to float within the space. The international branding of the space is communicated through the selection of furniture, architectural detailing and graphics. Within the space were installed a number of transparencies and illuminated signs, including images of a Renaissance painting by Canaletto, European cities and the illuminated tail fin of a DC8 airliner.[19]

19. "Lights and Colours at Alitalia: Sydney's Smart Airline Offices," *Building: Lighting: Engineering*, July 1963, 36.

P&O Passenger Booking Hall, corner Hunter & Castlereagh Streets, Sydney, 1964

Material sophistication is taken further in the detailing of the P&O Passenger Booking Hall, designed by architects Fowell, Mansfield & Maclurcanin in 1964. Located on the ground floor, the Hall was a double-height space that comprised a central arrival zone, public seating and reception area to one side and a seated counter area to the other.

The material and spatial qualities of the Booking Hall conveyed a sense of sophistication and elegance. Paved in white marble, the central zone was dominated by a large richly coloured mural by Douglas Annand opposite the entrance. On either side of the central space were carpeted areas in blue and purple that harmonised with hues in the mural. Combined with the blue and purple seating, the colour palette created a strong contrast with the white marble flooring and black marble columns. Walls were covered in a gold and cream wallpaper as a neutral background to the mural and upholstery colours. Joinery in mountain ash was stained to a soft mellow grey as part of the background colour palette, continuing the understated elegance of the branding of travel.

Conclusion

In the case studies presented, interior space is understood as a total experience, moving beyond functional needs to one that attempts to create a physical, sensory and emotional relationship with customer that communicates the brand message of travel as a distinctive experience of modernity.

Key contemporary international precedents in branded space, such as the Grayson women's fashion stores designed by Victor Gruen and Elsie Krummeck in the 1940s and the showrooms for Olivetti by Studio BBPR and Carlo Scarpa in the 1950s utilise modernist design to communicate brand messages related to artefacts. What differentiates the tourist office typology from other commercial and retail environments of the time such as these, it is argued, is the representation of the intangible, the communication, through a modernist idiom, of a potential experience rather than the attributes associated with a physical artefact or company.

Tourism is an industry that is structured by intangibles, there are no material goods involved. Rather, the tourism industry produces experiences, events, desires and emotions.

Read through the lens of the contemporary understanding of branded environments, the tourist office typology in Sydney is seen to steadily move away from a focus on the transactions involved in travel, to the communication of the experience of travel as a sophisticated pursuit of the affluent middle class.

Openness and transparency consistently appear as key design aims in the developing tourist office designs of the 1950s and 60s. Natural and artificial lighting effects become a focus for dramatizing the interior, both during the day and at night. Above all, the ceiling plane appears as a focus for design invention, often conveying a sense of theatricality and other-worldliness. While modernist architectural values such as openness and transparency relate easily to ideas of travel, there is also conveyed in these spaces a renewed interest in materiality, ornamentation and craft, physical translations of notions of sophistication, luxury and high value. Detail, colour, pattern, the use of exotic materials and dramatic lighting effects extend modernist values into the sensory. A greater sense of democracy is also evident in the spatial relationship between customer and staff with the removal of counter barriers and less formal approaches to customer consultations.

Through the utilisation of modernist architecture and design, the tourist experience in the 1950s and 60s is spatialized, commodified and branded as modern and desirable. Key to the branding of these spaces is the promise of travel as a sophisticated and high value experience. The case studies are evidence of an emerging local understanding of the relationship between advertising, marketing, consumer behaviour and interior design, one that predates our contemporary understanding of branded environments by almost four decades.