

# A NEW CANVAS:

## *Wayfinding Graphics and Art to Enhance Parking Facility Design*

BY DENNIS BURNS and BECKY HANNUM

Parking is an essential infrastructure element in any environment, but in the past parking facilities have been treated primarily as utilitarian structures with little investment in amenities that could make them more attractive, memorable, user-friendly or even entertaining. However, in the past decade, parking structures have begun to evolve as more refined elements of integrated urban design.

Design trends related to parking structures include the integration of parking, residential, office, and street-level retail as components of mixed-use developments. Garages have been placed below ground to allow the creation of urban parks and public gathering places at street level. Another notable trend is the development of multi-modal facilities that integrate parking and transportation elements such as transit stations, light rail connections, bike lockers, etc. These changes in the functional role of parking structures, enhanced by new and creative architectural treatments, have continued to advance parking structures as a unique and important building type.

It is not only new garages that are changing the parking landscape. Creative applications that renew and enliven existing parking structures are emerging. One of the most exciting of these new trends is the active engagement of local artists and graphic designers to creatively enhance parking structures through the development of memorable level identification and theming concepts. Some projects have gone beyond creative wayfinding aids and have made the garages themselves "attractions".

### WAYFINDING GRAPHICS INSIDE PARKING FACILITIES

From 1996 through 2001, Bank of America increased the size of its workforce in its headquarters city of Charlotte, North Carolina. In addition to adding more office space, the bank built seven parking facilities including a deck which, at that time, was the largest in the southeast. To enhance the downtown experience, the bank added street-level retail wherever possible. It also engaged artists and graphic designers to create more interesting, attractive and functional parking facilities.

"We thought about the needs of the driver, inside the car and on foot, within the parking garage," said Becky Hannum who managed the bank's art and wayfinding projects. She added, "Our goal was to make sure people would find their cars and that parking would be fun, attractive and informative." Bank criteria included the use of themes and stories unique to Charlotte or the project, brightly lighted interiors, easy to read vehicular signage and low maintenance solutions.

Another important consideration in these projects was the thoughtful use of durable materials — stainless steel, ceramic tile, Sintra board, etc. — This kept long-term maintenance costs to a minimum.

The bank's two-level underground facility in Transamerica Square on North Tryon Street offered an opportunity to highlight Charlotte and the region's gold rush history with information and artwork displayed in the elevator lobbies.

The parking garage in the 201 North Tryon Street office tower is located on the former site of a Cadillac dealership. The theme of "Cars by Decades" begins with the Model T on level 1 and rises to the Electric Car on level 10. The panels have held up remarkably well — the only significant maintenance was a thorough cleaning after five years at a total cost of approximately \$3,500.

The Hearst Tower garage presents eight cultural organizations within walking distance of the building. Level 5, for example, salutes Imaginon, the children's theater/children's library building two blocks away.

In each garage, "triggers" or clues, are strategically placed to help the driver and pedestrian identify their floors, rows or zones. Unique theme signage and colors distinguish one floor from another. To further assist the pedestrian, signage is added in the elevator lobbies and cabs.



15th & Pearl Garage & Mixed-Use Development – Boulder, CO



Spring Street Garage & Residential Development – Greenville, SC



Gateway Village Garage & Residential Development – Charlotte, NC



Transamerica Square Parking Facility – Charlotte, NC



Hearst Tower Parking Facility – Charlotte, NC



Seventh Street Station Parking Facility, Level 4 – Charlotte, NC



The Seventh Street Station garage was built in 1998 as a downtown destination. It is located along the Charlotte trolley and light rail system and offers retail on the ground level including a grocery store and seafood restaurant. The exterior façade is clad in an interactive multi-media work entitled “Touch My Building” by artist Christopher Janney and features 64 touch panels that light up and emit sounds. It has become a “must see” for all ages.

The interior is as lively and colorful as its exterior. The graphic design firm, StudioWorks, developed the theme of “earth strata” that begins with the Center of the Earth (level 1) and ends with the Universe (level 10). The engaging graphics relate whenever possible to Charlotte and North Carolina. The elevator lobbies feature ceramic tiles inset into the walls created by students from the city’s public school system, and inspired by the strata theme.



Left, and below: Hearst Tower Parking Facility – Charlotte, NC



Exterior walls of parking garages, such as Seventh Street Station, are excellent opportunities for public art. Phenomena artist Ned Kahn, was commissioned to create “Wind Veil” on another exterior façade, the Gateway Village garage in Charlotte. A wall of 88,000 stainless steel louvers that flutter in the wind, screens cars in the 2,800 space deck. The project was co-developed by the Bank of America and Cousins Properties, Inc. The wind playing on the Wind Veil creates a mesmerizing visual effect. Carl Walker, Inc. provided structural, functional and operations consulting services for this project.

Are these concepts of interior wayfinding graphics and exterior art something that your community could benefit from? Carl Walker, Inc. and Becky Hannum of Art Everywhere, LLC, have allied to provide a unique package of expertise and experience to help you in the creative transformation of your parking environments. For more information please contact Dennis or Becky. ■



**Dennis Burns** is the vice president of the Studies and Operations Consulting group for Carl Walker, Inc. He has over 25 years of parking operations, management and consulting experience. Burns is the author of over 100 parking studies. His specific areas of expertise include: parking master planning, municipal parking strategic planning, feasibility studies, supply/demand analysis, shared parking analysis, parking revenue control and operational audits, and organizational analysis. E-mail: [dburns@carlwalker.com](mailto:dburns@carlwalker.com).



**Becky Hannum** is the principal of Art Everywhere, LLC and has over 30 years experience developing strategies and facilitating partnerships that use the arts as a catalyst for positive economic, physical and social change. E-mail: [beckyhannum@yahoo.com](mailto:beckyhannum@yahoo.com).

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201 North Tryon Street Parking Facility Level Theming – Charlotte, NC