



AIRPORT PARKING

Vancouver International Airport's parking structure undergoes a wayfinding makeover

By Todd Pierce

Color-coding and clear text improved wayfinding at the airport for both drivers and pedestrians.

We don't go to an airport to park. We go to fly! So parking need not be the adventure. The anxiety of arriving to the airport on time to catch our flight is often heightened as we approach the airport and begin thinking about parking. Do I attempt to park in the long-term lot and hope the shuttle will get me to the terminal in time? Do I chance finding a parking spot in the garage?

Parking is plentiful within the three-level parking garage at the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) in British Columbia, but merely deciphering which area to park within it created several wayfinding challenges. One challenge was "communications clutter." In Canada, it is required that all government facilities display messages in both English and French. And with large populations living in the Vancouver metro area who speak languages other than English and/or French, the challenge of clearly communicating messages is greatly enhanced. Another significant wayfinding challenge common to all airport parking facilities is parkers trying to remember where they parked their cars upon returning from their trips.

I'm catching a flight to Calgary. Where do I park within the garage?

There are two terminals at YVR—the Domestic Terminal (Canada flights) and the International Terminal (U.S. & international flights)—and the first priority when entering the parking garage is finding a parking spot nearest the entrance to your desired terminal. Sounds simple enough, but navigating the interior of a parking garage while staying oriented can prove challenging. The new signage is designed to visually simplify this basic wayfinding requirement. Vehicular directional signage is presented on a black background with white typography and pictograms, while specific directional information pertaining to Canada flights is featured on a red field and that pertaining to U.S. & international flights is on a bright blue field. This establishes a simple system of following the red or blue breadcrumbs. And at every point of decision, be it by car or navigation on foot, a red or blue sign points the way to the respective terminal. Creating hierarchies of information adds clarity and reduces confusion. Once the parker begins to follow the red signage to Canada flights, for example, he no longer must attempt to read each and every sign installed within the garage.



TAKES OFF

Clarity of messaging can make wayfinding easy!

A clear and orderly presentation of information on a sign will aid the understanding of it, even when signs must display multiple languages. A judicious use of pictograms or symbols can cross language barriers and make signage understood by all, quickly and effectively.



A clean and crisp parking garage, with bright colors, white ceilings, and proper light levels will reduce anxiety and aid in boosting the overall parking experience.

Color can enhance the overall garage environment

Designers have used color-coding to assist in identifying parking deck levels for years. But a bold use of color can enhance the overall environment as well. A clean and crisp parking garage, with bright colors, white ceilings and proper light levels will reduce anxiety and aid in boosting the overall parking experience.

Planning for color (paint) at YVR strategically utilizes overhead beams and key columns, ensuring that all patrons, once parked and now pedestrians, pass by and under brightly painted surfaces on Level P1 (green: to represent “Land”), Level P2 (blue: to represent “Sea”), and Level P3/Roof (sky blue: to represent “Sky”). Each color coincides with YVR’s motto, “Land, Sea & Sky.”

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A picture is worth a thousand words

British Columbia is known for its beautiful forests, shores, and mountains, so a local photographer was engaged to provide equally beautiful photos to represent each. These images are mounted to interchangeable panels that enable YVR’s parking division to rotate images that display winter or summer scenes, depending upon the time of year – all in careful orchestration with the Land, Sea & Sky theme on the parking levels. As the parking patron exits the garage, he passes key columns that are mounted with plastic holders. These are filled with bookmarks that have been printed with the color of the given parking level on one side, and a reduced image of the photo murals on display within the garage on the flip side, complete with a description of exactly where the photo was taken by our photographer.

First Class Parking at YVR

The simplicity and clarity of wayfinding signs, bold use of color and themed graphics enabled YVR’s parking operations to introduce a new Business Class parking program. Patrons can phone ahead of their trip and reserve premium parking stalls—clearly marked by new signs, of course.

The overall improvements made within the YVR parking garage are a striking example of a carefully planned graphics and signage program that resulted in first class parking. 



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