

# The service setting

## Introduction

The setting and surroundings in which many services are delivered is often a critical component of a consumer's service experience.<sup>1,2</sup> Since it is often the first tangible clue that the consumer is given about potential service delivery, it shapes expectations.

These clues shape consumers' rational, emotional and behavioural responses, and for this reason the service provider would be wise to consider all elements of both the physical and ambient setting in which the service is consumed.

The control by the designer of corporate elements that form interior spaces can impact on the success of that delivery in a variety of ways. It can influence the client's or customer's perception of the particular service sector and can enhance the function, appropriateness and ambience of the activity.

## 4.1 The service setting framework

The term 'service setting' is used to describe the tangible physical environment in which a service is experienced. This environment gives vital tangible and intangible clues that help potential clients, customers, employees, stakeholders and opinion-formers understand a service's character and ideology. Who and what an organization is and what it believes in ultimately determines whether or not people will believe in it, work for it and buy from it.

Another term used to describe the tangible physical environment is *servicescape*. This descriptor was first used by Bitner<sup>3,4</sup> as a means of differentiating those aspects of the physical environment, e.g. signage, equipment, furniture, that provide tangible clues about the service offering, from other physical evidence, e.g. uniforms and business cards, that do this too. This chapter is concerned with the former (see Chapter 9 for a discussion of the latter).

The environment can portray a strong and consistent character. It ensures employees know when they are 'on-message' and true to the character of the organization as

expressed through its corporate identity or brand as well as its services. This in turn helps make the organization coherent to its constituency – its customers, clients, partners, stakeholders and opinion-formers. In short, design of the service environment is an essential process through which the distinctive character of an organization is distilled, ‘packaged’ and consistently expressed. In this way the service setting is an essential component of success because it can communicate distinctive and desirable qualities that give the organization a clear positioning and differentiation in today’s competitive marketplace.

We are all unconsciously but acutely aware of our surroundings. Like sleepwalkers we make automatic decisions about the objects and environments around us that effect how and where we live, what we buy, where we go and how and on what we spend our money.

One way to understand the effect service design has on our lives is to slow down and unpick our everyday decisions. We’re all unconscious experts and know much more about the world than we give ourselves time to discover. Think about why you chose to go to the last pub or restaurant you visited and what you like, or dislike, about the environment. Think about your choice of holiday resort or cinema – what do you like or dislike about them and what triggered you to buy them in the first place. Consider why you prefer one brand over another and their respective meanings.

When we step through the vast door of a grand cathedral we automatically feel small and introverted because we are dwarfed by the interior space. We can hear our own footsteps, feel the drop in temperature and smell the stale air. Together these elements make us aware of our mortality and our solitary existence in a much bigger world. None of these phenomena are accidental, but are techniques honed by designers over thousands of years.

In terms of service strategy it is only relatively recently that serious consideration has been given to how the design of the service setting may affect consumer feelings and responses. There are no Ten Commandments that determine how a service setting should or should not be designed. From the customers’ viewpoint it is still very much a matter of taste coupled with perceptions of what is appropriate. Nevertheless, just as companies want to know how and why customers respond to packaging, price, product, advertising, service organizations need to develop an understanding of customer responses to layout, furnishings, colour, light etc. Research should focus on overall impressions and feelings (Table 4.1), followed by an investigation of specific environmental ones.

Drawing on developments in decision-making theory in which customers respond to more than simply the tangible product or service, Kotler<sup>5</sup> proposed that atmospherics be regarded as an important marketing tool. He suggests that, ‘In many areas of marketing in the future, marketing planners will use spatial aesthetics as consciously and skilfully as they now use price, advertising, personal selling, public relations and other tools of marketing.’ He maintains the atmosphere of a place affects purchase behaviour in three ways:

- 1 As an attention-creating medium – use of colours, noise etc. to make it stand out.
- 2 As a message-creating medium – communicating with the intended audience, level of concern for customers etc.
- 3 As an affect-creating medium – use of colours, sounds etc. to create or heighten an appetite for certain goods, services or experiences.

**Table 4.1** Atmosphere and feelings

<b>Environmental atmosphere generated</b>	<b>Reaction in terms of customer feelings</b>
Elegance	Status
Professionalism	Trust, security
Welcoming	Happiness, enjoyment
Sombre	Depressed, gloomy
Forbidding	Anxious
Warmth	Comfort
Lively	Inviting

Kotler concludes with an example of antique retailing. Many antique dealers also make use of ‘organizational chaos’ as an atmospheric principle for selling their wares. The buyer enters the store and sees a few nice pieces and a considerable amount of junk. The nice pieces are randomly scattered in different parts of the store. The dealer gives the impression, through his prices and his talk, that he doesn’t really know values. The buyer therefore browses quite systematically, hoping to spot an undiscovered Old Master hidden among the dusty canvasses of third rate artists. He ends up buying something that he regards as having a value. Little does he know that the whole atmosphere has been arranged to create a sense of hidden treasures.

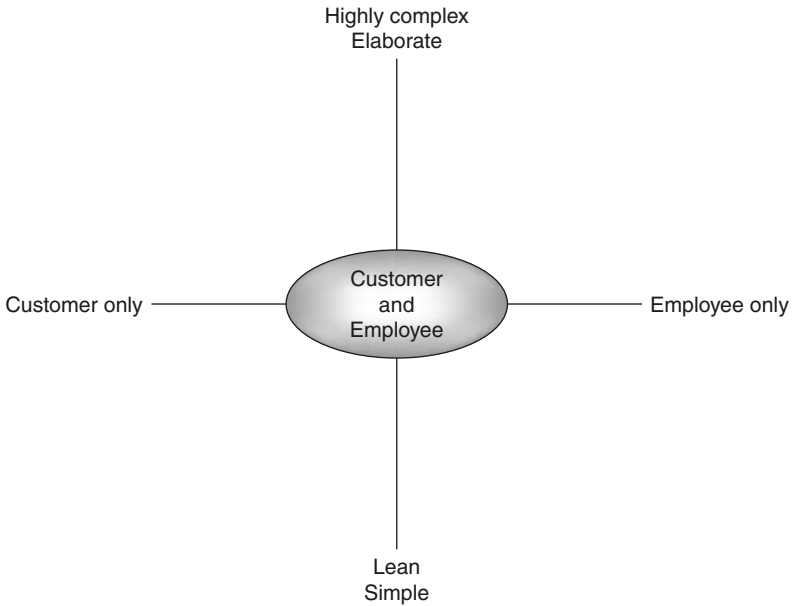
## 4.2 Types of service setting

It is often useful in determining the role/function of a particular service setting to consider the nature of the anticipated consumer relationship with the organization. In this context, services can be classified in terms of two dimensions (see Figure 4.1): the extent to which customers/employees are present during service delivery and the degree of complexity associated with service consumption.

In terms of the first dimension, there are some services where the customer is self-serving, e.g. ATMs, voice messaging services, online shopping services. In these services, the organization should be more concerned with planning the service experience to maximize satisfaction, than with any considerations for the physical environment, since the setting is not seen by the consumer.

Then there are some services where both customer and service employee are present – restaurants, hotels, air travel. Here the designer has to consider the needs of both. There is little point concentrating solely on one, even customers, since this may reduce staff morale and consequently motivation. How many of us have experienced a pleasant service setting ruined by disenfranchised staff? The current outbreaks of the MRSA superbug in hospitals have been largely attributed to poor standards of cleaning by hospital staff. Who knows, they might clean more effectively if some consideration had been given to their needs in the design of the service setting.

At the other end of the spectrum are services where only employees are present, e.g. telephone mail ordering. Consequently the focus of those designing the setting should be on such matters as staff motivation and productivity.



**Figure 4.1** Complexity and degree of customer involvement

In terms of the second dimension – the extent of complexity associated with the service consumption – Bitner<sup>6</sup> suggests that services can be classified as either *lean* or *elaborate*. Lean environments are those that are simple, with few elements. In such environments design decisions tend to be relatively straightforward. Elaborate environments, on the other hand, tend to be complicated, containing many elements and forms. Hospitals, hotels and schools are some examples of elaborate environments. These are the most complex service settings to design.

### 4.3 The role of the service setting

We have previously mentioned the role that the service setting plays in helping position and differentiate a service provider. Given the intangible nature of many services, the setting gives important clues about the organization. Consider the imposing portals of a bank's corporate headquarters compared to the 'shop window' of the local plumber. Each is different, but then the user groups and services provided are so very different also. One would expect the setting to reflect this. Note that the setting can often lead consumers to infer a higher quality (and therefore higher expectations of price) on an item found in an exclusive setting, than where the identical item appears in a lower quality setting.<sup>7</sup>

Even within an industry, service providers often use their settings to differentiate from competitors. Think of the difference between the setting of the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden from that of a fringe venue at the Edinburgh Festival. Research has shown that there are various cues that customers use to differentiate services within the same industry.<sup>8</sup>

A key role of the setting may be to facilitate the roles and performances of those taking part – customers and employees. In doing so, a key objective is often to improve productivity or reduce costs. So banks and airlines in their increasing use of self-serve have to design their service environments in a different way to that of ten years ago. Many hotel chains too are asking customers to become more involved in the production of the service. So breakfast is from a buffet, tea-making and clothes-ironing is in the room. These factors impact on the design of the setting.

Finally in some organizations the primary objective in the design of the service setting may be to encourage socialization between staff and/or between staff and customers. So in many advertising agencies, board members have large, well-furnished imposing offices, whilst the new graduate trainee is lucky to get a corner of a desk. The same agencies will often have bars, games rooms or soft play areas where staff can unwind and socialize with one another. In health clubs and other leisure industries staff are often expected to socialize with customers and some area of the service setting is designed to facilitate this.

## 4.4 The service setting and consumer behaviour

Like any other stimulus, service environments work on consumers at cognitive, affective and connotative levels – in other words, they work rationally, emotionally and behaviourally/physiologically. We will not enter the debate about the order in which cognitive or affective states are experienced. Nor will we discuss whether these states are antecedents to the behavioural outcome, or consequences of them. There is substantial debate about both these matters in the consumer behaviour literature.

### 4.4.1 Cognitive response

In terms of cognition, the perceived service setting can play an important part in belief formation. The setting can provide vital cues and clues that convey meaning through what is referred to as object language.<sup>9</sup> The fixtures and furniture in a hotel will often influence a consumer's beliefs about the level of service to expect (and the price to pay). It's not difficult to think of others.

In some cases industries can be categorized into different types of setting. The belief is that the clues and cues offered shape participating consumers' rational response. They help inform them of what is expected: so, on the low-cost airline there are none of the segregated seating or executive lounges of the traditional carrier. These differences affect consumers' cognitive responses.

In truth the majority of service experiences are fairly routine with little high-order level cognitive processing. We tend to be on 'auto pilot' and follow simple service scripts. However, should higher level processing be triggered, it is the interpretation of this surprise that determines a consumer's affective response.<sup>10</sup>

### 4.4.2 Affective response

In general, greater emphasis nowadays is placed on the affective or emotional response to the physical evidence of the service environment: how a consumer feels

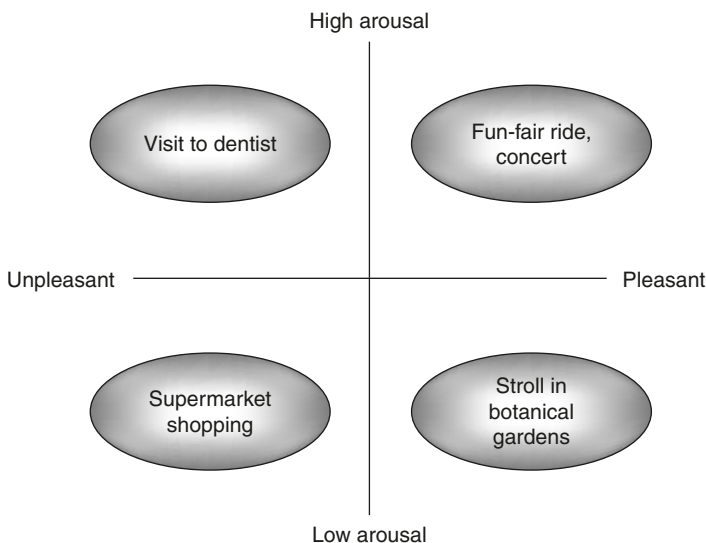
becomes an important consideration in the design of the setting. The designer will employ many elements (colour lighting etc.) to elicit the desired emotional response. On a ghost train ride, the desired affective response might be one of fear, excitement and terror, whereas in the funeral parlour, the service provider will be looking for an environment to elicit/empathize with other emotions.

Research conducted by environmental psychologists in this area has shown that any environment will elicit emotions that can be captured on two basic dimensions: the extent of arousal and the extent of pleasure/displeasure.<sup>11,12</sup> The simplicity of this model allows service providers to assess how customers feel while they are in the service setting. It can also assist those tasked with designing the service environment. If a service is in the pleasure/non-arousal quadrant (see Figure 4.2), the designer might want to build in elements that heighten arousal. Conversely, those services operating in the unpleasant/non-arousal quadrant would not want to build in arousal – this would take them into the distressing category. Instead, they should attempt to incorporate elements to shift the horizontal positioning.

#### 4.4.3 Physiological/behavioural response

In environmental psychology there are two possible behavioural outcomes to the affective response – *approach* or *avoid* – pleasant emotional responses leading to the former and unpleasant ones the latter. Those charged with designing settings for service providers will most probably be tasked with eliciting behavioural responses beyond that of *approach*.

The setting may be designed to encourage the consumer to linger or browse on the basis that this is likely to increase the value of their shopping basket. The bookseller Waterstones does this to good effect. It has seating areas, and coffee shops. Or it may be designed to take customers speedily through the service experience on the basis that revenue can be maximized by encouraging speedy customer throughput. Many



**Figure 4.2** Emotional/affective responses

fast-food restaurants do this. The chairs are a little uncomfortable, the tables close together and the lighting is bright.

Remember that in many service operations, the environment should be designed to elicit desired behavioural responses not only from the customer, but also from staff. Hospital staff are expected to work in an efficient, hygienic and calm way. Their environment gives all sorts of clues about this. Soft furnishings are kept to a minimum, and the space is designed to be uncluttered and germ-free. Designer retail outlets have no seats for their sales advisers. Instead they have to stand, making them ever-ready to assist the customer.

## 4.5 Environmental dimensions of the service setting

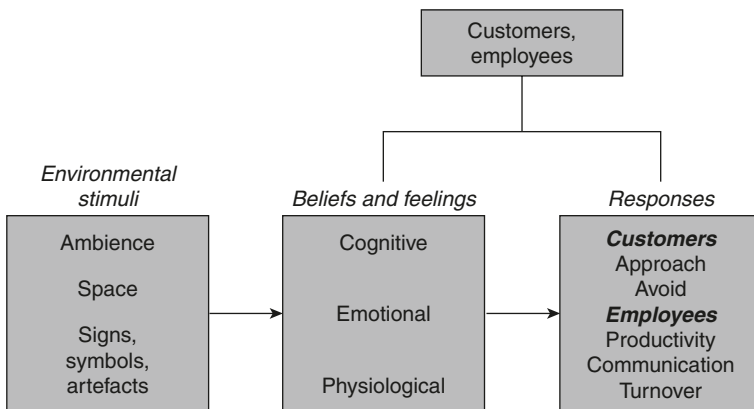
In Bitner's<sup>13</sup> model of the servicescape, the key dimensions of the service setting that condition the consumer response are highlighted. These are the ambient conditions, space and functionality, and the use of signs, symbols and artefacts (see Figure 4.3).

### 4.5.1 Ambient conditions

These are elements of the service setting that affect our senses. Elements such as lighting, music, noise, colour, temperature and scent. The service provider should consider these factors in the design of the environment. They can play a significant role in achieving desired behavioural responses. For example, a number of studies have demonstrated the effect of 'musak' in supermarkets on consumers' buying patterns.<sup>14,15</sup> It appears that 'musak' lulls the shopper into a semi trance-like state where they are more easily persuaded to part with their money and spend time waiting in queues.

### Lighting

This is often a key element in the design of the service setting. The design and specification of lighting schemes is a specialized activity.



**Figure 4.3** A service-setting framework for understanding behaviour and relationships

Source: Adapted from Bitner (1992)<sup>3</sup>

When considering lighting design for a service setting the following factors must be taken into account: daylighting, colour, the nature of the activity to be performed in the space(s), the service provider's perception of the task, levels of vision, and finally ambience, the desired mood:

- Daylighting and the way in which it is controlled influence heat, glare, penetration, visibility and the perception of colour – most schemes take account of the orientation of the building to the sun, its changes daily and seasonally, as well as poor daylighting conditions and darkness.
- The direction and strength of daylight affect the perception of colour.
- The particular activities to be undertaken in the space under consideration must be clearly defined: accuracy, speed, safety, recognition etc.
- What does the organization really want from the space? Is it to sell visual satisfaction or is it to sell hamburgers? Is it to indicate the conservative solidity of the world of financial services or is it to reassure people about to board an aeroplane?
- The level of vision required can depend upon the nature of the task. It can also depend upon the age of the client or customer. If the task requires detailed work from the customer or service provider then strong light is required. If the background setting is well lit then even greater intensity of light will be required for the detailed work as the eyes become accustomed to the relative lessening of the contrast.
- In many situations the achievement of the desired mood or ambience of the space is paramount. A church or library would generally exude a peaceful calm whereas a fast-food diner or modern music store would wish to create a youthful, exciting, gregarious atmosphere.

On a scientific level, the perception of colour and lighting is governed by a vast array of data such as the depth of penetration of daylight, glare, or the reflectance value of the surface that light is falling on and the psychology of colour contrasts. Other constraints on the design of lighting systems have to do with variables such as energy conservation, heat gain and ease of maintenance programmes.

For the designer there is the additional burden of wanting to create magic. The creative use of light can bring an interior to life – the interaction of light and shadow can sculpt, expand, scale, highlight, silhouette, sparkle and most importantly can move merchandise.

## **Colour**

Colour has a language of its own. Much like music, it can evoke moods and emotions – excitement, happiness, serenity, sadness. We daily refer to 'feeling blue', 'seeing red', 'being green with envy', 'in the pink' etc. The symbolic nature of colour has for centuries fulfilled a role in religion, magic, heraldry, communication, and ritual, as well as being a major player in creative processes.

The 'fashion' element of colour use is a subject in its own right but suffice to say that as with most fashions, its use can be traced in cycles. Ancient classical architecture of the Greek and Italian empires used brilliant, bold colours.



Colour is composed of three elements:

- Hue – the name of the colour, e.g. red, blue, yellow.
- Value – the lightness or darkness of a colour.
- Chroma – the intensity of strength or purity of colour.

There are numerous theories about the way in which colour works. It is not sufficient, however, to consider colour without an understanding of the effects of light, the discrimination of relative colours – that is, the different appearance of one colour or hue which is in the proximity of another hue – and also the spatial and the emotional effects of colour.

It is always dangerous to pragmatize when discussing a variable such as colour, and any statements that might appear as ‘rules’ should only be read as examples in the context of suggestions for the particular service settings discussed.

Colour can only be measured *in relation to other colours*, and while an adult with normal vision can distinguish probably two thousand colours, this experience is, at best, highly subjective. Colour can never be isolated and the resultant experience modifies the perception. Look at a strong red sample for about a minute and then focus on a white surface – the resultant green vision is the after-image of a colour’s opposite or complement. A colour always has to be considered in relation to its neighbour in any successful lighting design. In simplistic terms one can say that colour schemes that are largely monochromatic (different values of the same hue) are the safest solution. Next best in terms of little risk are schemes that rely on using colours that are adjacent in the spectrum and therefore have one hue in common. The riskiest and therefore sometimes the most rewarding or interesting schemes are those based on complementary colours or those of high contrast. This almost elementary appeal perhaps stems from experiences and memories we had as children. Nature, of course, employs exotic schemes in the plant world and colours of courtship or warning in animals, fish, birds and insects.

A further consideration in managing colour in the service setting is to plan a scheme such that adjacent rooms share some relationship or harmony. Generally speaking, large spaces are better balanced by using a scheme of soft, low-intensity colour with strong, vibrant hues reserved for accent or highlight value. Again as a general rule, background colours are selected and developed first for the large planar areas (floor/ceiling/walls) with ‘accessories’ (equipment, furniture, curtains, pictures) figuring as stress or accent points.

Also important is an understanding that colours have *optical and emotional values*. Warmth and coolness are easily distinguished by colour choice so that red, orange, yellow and their family are warm while green, blue, violet and their family are cool. A finer division can occur at junctions in the spectrum so that red-violet and yellow-green can occupy both camps or form a bridge between warm-cool.

Red indicates danger, excitement, stop etc. – the pulse rate and blood pressure of a viewer increase when shown the colour. Conversely, green indicates peacefulness, safety, go etc., likewise for blue. Perceived sizes of areas of colour vary with the selection of hue – warm colours appear to advance towards the viewer, cool colours to retract or recede. Colour choice can therefore be used to modify the perceived size and shape of areas.

It will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that these colour theories can be, and are, used as a functional tool in the design of interiors. Colour is utilized to improve efficiency in the workplace; colour can help people to relax, it can help lower accident rates, aid convalescence, help market merchandise or create an appetite where food is served. Specifics will be discussed below under the five colours selected.

In their book based on the television series *The Colour Eye*, Cumming and Porter<sup>16</sup> give some valuable insights into colour psychology. For example:

- **Red** – the colour of fire and passion, suggesting activity, energy, joy. It is used by interior designers to increase comfort levels in unheated spaces and is also regarded (along with pink) as good for restaurants, especially the fast-food variety. One study showed that red stimulated diners to eat more quickly and move on for the next person.
- **Orange** – although researchers have claimed that an orange environment improves social behaviour, cheers the spirit and lessens hostility and irritability, it is seldom used by professional designers.
- **Yellow** – conflicting evidence here which, on the one hand, suggests its ideal stimulative effect where concentration is required. However, if used too strongly those in its environment are likely to get ‘stressed up’.
- **Green** – symbolizes the natural world and is widely believed to be a calming hue. Ideal for areas where relaxation is required and along with blue is found to enhance our appetite; thus good for dining areas.
- **Blue** – symbolizes authority and implies truth, prudence and wisdom; ideal for banks and building societies. It is considered as having a calming effect which makes it ideally suited for hospital cardiac units.
- **Purple** – regarded as disturbing and psychologically ‘difficult’. In a Swedish study it was the most disliked colour in terms of environmental settings.

## 4.5.2 Spacial considerations/planning

Most design training is based on historical precedent and takes its ideas from either nature and/or mathematics. Precedent has meant that the most common source of creativity has come from a vast visual dictionary that has evolved from concepts that have been tested and re-tested until principles are established. Symmetry, proportion, rhythm, texture, colour and other fundamentals are combined and developed to present the viewer or user with a rational and emotional response.

### Space planning

In an ideal world, the interior designer works alongside the architect from the initial planning concept stage – by doing so, coordination of the arrangement of all of the interior elements with the architectural features is assured. A large proportion of the sites interior designers encounter, however, do not offer this luxury – most jobs are concerned with refurbishment of spaces and buildings originally designed for other purposes. Certain ‘rules’ do make up the fundamental approach to the planning process.

Generally speaking, the planning exercise with most interiors falls into five categories:

- 1 The identification of the issue (the brief)
- 2 The synthesis of the solution
- 3 The design development
- 4 The solution
- 5 The testing of the efficiency of the solution.

The identification of the space planning issue will fall into several subsections. For example:

- What are the functional requirements?
- How will the users circulate?
- What does the client wish to feel like?
- What does he or she wish to see?
- What does he or she want others to see?
- What is going on in adjoining spaces?
- What are the safety and legislative requirements?
- Are exterior spaces involved?
- What kind of lighting, heating and other services are required?
- What is the desired 'mood' or character of the space(s)?
- What is the likely budget?
- How long must the scheme last before refurbishment?
- Are future developments, growth or flexibility prerequisites?

The synthesis or sketch designs of the planning process can take several forms. The most common is to formulate a graphic or schematic model which enables the designer to rank the requirements. Usually this process begins without regard to the physical constraints of the particular site and designers can indicate space relationships and traffic throughput on a purely functional level and can test their ideas against the model formed in the brief.

The development phase occurs when the designer transcribes findings from this schematic visual into the constraints of the actual space: the fitting of furniture and equipment into the space, establishing correct circulation routes, working out all the complex requirements to enable the drafting of a floor plan and associated working drawings and details.

The solution begins to take shape when all of the other phases are in place. It lasts from the time of client approval to the opening ceremony of the successfully completed building.

The final phase is the testing and modifying of the solution when the user or client can be interrogated and suggestions for improvement taken on board. This is as important a phase as any of the other four described. A list of priorities can be formulated without being dogmatic in terms of 'generalized rules'.

Circulation is of primary importance – not only traffic levels and direction of the user but also allowing sufficient space around objects, equipment and furniture to enable them to be used efficiently and safely. Unobstructed approaches to doorways, corridors and escape routes are obvious considerations. The designer above

all hopes to create interest and a particular ambience to the space which is appropriate to its function. A sense of scale, balance of proportion and interaction between adjoining space is important. Simplicity in planning is invariably successful and can lay the foundation for all of the other elements which make up the service setting.

### **Furniture/equipment/furnishings**

Furniture can host people, or it can form a barrier between people. It can host equipment such as computers, cables and cash registers. It can protect precious or delicate objects. It can project or display. Furniture can be welcoming or austere and can have a great deal to say about the status of the owner or user.

Places, tools, furniture and decoration are interdependent elements of our lives. They contribute to our quality of life by dint of functionality and aesthetic enrichment. They can be designed, controlled, and become tools to further the designer's intentions.

Furniture and equipment can take on architectural proportions when one considers the cost of subdividing rented space. Often modern refurbishments have a 'designed-in' longevity – two years, five years, ten years. The cost of partitioning and its accompanying rigidity soon provides good reasons for considering the functions of walls and doors being replaced with free-standing furniture elements. Most of the established thinking to do with the subdivision of space is fast becoming outdated with the proliferation of office and business automation. Wide, open spaces are no longer required. The need to keep people in proximity is redundant as office information now flows down cables. In a modern building with a life expectancy of, say, thirty to forty years, the initial capital cost is only 10% of the complete cost. Ninety per cent will be devoted to staff costs associated with maintaining a working environment and the machines and technology necessary for the purpose.

In general terms there is incredible freedom of choice available to the occupier of a commercial interior – artificial environmental qualities (light, ventilation, heating etc.) are controllable. Heights and inclinations of chairs and worktops are variable, furniture and equipment can be 'high tech' or soft and domestic in nature.

Technological development has brought overwhelming change to the service setting; the office-based service industry means that the office can now be a club, it can be a factory, a series of cosy meeting places, a streetscape or a marketplace. This choice will, hopefully, reflect some of the functions of the particular service. Another social change – the shrinking of class differentials – has impacted on the construction of the service setting in that in many environments designers no longer have to consider the status of its users.

Perceptions of equipment are also changing. The typewriter keyboard was invented in the 1860s – this meant the standardization of the layout of the letters (obvious but nonetheless staggering). The mechanical keyboard is now electronic and pressure requirements are infinitesimal in comparison to the earlier typewriters but operator posture and ergonomics have changed to accommodate the new requirements. Operators rarely view paper, displays are on VDUs. Five or ten years ago an operator in the service sector would probably search for documents in a filing system, make notes, write letters and memos, use the telephone, exchange words with colleagues and be constantly on the move. Now as a link in the technology-based environment,

eye contact might only be between customer/client or VDU and the service operator. The office today is still a 'shelter' to its occupants but is also a 'display window' to the clients and customers of that particular service sector. The demonstration of the efficiency of the now visible 'working parts' of the organization is a tangible sales promotion tool. The idea of 'front office' as the only area visible to the client is long gone. The customer has also experienced the impact of technological change. Most people have drawn money from an ATM (automatic teller machine), spoken to an answerphone or received a computer printout on some occasion.

### 4.5.3 Signs, symbols and artefacts

Service providers use signs, symbols and artefacts to guide customers through the service delivery process. They signal to the customer how to behave, and where to go. New customers, and probably seasoned users of a service, would become disorientated causing anxiety and distress if there were none of these artefacts.

#### Signage

Graphically transmitted messages or signage are fundamental to communication in all areas of the service sector. The visual appearance, the placing, the physical construction, the colour, lighting and choice of typeface are all important and interdependent.

'Letters are signs for sounds'. This is a well-known quote and serves as an apt definition of what signs are about. A good sign is one that imparts information as simply and directly as possible. As with colour and spatial considerations, letter forms can evoke emotional responses.

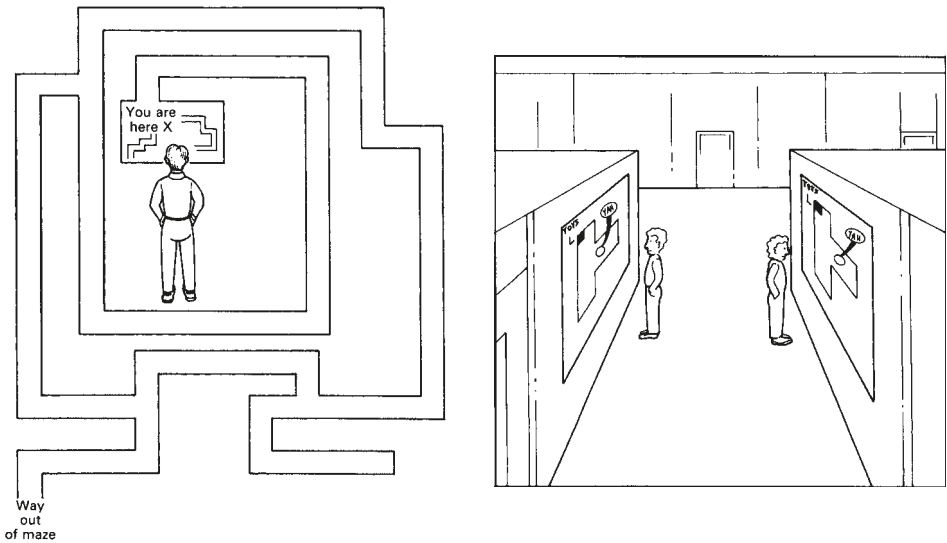
Signs, unlike print, are read quickly and therefore the choice of weight of the letter form is paramount. It should seek to provide maximum clarity and contrast from the sign's surroundings.

Signs can be of some importance in many service settings. The 'you are here' map (YAH) is designed to answer the questions 'Where am I?' and 'How do I get from here to there?'. The trouble with many of these maps, apart from not being particularly well designed, is that they are not always aligned with the territory. The difficulty seems to be that YAH maps are usually placed vertically on a wall. 'If', as stated by Levine, Marchon and Hanley<sup>17</sup> 'the direction which is in front of you is up, on the vertical map, the map and the terrain are aligned and the map will be relatively easy to use. If, on the other hand, the direction in front of you is down on the map, they are contraligned, the map will be relatively difficult to use'. Counter-alignment and alignment can be demonstrated quite simply (see Figure 4.4).

## 4.6 Three service settings

### 4.6.1 Financial services

The public interface with financial services, especially in banking and other high street institutions, has undergone radical change in the last generation. We have witnessed



**Figure 4.4** Alignment and counter-alignment of YAH maps  
 Source: Levine *et al.*

the metamorphosis from elegant, dark, expensive and foreboding interiors to the ‘fun money shop’ era of the past decade to the current trend of serious design, professional service and interaction between people.

During the 1980s, the yuppie mentality was all. High street banks and building societies resembled retail establishments and nightclubs in contrast to the Victorian approach of previous decades. Neon light, distressed surface finishes and dreamy uplighting housed high-tech machines that obviated the need for personal contact. Banks and the like became ‘take-away’ or ‘fast money’ outlets resembling the franchised fast-food chains that proliferate in every shopping mall or provincial high street. There is no doubt that the money business itself has undergone radical change. Building societies initiated the change by offering attractive interiors. The banks followed to continue to compete successfully.

In general terms, layouts tend not to vary and follow a common design. Entrances have become lobbies that house self-service cash dispensers (and other routine transactions – deposits, statement provision etc.). These are often fitted in fairly sturdy surroundings that recognize the out-of-banking-hours activities and the need for anti-theft, anti-vandal and in some cases anti-weather protection. The reception area is found behind this area and this first point of customer–staff interface is afforded adventurous front-line reception desking that is generally modern and colourful. The transition for the customer is marked by a change in floor covering from marble or tile or hard surface to soft surface such as carpeting of a warm hue. Wall surfaces likewise will blend from a stone cladding or laminate surface to a textile base or wallpaper and lighting will change from security conscious task lighting to uplit pools that are warmer and more ‘domestic’ in context. Beyond the reception point is the area designed for financial consultations where bandit-proof glass screening and counter tops are being replaced with informal, low-level, comfortable and

discrete consulting areas. The customer will feel that he or she is being afforded status and personal attention. Much of the brutality of design approach has disappeared to be superseded by a thoughtful more gentle approach where the customer is allowed to feel less threatened.

Behind the area designated for personal consultations, the working area of the institution often remains as open-plan and clearly visible personnel movements reflect the exposed working kitchen seen in McDonald's and Burger King establishments.

The financial service sector is also responding to the rapidity of change by generally reviewing interior design policy every five years or thereabouts and recognizes that the 'service setting' is an increasingly important asset in its marketing armoury.

## 4.6.2 Fast-food restaurants

Born in the USA out of the hot-dog stand or lunch-wagon genre, the fast-food chains and franchises have spread throughout the world. Previously the menu revolved around 'burgers and fries'. The quick-service/short-order restaurant industry has changed out of all recognition since the early part of the 1980s. The 'yuppy youth' culture demanded healthy food, salads, baked potatoes, pulses and pastas, fresh fruit and vegetables. The menu says it all. The interior design reflects the menu and what it says is 'quick turnover'.

A successful design is the one that attracts customers into the restaurant, organizes their traffic flow, creates just enough (and no more) comfort, arranges seating configurations that are economic and then hustles the customer out.

Fast-food outlets have produced a lot of innovative designs. Successful schemes (financially rewarding *and* aesthetically pleasing) invariably combine slick and lively ambience with often whimsical, youthful, colourful surroundings enhanced with a good portion of pop music or musak.

Wall and floor surfaces are invariably hard – usually tile or laminate for durability, ease of maintenance and cleaning. Soft base colours always serve to contrast with a dramatic splash of colour, red or green. All interior materials are simple and appear inexpensive. Seats are just too short and just too close to the next table to encourage customers to linger. The emphasis is often on serve yourself and dispose of the debris yourself in self-consciously signposted receptacles. The kitchen is the focal point, always busy, clean in appearance and in some instances forming a stage or 'altar' in the case of pizza ovens.

Lighting is brutally harsh and no attempt is made to pool light over individual tables as this would create an intimate ambience and invite diners to dally. Graphics are over-sized, unmistakable and again centre around blown-up versions of the menu. In this industry, success or failure may depend on the ability of the service setting to stimulate a speedy throughput of customers.

## 4.6.3 Hotels

Hotel design and creative manipulation is a complicated and lucid combination of sensitivity and imagination that is woven seamlessly within architectural and economic parameters. These in turn are set by social and cultural demands past and present.

There are several questions to consider when tackling a hotel project:

- Who is the clientele? What does the clientele want? What does the clientele need?
- What does the building want to be? Is the project a 'new build' or has it history to tell?
- Should this influence our design solutions?
- Who built the building originally and for what use?
- What does a hotel need to be? How does this relate to the building?
- How can you address this hotel design in ingenious and unexpected ways?
- How does the context influence your decisions?
- Do hotels and other social spaces provide a respite from public life?
- Do hotel spaces represent a cross-section of our society of recent years?

Although local notions of luxury in London are not necessarily the same as those in New York, now that international travel has homogenized our expectations of comfort and service, it is often left to design, in the broadest sense of the word, to add the distinction that local manners would once have imposed.

Design helps to identify, divide or individualize each hotel or chain of hotels. The way that the designer creates an experience whilst practically facilitating all the needs of a varied and demanding clientele is key to a successful hotel design. Be it traditional, mainstream, original, designer or a new build hotel of architectural significance it is essential to create space and environments that remove the guest from their everyday life and provide an experience, which can manipulate feeling through well refined methods. These include: the design philosophy of the threshold or transitional spaces, the creation of views internally and externally, spatial manipulation structurally and aesthetically, circulation and the detailed use of light, colour and materials.

The threshold or transitional spaces are extremely important in that they link environments rather like a film editor links scenes within a movie or television program. The editor's choices are to seamlessly blend the scenes together, create a contrast to punctuate individual characteristics of both scenes, or to create a common visual language so that each scene complements one another. Moving through the space within a hotel is relatively similar in that the user moves from one space (or scene) to another. The entrance or foyer is a transition between the exterior and interior. The entrance is the first and the last element that is experienced and therefore the image most likely to be remembered. It is therefore essential to get the design of these threshold areas just right in regards to the hotel and its position within the marketplace. Does the hotel come out to meet you on the street in the form of its flooring, leading you off the street and up into an experience of luxury and hospitality? Does the caring start from the street by providing a protective canopy to shelter you from the elements, which also doubles as a sign or beacon as to the hotel's presence? Is the entrance set back, allowing privacy and a quiet transition between street and hotel? Are the steps up to the entrance an extension of the street where hotel and street meet with a mutual respect with regard to façade materials and design or does the hotel entrance allow the street in and straight to the reception desk, delivering the guest and blending the streetscape with the interior, creating a relaxed transition?

Views play a key role in the design of a hotel space, whether by connecting the guest to the exterior, making the most of key contextual features such as Edinburgh's Castle, or by creating internal views to other parts of the hotel, such as the restaurant or bar. These views or windows of information are created to draw the guest through



a space or give depth and orientation to the spatial experience. The enticing view to the bar, for instance, creates visual and emotional stimulation whilst drawing potential custom from the foyer or even from the street.

Spatial manipulation with regards to surface, light and colour are the core elements to a successful hotel design. The surface planes are important, in that they often separate and highlight boundaries within the hotel, the horizontal plane (usually ceilings and floors) and vertical planes (normally, walls and partitions) dictate the areas. The foyer, for example, could benefit from having a higher ceiling creating an airy and spacious feeling that will promote relaxation and calm. The areas that lead off and link to the foyer, such as the reception and service areas, may drop to a lower more practical level of ceiling, thus signifying a change of use. Floors are also used to separate areas whether by leading you upwards via stairs to a timber-floored restaurant or leading you to a lower level where the lounge and shops can be accessed. Although these elements are not dividing the spaces as walls and partitions do, they have the same effect visually and psychologically.

Walls and partitions have a more obvious role in dividing space; however, it is important to understand the effects on circulation, light and aesthetics that a wall can have on a space. Although excellent in places where, perhaps, an area needs to be secured, a high level of privacy is needed, or an acoustic separation is required, a wall could have a negative effect by impeding light, interrupting the line of sight between important spaces or generally creating a claustrophobic environment.

The design intent with regard to surface materials varies from hotel to hotel. It is the materials amongst other things such as lighting and colour that give the space texture, character and personality and therefore should reflect the individual hotel's image.

In general, the materials used to denote service are hardwearing, robust and maintainable, such as, tiles, concrete, steel or plastics. In contrast, materials that denote relaxation or leisure are often natural materials such as timber, glass, stone and natural fabrics. The use of material runs far deeper than reflecting an ambience but can be used in subtle and sometimes more important ways. The handrail of a stair, a bar top or even the door handles used to gain entrance need to be designed so that where the hand touches the material should reflect the spatial integrity.

Lighting is a critical element of design. Too much light can destroy the character of the space. Too little light can be hazardous to the user and depress the hotel's atmosphere. Whether lighting is used to create points of interest, identify individual spaces, safely illuminate circulation or pick out architectural intervention, it is important to specify the lighting accurately. Lighting is often the largest single factor dictating feeling and spatial atmosphere. A great deal of effort has been taken to hide and recess the light fittings but without losing the impact of the different light effects required. Light draws the eye to the space throughout the building and provides windows of information and interest. A more utilitarian light effect has been used to punctuate the service areas, but the design intent is the same, i.e. recess the lighting (which applies to all the services, such as the ventilation and fire detection for example).

Materials also play an important part in dictating and manipulating the use and atmosphere of a space. The stair in Figure 4.5 for instance is made from the same material as the floor that leads from the street to the reception. The stair seems then to invite the guest up to the next level, where a timber-clad welcoming pier awaits the arrival.

Spatial boundaries are defined by a change in light, materials, vertical and or horizontal planes. The timber floor (horizontal plane) denotes a place of relaxation. The



**Figure 4.5** Radisson SAS Hotel, Glasgow, UK in 2002

natural materials gently reflect light and calm the senses, in contrast to the harder tiled surface that indicates service, circulation and movement.

The structural glass wall (vertical plane) divides the circulation area from the reception space, whilst linking both floors physically and visually it has a key role to play in the manipulation of the guest's feelings. With its colour and material qualities, the structure is seductively suggesting 'this way to a restful environment, a quiet and relaxing bedroom suite'. The glass wall's surface is the only surface to have a rich reflective surface, which exudes depth and integrity.

The ceilings (horizontal plane) are pale and unobtrusive, stepping back in order to give added prominence to the key design elements such as the skylight. The skylight highlights and signals the circulation routes. It also creates a light and airy atmosphere as it draws the guest up the stair.

## Summary

Where a service takes place is now receiving the attention it deserves. Designers are being called upon by organizations to create an environment that will support and reflect the service being offered.

Atmospheres must be engendered that will stimulate appropriate customer feelings and reactions. To achieve this the designers apply their knowledge and skills in respect of space idealization, lighting, colour and so on.

There are no Ten Commandments which state that different service activities should be designed in particular ways. It will be for the customer, in the final analysis, to decide whether the design has any meaning and impact on what is being received.

The three 'case studies' emphasize the point that there is no exclusive design for a certain service. However, there will be clues from the selection of colours, lighting and the layout of space etc. as to the nature of the activity in operation.

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