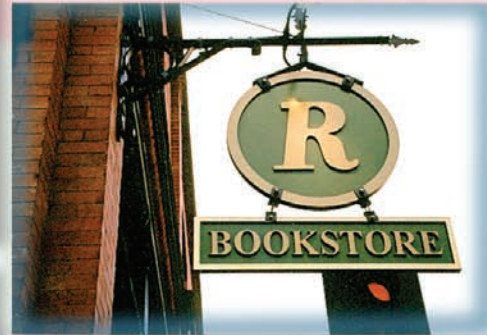


# Newport Beach

## Citywide Sign Design Guidelines



CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH





# City of Newport Beach -- Sign Design Guidelines

## A. Introduction

Signs are one of the most noticeable visual elements along Newport Beach's commercial streetscapes. Not only do signs communicate information about the goods or services being offered at a particular establishment, they also communicate something about the quality of the particular business and they contribute to the visual image of the City as a whole. Taken together with other visual elements in the City's environment, signs play a major role in how people perceive the City's image. Well-designed signs that communicate their message clearly, without attempting to compete for attention will help maintain a quality visual environment along Newport Beach's streets.

## B. Purpose

The purpose of this Sign Design Guidelines manual is three fold. First, is to further implement the intent and purpose of Chapter 20.67 (Signs) of the Newport Beach Zoning Code, otherwise referred to as the Sign Code. Second, it is intended that the design guidelines will assist business owners and sign designers to better understand the City's expectations for well-designed, quality signs. Third, the Guidelines are intended to assist those with the responsibility of reviewing sign permit applications to have established criteria with which to judge the appropriateness of a sign's design.



*A good quality sign enhances the aesthetic character of the development.*

## C. Applicability

1. The Sign Design Guidelines are applicable to all new signs and the modification or reconstruction of existing signs throughout the City. The Sign Design Guidelines will be utilized during the City's review of Sign Permit applications or through the review of other permit applications when signs are a part of a larger project. Signs will be reviewed for their "consistency" with the Guidelines and the standards contained in the Sign Code.
2. The Sign Design Guidelines are designed to help ensure quality signs that communicate their message in a clear fashion; however, the "Guidelines" are not strict sign "standards" as are found in the City's Sign Code. The approval authority may interpret the Design Guidelines with some flexibility as they are applied to specific signs/projects. This is in recognition that not all design criteria may be workable or appropriate for each sign or project. In some circumstances, a particular guideline may be relaxed to accommodate compliance with another guideline determined by the approval authority to be more important. These decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. The overall objective will be to ensure that the main principles of the Guidelines are followed in each case.
3. To ensure compliance with the Guidelines, Sign Permits will be issued in compliance with the Sign Code.



*Design guidelines help ensure good quality signs.*

## D. Relation to the Newport Beach Sign Ordinance

The Sign Design Guidelines are intended to supplement the City's Sign Ordinance. The Guidelines establish criteria for the creation of well-designed signs and further clarify and support the intent of the City's sign regulations by providing examples of the City's expectations for well-designed, consistent signage that is pleasing in appearance and promotes a high-quality business environment.

## E. Sign Design Guideline Objectives

The Sign Design Guidelines for Newport Beach are based on the following objectives:

- Provide creative, high quality signage that positively contributes in the improvement of the visual environment, expression of local character, and development of a distinctive City image
- Enhance the building's architectural design
- Consider the scale proportions and character of signage in the immediate vicinity
- Provide the guidance for review and approval for all sign concepts and programs
- Provide merchants with a way to effectively communicate without creating sign clutter

## F. General Design Guidelines

### 1. Sign Compatibility.

No sign should dominate the façade. Signs should be designed to be compatible with building design in terms of relative scale, overall size, materials, and colors.

Signage elements should incorporate materials, colors, and shapes that appropriately reflect and complement the building's architecture style and surrounding environment.

Large signs that dominate a building façade and the streetscape are strongly discouraged.

### 2. Sign Legibility.

An effective sign should do more than attract attention; it should communicate its message. Usually, this is a question of the readability of words and phrases. The most significant influence on legibility is lettering.

- a. **Use a brief message.** The fewer the words, the more effective the sign. A sign with a brief, succinct message is simpler and faster to read, looks cleaner and is more attractive. Evaluate each word carefully, and, if it does not contribute directly to the sign's message, it should probably be eliminated.
- b. **Ensure legibility.** An effective sign should do more than attract attention; it should communicate its message clearly. Usually, this is a question of the readability of words and phrases. The most significant influence on legibility is lettering style and spacing. Use the following guidelines to help ensure sign legibility.



*Keep signs as simple as possible.*



*A brief message is easier to read.*

- **Avoid hard-to-read, intricate typefaces.** Typefaces that are difficult to read reduce the sign's ability to communicate.
- **Avoid spacing letters and words too close together.** Crowding of letters, words or lines will make any sign more difficult to read. Conversely, over-spacing these elements causes the viewer to read each item individually, again obscuring the message.
- **Limit the area of sign text.** Lettering and logos should not occupy more than 75 percent of the sign face.



*Avoid typefaces that are hard to read at a quick glance.*

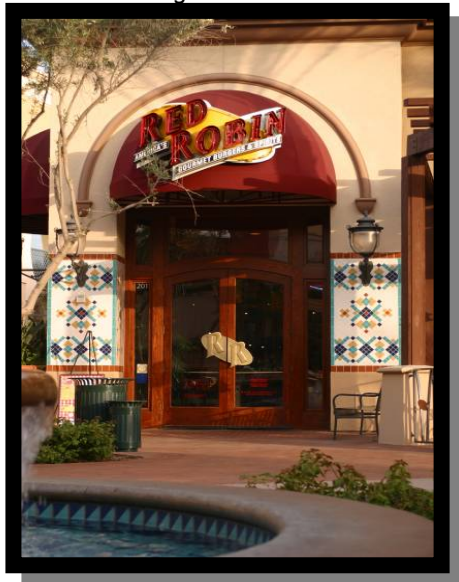
- **Limit the number of lettering styles in order to increase legibility.** A general rule to follow is to limit the number of different letter types to no more than two for small signs and three for larger signs.
- **Avoid faddish and bizarre typefaces.** Such typefaces may look good today, but soon go out of style. The image conveyed may quickly become

that of a dated and unfashionable business.

- c. **Use significant contrast.** If there is little contrast between the brightness or hue of the message of a sign and its background, it will be difficult to read.



*Sign with contrast.*



*Sign with no contrast.*

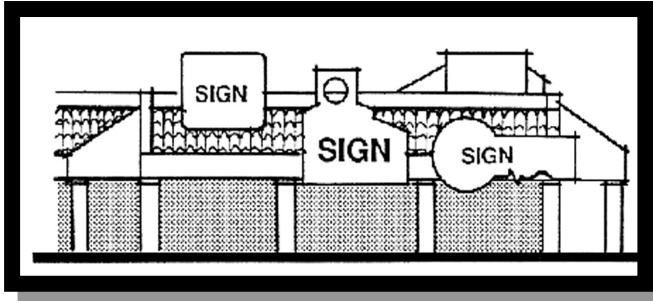
- d. **Avoid signs with strange shapes.** Signs that are unnecessarily narrow or oddly shaped can restrict the legibility of the message. If an unusual shape is not symbolic, it will probably be confusing.
- e. **Use symbols and logos.** Pictographic images will usually register more quickly in the viewer's mind than a written message.



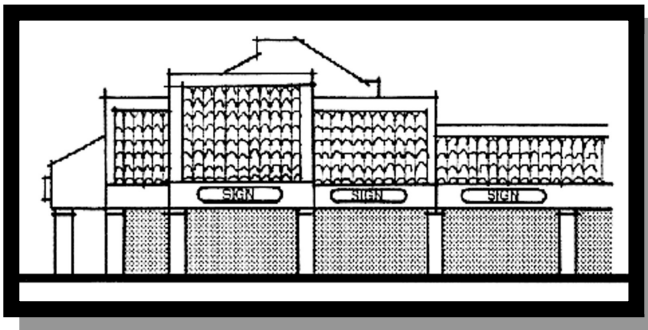
- f. **Avoid large areas of blank space.** Large areas (50 percent or more) of blank sign area should be avoided. If the total allowed sign area is not required to convey the message effectively, it is best to reduce the overall size of the sign.

### 3. Location and Size.

- a. Signs should be designed to relate to the architectural features of the building on which they are located and create visual continuity with other storefronts in the same building and adjacent buildings.



*Don't do this. Inconsistent sign patterns create confusion.*



*Do this. Employ a consistent sign pattern.*

- b. Signs should be placed to indicate the location of access to a business. Signs should be placed at or near the public entrance to a building or main parking area to indicate the most direct access to the business.



*Well-placed sign at main entrance*

- c. Signs should be placed and sized consistent with the proportions of the building's facade. For example, a particular sign may fit well on an upper, more plain wall, but would overpower and obstruct the finer detail of a lower storefront area. A sign that is appropriate near the building's entry (pedestrian orientation) may look tiny and out of place above the ground level.
- d. The overall size of a building mounted sign and the height of its lettering should relate to the distance the sign is from the street and its ability to be seen clearly. Signs close to the street are more visible and therefore should use a smaller letter size than signs that are set back from the street. The size of the letters, as well as the overall size of the sign should be proportional to building's façade. Sign users should keep in mind that the purpose of a sign is not to overwhelm the reader by sheer size but to convey its message efficiently while at the same time be designed to "fit" with the overall scale of the building and its relationship to the street.



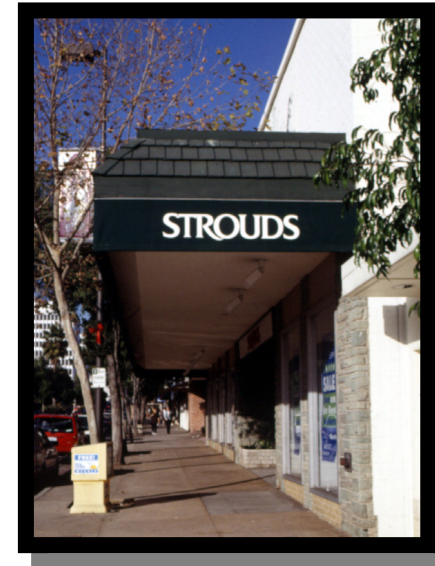
*Place signs above storefronts in a logical location.*

- e. Signs should not be located so that they cover or interrupt the architectural details or ornamentation of a building's facade.
- f. Signs should not project above the edge of the rooflines and should not obstruct, windows, and/or doorways.

#### 4. Color.

- a. Use of colors is one of the primary means of visual communication. Excessive and uncoordinated use of colors confuse and negate the message of a sign. Choose colors that are complementary yet provide good contrast with one another.
- b. Contrast is an important influence on the legibility of signs. The most aesthetic and effective graphics are produced when light colored letters and images are placed on a dark, contrasting colored background.

- c. Too many different colors on a sign can interfere with the basic function of communication because they compete with the content for the viewer's attention. Typically it is best to limit colors to no more than three on a single sign.



*Light colored letters on contrasting backgrounds make signs easier to read.*



*Signs with poor contrast are hard to read.*

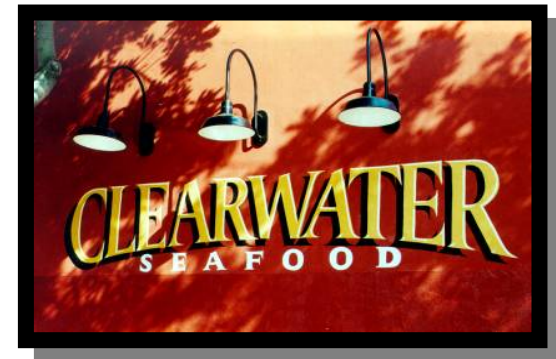


*Overly bright, garish colors should be avoided.*

- d. Colors or color combinations that interfere with legibility of the sign copy or that interfere with viewer identification of other signs should be avoided.
- e. Colors should relate to and complement the materials or paint scheme of the buildings, including accent and trim colors.
- f. Bright day-glo (fluorescent) colors should be avoided as they are distracting and do not blend well with other background colors.

## 5. Illumination.

- a. Signs that are illuminated by a direct source of light are encouraged over internally illuminated cabinet signs because the sign will appear to be better integrated with the building's architecture. Light fixtures supported in front of the sign cast direct light on the sign and generally a portion of the face of the building as well. This direct lighting emphasizes the continuity of the building's surface and signs appear as more of an integral part of the building's facade. Conversely, internally illuminated cabinet signs where only the sign face is illuminated tend to stand out and do not appear integrated with the building's facade.

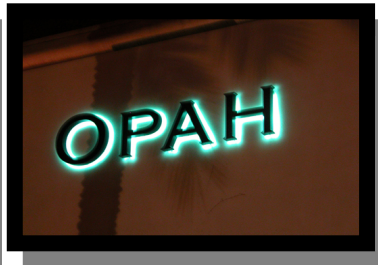


*At night, light is cast on the sign and a portion of the building, thus integrating the sign with the building's architecture.*



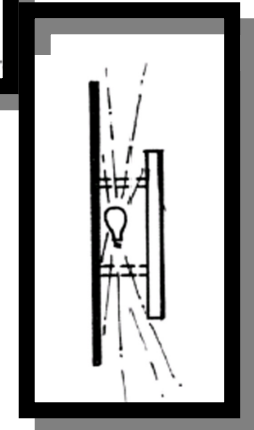
*Signs illuminated by an indirect source of light are encouraged.*

- b. Individually illuminated letters, either internally illuminated or backlit solid letters (reverse channel), are strongly encouraged over internally illuminated cabinet signs. Signs comprised of individual letters will be better integrated with their background as opposed to cabinet signs.



*Good examples of backlit signs that are easy to read at night.*

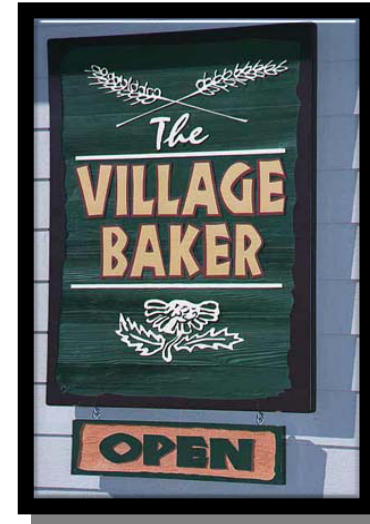
- c. In compliance with the City's Sign Code, the use of internally illuminated cabinet-type signs with translucent panels are not allowed unless the sign's panels are opaque so that when illuminated only the lettering, not the background, is illuminated. The background or field should have a nongloss, nonreflective finish.
- d. Whenever indirect lighting fixtures are used, care shall be taken to properly shield the light source to prevent glare from spilling over into residential areas and public rights-of-way in compliance with requirements of the City's Sign Code.



*Backlit letter signs are encouraged.*

## 6. Materials.

- a. Sign materials should be selected with consideration for the architectural design of the building's façade. Sign materials should complement materials used on the building and should also contribute to the legibility of the sign.
- b. The glossy materials (e.g., plastic, acrylic) used on many cabinet signs are often difficult to read because of glare and reflections and should therefore be avoided.
- c. Sign materials should be very durable. Paper and cloth signs are usually not suitable for exterior use because they can deteriorate quickly. If these nonpermanent materials are used, they must be continuously maintained in good condition at all times.
- d. If wooden signs are used, they should be properly sealed to keep moisture from soaking into the wood and causing the sign's lettering to deteriorate.



*Example of carved wood sign.*



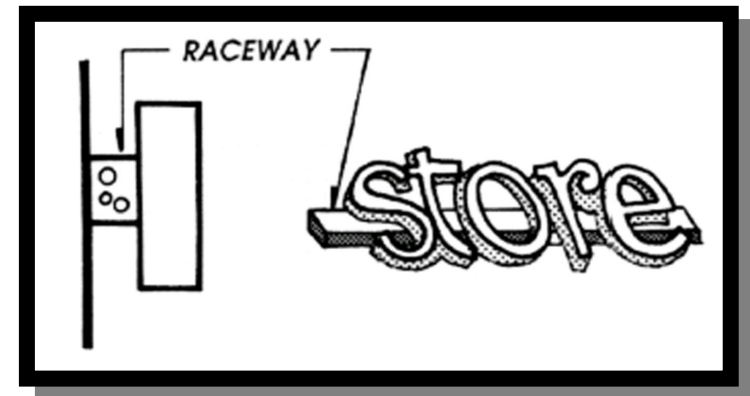
*Example of cut metal sign.*



*This carved wood sign fits well with the design of the building's facade.*

## 7. Electrical raceways and conduits.

- a. Electrical raceways should be concealed from public view. If a raceway cannot be mounted internally behind the finished exterior wall, the exposed metal surfaces of the raceway should be finished to match the background wall, or integrated into the overall design of the sign.



- b. If raceways are necessary, they should be as thin and narrow as possible and should never extend in width or height beyond the area of the sign's lettering or graphics.
- c. All exposed conduit and junction boxes should be concealed from public view.

## G. Design Guidelines for Specific Sign Types

### 1. Wall and Building Signs.

- a. A wall sign should be located where architectural features or details suggest a location, size, or shape for the sign. The best location for a wall sign is generally a band or blank area between the first and second floors of a building.



*Place signs where architectural features suggest the most appropriate location.*

- b. New wall signs in a shopping center that does not have an approved sign program should be placed consistent with sign locations on adjacent businesses. This will establish visual continuity among storefronts and create a unified appearance for the center.



*Wall signs of consistent size and placement are encouraged.*

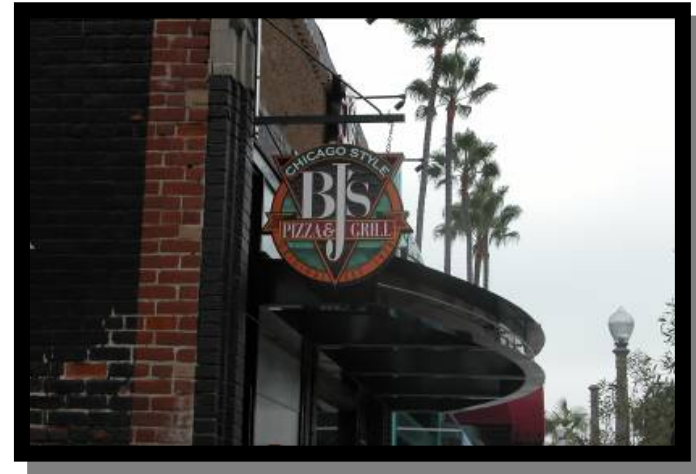
- c. Lettering should not occupy more than about 75 percent of the area of the sign to avoid a cluttered look and to help maintain the readability of the sign.
- d. Although internally illuminated cabinet-type signs with opaque backgrounds are allowed by the Sign Code, they are strongly discouraged. If signs are to be illuminated, internally illuminated, individually cut channel letters or solid backlit letters or the use of external, direct illumination are the preferred methods.



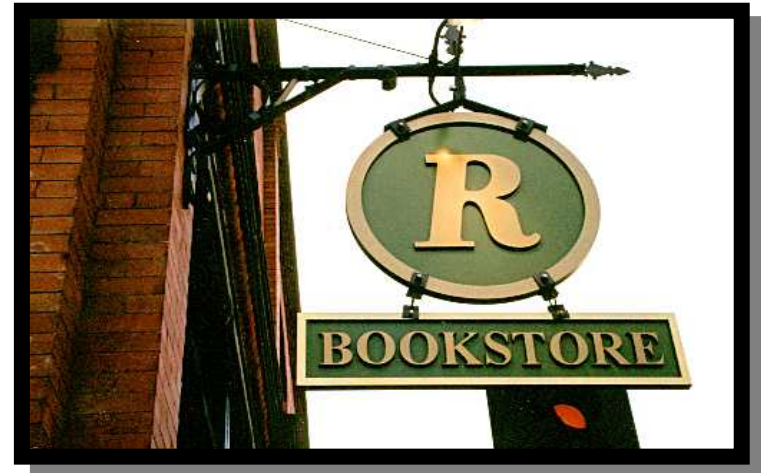
*Good example of backlit sign.*

## 2. Projecting Signs.

- a. The use of pedestrian-oriented projecting signs is strongly encouraged.
- b. Projecting signs should be used for ground floor uses only. The maximum sign area should not exceed ten square feet.
- c. Sign supports and brackets should be compatible with the design and scale of the sign and the architectural design of the building.



*Sign supports are compatible with design and scale of sign.*



- d. The text, copy, or logo face should not exceed 75 percent of the sign face of a projecting sign.
- e. The sign should be hung at a 90-degree angle from the face of the building.
- f. External illumination of projecting signs is encouraged.

### 3. Window Signs.

- a. Permanent window signs should consist of individual letters and/or logos placed on the interior surface of the window. Glass-mounted graphics may be applied by painting, silk screening, or vinyl die-cut forms.
- b. Window signs should be located so that they do not block views into the business. This is not only good for business, but also increases visibility for security purposes.
- c. The use of nonpermanent materials such as paper is strongly discouraged.



*Good example of simple window sign.*



*Good examples of window signs that allow views into storefront.*

- d. The text or sign copy of a window sign should be limited to the business name and brief messages identifying the type of product or service (e.g., "Maternity wear" or "surf accessories") or pertinent information (e.g., "reservations required").

#### 4. Awning Signs.

- a. Awning signs should be limited to awnings covering a main or side/rear entrance on a street or parking lot.
- b. The shape, design, and color of awnings should be carefully designed to coordinate with, and not dominate, the architectural style of the building. Where multiple awnings are used on the building, the design and color of all awnings should be coordinated.
- c. Only permanent signs that are an integral part of the awning or canopy should be used. To avoid having to replace awnings or paint out previous tenant signs when a new tenant moves in, the use of replaceable valances should be considered.
- d. Awnings should not be internally illuminated. Lighting directed downward that does not illuminate the awning is allowed.



*Good example of awning shape coordinated with window size/shape.*



*Good example of lettering on awning without valance.*

## 5. Freestanding Monument Signs

- a. Freestanding monument-type signs (on ground) are encouraged over pylon signs. However, pylon signs may be appropriate where the property's street frontage is a minimum of 50 feet wide, the business is setback from the street, and traffic volumes and speeds are high.



*Example of well-designed monument sign that is in scale with adjacent development and includes street address.*

- b. Between 5 to 10 percent of the sign area should be dedicated to identification of the street address.
- c. Freestanding monument signs should be placed perpendicular to the street.
- d. Freestanding monument signs should be placed so that sight lines at entry driveways circulation aisles are not blocked.

- e. Freestanding monument signs that are externally illuminated, either with light cast directly onto the sign or with individual backlit letters are encouraged over internally illuminated signs.



*Freestanding monument signs are required to be landscaped along their base.*





*Good example of multi-tenant sign with street address.*

- f. The City's Sign Code requires that monument signs be surrounded by a landscape planter that extends in all directions beyond the base of the sign. Plant materials should provide annual color when possible.
- g. Multi-tenant monument signs with multiple tenant identification panels present a special challenge in delivering their message in a clear manner. To help overcome the problems associated with these types of signs, the following guidelines should be followed:
  - Monument signs should have no more than five individual tenant signs or four tenant signs and the name of the center.
  - Individual tenant sign panels should be uniform in size recognizing that the major tenant or the name of the center may require a slightly larger sign panel.
  - The size, letter style, and number of tenant names should be to provide visual interest and to minimize the look of a plain, uninteresting list of tenants.

## 6. Figurative signs

- a. Signs that identify the occupant business through the use of graphic or crafted symbols, such as shoes, keys, glasses, or books are encouraged. Other figurative signs may include surfboards, kayaks, bicycles, fish, coffee cups, fishing equipment, etc.
- b. Figurative signs should be well-crafted using durable materials.
- c. Illumination of figurative signs should be from a shielded light source that shines directly onto the sign.
- d. Supporting brackets and braces should be simple in design and in proportion with the size of the sign they support.



*Examples of figurative signs*

