

Decorative graphics at an outdoor entertainment area

Happy

BY W. S. MOORE, III



Left: Colorful 10-ft-long banners marking Penn's Landing's landward edge are made of polyester and plastic meshes, the better to withstand waterfront winds. The graphics salute three facets of the landing: its role as a historic port (a figurehead), its present-day activity as a working harbor (an anchor), and its new life as an entertainment center (a saxophone).



Opposite top and opposite below right: An outdoor stage is one of Penn's Landing's centerpieces, and designers heightened its visual impact with brightly colored waves of plastic mesh, which provides color without turning into a sail. The designers also added the towers at the ends of the stage.



Opposite bottom left: As part of the designers' plan to shape identity through color, rather than with a ubiquitous logo, the laminate roofs of vendor stands sport bright, heat-sealed bands of color. The brilliant waves take the place of ordinary identity signs and act as a beacon for passersby in the absence of wayfinding signs.

THESE DAYS, MANY CIVIC LEADERS WORRY ABOUT the vitality of their urban areas, fearful that, as commuters flee to the 'burbs, evenings and weekends turn downtowns into ghost towns. Penn's Landing represents Philadelphia's effort to solve that problem.

Situated along the banks of the Delaware River, Penn's Landing, long a working waterfront, is a 20-block-long outdoor entertainment district, open-air market, and port. Although developers had eyed the area for years as the perfect site for hotels, office complexes, or other big-ticket projects, none of those plans came to fruition. Instead, the landing has become a backyard and party zone for the city, with events going on nearly round the clock, winter and summer.

Nightclubs entertain visitors to the district, which boasts numerous vendor stalls, an outdoor stage, and a new skating rink. Trolleys serve the strip day and night, carrying visitors to and from the clubs or depositing them along the way to enjoy the near-weekly festivals and events, including fireworks displays on New Year's Eve.

But Penn's Landing Corp., the semi-public entity that operates the landing, wanted something more. The signs there were dryly factual — historical markers that were informative enough, but lacked emotional punch. The landing needed clearly defined boundaries and a graphic kick, and the corporation looked to a hometown firm to provide that.

Philadelphia-based Cloud & Gehshan created environmental graphics for the Penn's Landing area, building a festive air that reinforces the idea that the landing is The Place To Be. Banners, fiberoptics, and a ubiquitous palette of bright colors combine to welcome visitors to the area while reminding them of the landing's history.

Color it exciting

Virginia Gehshan, principal of Cloud & Gehshan, wanted the environmental graphics to reflect the three different functions of Penn's Landing: its historic role as a port, its ongoing position as a working city waterfront, and its role as an entertainment center. At the same time, the graphics had to be festive and fun, a source of visual excitement to match the exciting things going on at the landing. A strong identity was critical, because there was no clearly defined entrance to the area. The graphics had to mark the boundaries of the landing while providing a sense of place. The solution, says Gehshan, was color.

Landing

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"We wanted to weave together a large site, but we didn't just want to create a logo and plaster it all over everything in sight," Gehshan notes. "That's dated and boring. Instead, we wanted to use colors. As visitors see those colors on banners and signs and uniforms, they create an environmental identity and link everything. A palette of colors gives you flexibility without the monotony of a single logo or single color."

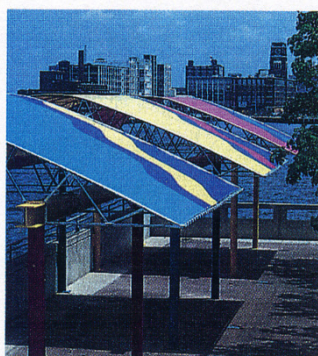
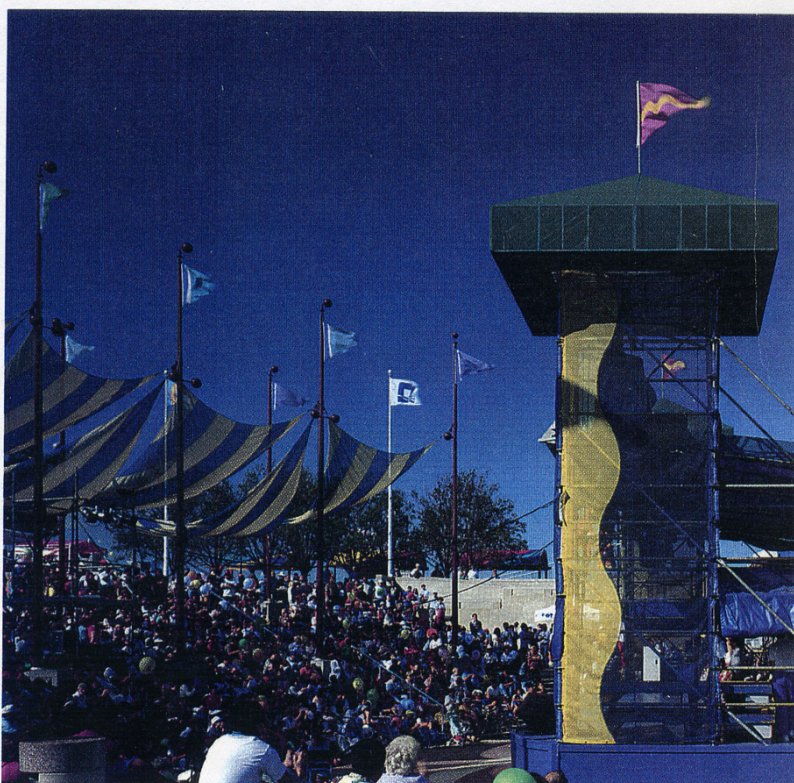
Gehshan chose strong, often bright colors (such as fuchsia and yellow) and set them against blues and aquas representing the water at the landing. She then created images to reflect the landing's triple role: a ship's figurehead represents the area's history, an anchor reinforces the harborfront theme, and a saxophone emphasizes the landing's role as an entertainment center.

These images appear on rectangular 10-ft.-long banners that greet visitors as they enter from footbridges across I-95, the landing's de facto border. They set a festive tone and act as an entrance statement, separating the landing from the rest of Philadelphia. Narrower, triangular 14-ft.-long banners offset the large banners and add extra color.

Of course, once a visitor arrives, it helps if he can see that things are going on, and where. When the area in question is 20 blocks long, however, it can be a problem. That issue faced the designers as they tried to extend the air of festivity to the outdoor stage and vendor stands along the riverfront.

Designers festooned the roofs of the stage and stands with waves of color, like the waves along the waterfront. Bands of crayon-bright colored vinyl are heat-sealed to the structures' vinyl laminate roofs, and their posts and supporting crossbeams are also painted in primary col-

Barry Holkin, Philadelphia



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ors. The stage, meanwhile, is decorated with sheets of plastic mesh, designed like the banners to co-exist peacefully with the wind off the river. The bright colors, visible from considerable distance, act as identifiers for the landing's sites in the absence of a permanent wayfinding system.

Blink, blink, blink went the trolley

With nightclubs at either end, Penn's Landing is almost a 24-hour site, and designers wanted to make people aware of its nighttime presence. So they made the trolleys that carry visitors from one end of the landing to the other vehicles for communication as well. Sidelight fiberoptic technology provided the vocabulary for the trolleys' nighttime statement.

The pale blue trolleys sport painted waves of darker blue and purple with fiberoptic cable threaded through holes drilled in their sides, following the rise and fall of the waves. Another fiberoptic wave decorates the trolley's front. The waves stem from light sources in the cab.

Although this mobile application is an unusual use of fiberoptics, Gehshan says that the toughest part of the installation came not in the application per se, but in coordinating the trolley builder and the fiberoptics vendor,

Both photos: The trolleys that serve Penn's Landing project a strong identity both day and night. Fiberoptic cables are threaded through holes drilled in the trolley's body, and are illuminated by an internal light source. Other exterior graphics include applied vinyl letters and waves.



IDENTITY ON ICE

One of the big draws for Penn's Landing is the new RiverRink, a Blue Cross-sponsored ice rink near the vendor stands. Cloud & Gehshan designed the rink's identity and graphics to reinforce the idea that Penn's Landing is a 12-month-per-year operation, a must because a windswept Philadelphia riverbank in February may not be everyone's idea of a good time.

The designers began with a logo that incorporates the Blue Cross trademark and logotype into a curve reminiscent of a skater's graceful turn. The word RiverRink appears in two contrasting typefaces, the elegant River flowing into the heavy type of Rink, which is broken up by arcing "skate marks." At the bottom of the rink's name, the words *at Penn's Landing* appear in an italicized Futura typeface that adds to the logo's sense of motion.

The logo appears throughout the rink area, on banners, uniforms, the Zamboni machine that resurfaces the ice, and the rink surface itself, where a 27-ft. version is visible



through the ice. This offers an interesting contrast to the approach taken elsewhere in the landing, but because the rink is a new attraction, giving it an omnipresent logo makes sense, notes Virginia Gehshan.

Another symbol of the rink perches well above the ice. An aluminum silhouette of a female skater (waggishly dubbed "Tonya" by tongue-in-cheek designers) pirouettes atop a pole, an array of brightly colored polyester streamers flowing from her outstretched hand. Like the eye-catching vendor roofs and the stage's towers, she acts as a beacon for visitors. ■

Below: Inside the trolley, vinyl letters list stops along the route.



who had never worked together before. But it was worthwhile, she admits. "When you stand down there at night and see a trolley coming your way all lit up, it's just exciting — it's a rush."

The decoration isn't merely limited to the fiberoptics and blue waves, however. A white spray of water is painted on the side of the trolley, near the cab, and the spray is echoed in mock-frosted vinyl on the windows. Elsewhere on the trolleys, the anchor graphic introduced by the banners reappears.

Inside the trolley, a sign lists stops along the route in a Bodoni face used throughout the project for its graceful look and legibility. The stops are also listed on the vehicle's front. The signs are notable in a relatively signless project, but necessary. Colors may unify the site, but they won't necessarily tell you you've reached the parking lot by Joe's Bar.

Like any neighborhood in any community, Penn's Landing is an organism with its own vitality. As a waterfront, it remains a vital part of the city's commerce. As an entertainment center, it will continue to grow and develop, with a museum expected in the near future. In both roles, the landing will continue to energize Philadelphia. Not bad for 20 blocks of riverfront. ■

CLIENT

Penn's Landing Corp.,
Philadelphia

ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHIC DESIGN

Cloud & Gehshan,
Philadelphia

PHOTOGRAPHY

Tom Crane, Bryn Mawr,
PA, [except where
indicated]

FABRICATION

Banners: Swirling Silks,
Collegeville, PA; vendor
stands: Airshields, Cherry
Hill, NJ; stage: Globe
Canvas, Yeaton, PA; trolleys:
The Ward Co., Daytona, FL
(body work) and E-Finity,
Wayne, PA (fiberoptics); rink
signage: Southern Signs,
Willingboro, NJ, and
Margulis Signs, Philadelphia