



ALLYCE'S ATTIC

SIGNS, SIGNS, EVERYWHERE, SIGNS!
by MARY ALLYCE

Signs are everywhere. We love 'em - we curse 'em. Some signs are for advertising everything from "Welcome To Our Town" to local businesses and events. Even in a small town like Bandera, there are businesses devoted to making signs, both artistic and purely prosaic. There are pesky ordinances regulating signs in most towns, where signs are preordained according to size, styles, and types. This annoys some folks and pleases others. For the most part, the advertising types of signs are not the ones that get me. What makes me crazy is what developers and city planners insist on calling "signage".

I shudder just typing the term.

Again, I'm not trashing storefront signs. If held to some good and well thought out guidelines, they can really dress up a town, actually add to the ambience of a place. Add a clever name along with an attractive sign and you've got a winning combination to draw customers.

The signs I'm taking aim at are the ones you need to help you find your way around a strange place. Yes, I know most of us have access to a GPS and they are wonderful - most of the time. When I was doing survey work for the government from Texas to New Mexico, my GPS became a trusted friend and only misfired with wildly inaccurate directions a couple of times in five years and it was usually easy to pick up the error.

But I just don't understand the folks who design and govern the readability of these directional signs. I get the reasoning behind the "signage" in planned real estate developments. Sort of. Seeing cute lantern lights with graceful "signage" adds consistency, value and prestige, at least according to developers who spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on the phenomenon. (I know, I

was married to a developer for over 35 years and how they love their signage.) If you're strolling through a sedate neighborhood with little traffic and 25 mph speed limits, slowing down to read a cutely quaint type font on a street sign is no big deal. Translate it to a big city, local traffic streaming along at over-the-limit speeds and you're trying to read a sign that's almost, but not quite readable. Argh.

Sure, the GPS is droning, "In half a mile turn right . . . In five hundred feet . . . in three hundred feet the address is on your left . . ." The address? If street signs are hard to read, numbering is apparently a lost art. Try to find the number on a building or a sign before you've driven past it. I dare you unless you work for the fire department!

Recently I developed health problems that necessitated trips into the medical center area of San Antonio. I want to make it clear up front that these top notch medical professionals, some of the best in the world, have been my angels, my hope and my trust in them is unwavering. But as Red Skelton used to say when he opened a live show in a new city, "Boy, the guy who designs your streets [and signs] around here - " and he would pause with his trademark befuddled look. "You must be real proud of him down at the home!" Yep.

The first road we missed was Wurzbach off of Highway 16. Sounds easy until you're trying it at rush hour and the backup in the turn lane outruns the GPS. We got turned around and made the turn and now we are in search of 12345 Wurzbach, a fictional address. No need to humiliate the actual building. Building after building, all low key, pale hued flow past with the traffic with numerous curb cuts on right and left and as you slide by, you think you can pick up a number here and there. By this time I had two GPS's going and both of them insisted "The address is on your left." Could be.

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