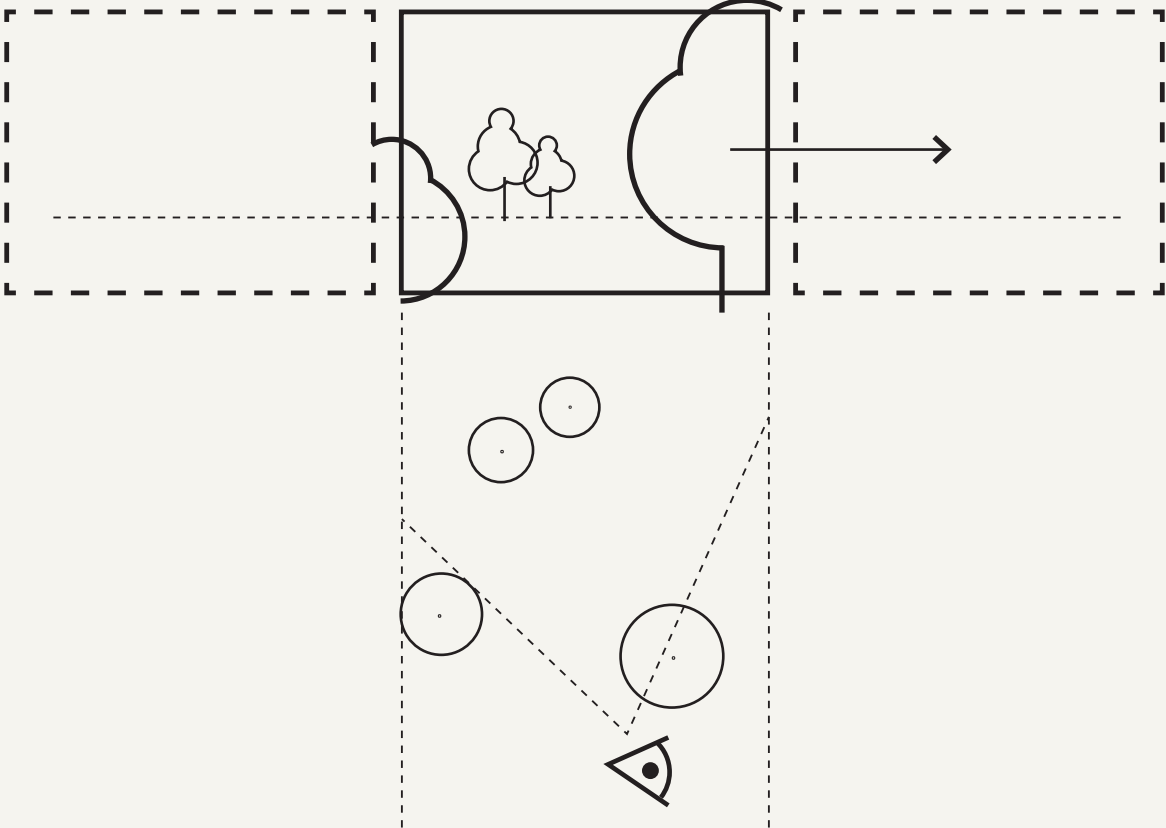


Sequencing & Movement in Retail Experience



Sequence & Movement in Retail Experience

Years ago a trip to the planetarium in New York City formed my concept decompression and recompression in retail sequencing.

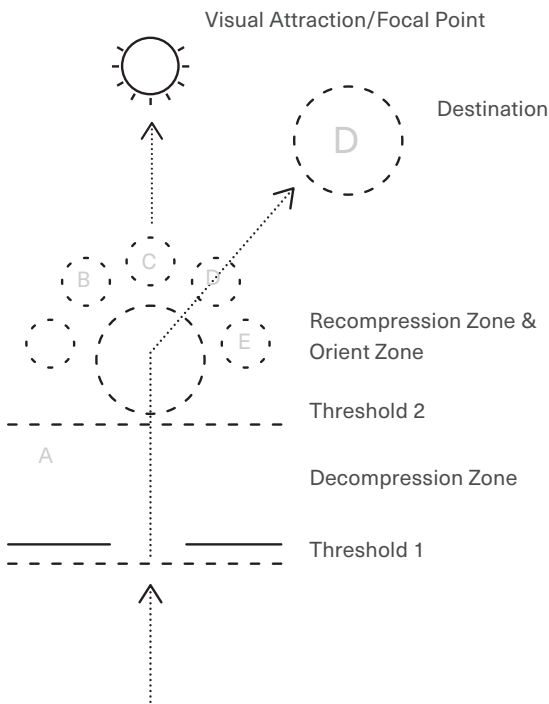
The planetarium experience, at least then when I had visited, began with purchasing tickets on a lower level. You were then told to walk a short distance down the hall and take a designated elevator up to the planetarium space. The elevator was centrally located in an area filled with natural light and was mostly constructed of glass. Once inside the elevator and as it ascended upward, the transparency of our surroundings became progressively more opaque. Once on the planetarium level, the doors opened to a broad open reception space. We had arrived early and so the space was fairly empty. As it got closer to show-time, the space filled with other people waiting to see the show. During this time the lights slowly lessened and the space gradually became darker. There were a series of television monitors throughout the space upon which a short introductory video was presented. The video was narrated by Tom Hanks, his voice had a warm calming sound. As he spoke, the lights gradually dimmed. Prior to the video beginning, the space was filled with noise from kids running around and families talking. The combination of the darkening of the space and Tom Hank's voice narrating over beautiful cosmic visuals on the screen slowed down the children and influenced the lowering of peoples' speaking. Within a matter of minutes the space was calm, quiet, and dark.

This a decompression and recompression. It is both functional—allowing your eyes to slowly adjust from the bright daylight to the darker environment—and experiential, initiating the cosmic experience and setting the scene for the forthcoming voyage inside the planetarium. It is a brilliantly designed sequence. There are a few key points that make it so successful. First, is the elevator. While seemingly simple and transactional, the added step of having you wait for the elevator feels like you are beginning on an adventure. I can't recall exactly, but I believe they had used terminology that associated the elevator with the lift that carries astronauts to the space shuttle. Next, you ascend up. You are about to be among the stars exploring the universe, so you need to wait for a bit, and ascend upward before you can begin your experience in space. The next key feature is the narration by Tom Hanks. The video and his narration begins before the lights are lessened, and at first kids and people are still talking loudly and moving about. But as the narration progresses it is synchronized with the dimming of the lights. It literally decompresses and lessens the activity of the room. The content of the video is a precursor to your forth-coming journey in the planetarium and it recompresses you to not only adjust your eyes and hearing, but to the content as well. Your thoughts begin to be about space and the galaxy as the narration continues. Shortly after the video ends, the doors to the planetarium are opened and people proceed in.

The planetarium is a unique and elongated condition, but the sequence is a great example of what is necessary in every retail experience. You need to decompress the visitor—seeking to have them forget all

Sequence & Movement in Retail Experience

the things that were previously occupying them; such as the lousy Uber ride, the annoying person walking in front of them, and the argument they just had with a spouse—and to recompress them to your space and content. The best retail experiences do this. There are many different variations and ways to effectively do this, and they all tend to follow the basic sequential architecture outlined here. I love the planetarium example because it elongates and highlights, almost like being in slow motion, the need to decompress and recompress people as they transition from one setting to another. It allows you focus on the simple effects of going up, and the cues and little things that trigger thoughts and associations that mentally recondition you for the future event.



Entry Sequence Overview

A successful and engaging entry experience should consider and address the sequence outlined here. The Decompression Zone may vary in size from a brief threshold to a more elaborate space.

In the Recompression Zone users should be oriented to the available options and to any system (layout, signage, zonal, etc).

There should always be a primary focal point or a visually engaging backdrop in clear view once the user has entered the space; something to help them focus attention and orient.

If working with a new space, you have the opportunity to explore and design a unique branded transition space from the outside to the forecourt and on to the entry door, vestibule, and first action.

The entry experience is the exposition and immersion, the physical crossing of the threshold. It is a critical phase to define the brand/narrative and set expectations for the experience. In a cinematographic sense, it is both the setting and the lead-in.

The entry sequence is best considered in snapshots, similar to the way you would think about a digital interface or cinematography:

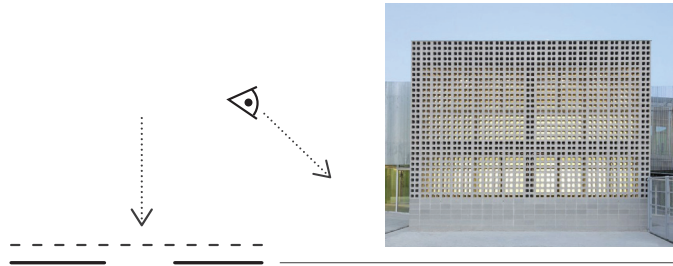
1. Where am I? (In relation to my context and the information I need/activity I need to perform—orientation)
2. What can I see? (And what can't I see—what is in frame?)
3. How do I know where to go? (What is the system(s)?)
4. What did I just see, and what do I see next? (Sequence)
5. Am I doing this correctly? (Reward or recognition—feedback)

Sequence & Movement in Retail Experience

Exterior & Threshold 1

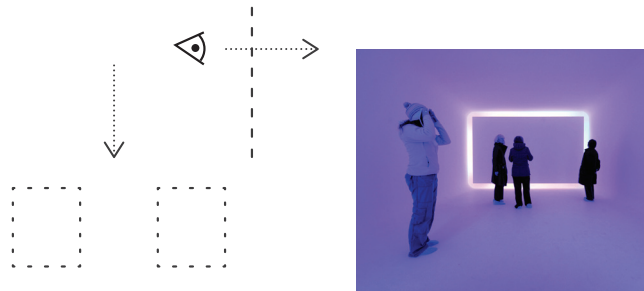
The approach to the front door must set the scene for the brand and experience. The exterior building, entry façade, and immediate door threshold define the image of the brand and set expectations for the experience.

Consider more extreme examples of how an image influences expectations and behaviors, such as haunted mansions, bakeries, as well stores with bigger narration and merchandising such as Ralph Lauren, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Whole Foods.



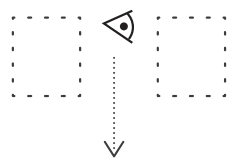
Threshold 2 Decompression Space

The vestibule is a transitional zone during daytime hours, and may be a destination during after-hours for self-service banking. In both experiences, the effect of the decompression should be to recondition the user from their outside state of mind to one focused on your brand. Simple, bold colors, materials, and lighting are effective tactics here. We consider this to be the "Turrell Zone."



Recompression Zone

Once inside the branch the user should be presented with an image of the brand and a snapshot of available options.



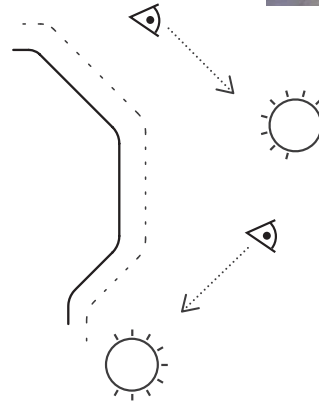
First Image

The First Image is the visual snapshot summary of the environment. Consider any place that you have visited and you will have a single image that acts as a *thumbnail* for the place. It is often one of the first images of the interior where there is the most amount of space available in a single view.



Bump & Redirect

This technique uses the physical architecture to slightly bump the user off a linear path, using the opportunity to draw their attention to another focal point. Offer the visitor a journey, a path to take, even if the store is small. The intent is for a subtle meander that makes the user's journey to their destination more interesting, or provides a path that leads them through all the whole store.



Design Made Shorts are brief articles on change and design by Founder & Chief Designer Brock Danner. See our website for more: designmadenyc.com