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### Contents





Searching for signs: A 'Tayronto' transformation

Walk through Toronto, which transformed into a Swiftie haven, with vibrant murals, immersive signs, and pop-up experiences to celebrate the last leg of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour.

Building a wrap empire Discover how M2 Graphix grew from humble beginnings to become a leader in vehicle wraps, using cuttingedge technology and community connections.

Out of home, into the future Study the emerging trends

redefining out-of-home (OOH) advertising in 2025, from Al-driven automation to sustainability and global campaigns.

A fresh take on supermarket signs Read about how Century

Signs transformed Fresh St. Market with more than 100 custom signs and unique metalwork, creating a vibrant and cohesive shopping experience.

A royal flush for a grand opening Learn how PM Signs brought Bear

Hills Casino's visual identity to life with large-scale exterior signage, a towering pylon, and detailed interior wayfinding for its opening.

Setting the tone for the home

Dive into how Signs Den Graphics enhanced the visual identity of two residential projects, blending material choice and light to create impactful signage.

IN THIS ISSUE

**Editor's Note** 

33

**Product Spotlight** 

**35** 

Marketplace

38

**Last Impression** 







Women who print progress
Explore how the Women in Print Alliance (V

Explore how the Women in Print Alliance (WPA) empowers women in the printing industry through networking, professional development, and collaboration.

A sign suspended in light and innovation

Look at the FOUFOU food hall project in Montreal, Que., which was
brought to life with signage that combined advanced lighting solutions
and precise engineering.



#### ON THE COVER

This cover story highlights M2 Graphix's journey to success and showcases its expertise in vehicle wraps, including the featured highperformance car.

Photo courtesy Roland DGA



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## Colour me impressed

s I look back on the whirlwind of 2024, I've learnt a little something about myself-in the realm of signage. Flipping through last year's issues (each more captivating than the last, of course!), I found myself picking out favourites-though, no reveals from me on that front! What really struck me was the diversity in every single selection. Each one felt so distinct, and it got me thinking: With every issue that goes to print, I'm gaining a deeper understanding of design-colour, texture, typography, lighting, scale-and how these elements come together to make a sign not just pop but integrate into its environment.

And now, as I dive into this first issue of 2025, I can't help but feel the same excitement. It's almost like having an "Aha!" moment every time I look at a sign-sharp, unique elements that make each one stand out. Yet, despite their differences, I love them all. How is that possible? It all comes down to the incredible sign professionals and their teams. They have an uncanny ability to read their surroundings and craft signage that shouts, "Look at me!"—in the most perfect way. It's the subtle art of balance and boldness that makes these signs so good.

Now, let's jump into our first issue of 2025-it's packed with all the good stuff! We would be remiss not to include one of the biggest highlights of 2024: Taylor Swift's transformative impact on every city she touched. Farheen Sikandar takes us on a tour of Toronto, uncovering the signs of an era gone by (page 6). Then, Ginny Mumm takes us behind the scenes with M2 Graphix, sharing what it takes to make your mark in the world of wraps (page 10). As out-of-home (OOH) advertising undergoes monumental shifts, Kayla Caticchio of Broadsign paints a picture on page 14 of what 2025 has in store for this ever-evolving industry.

Then, Khuram Shahzad from Century Signs pulls us into the details of their biggest project of 2024—a supermarket revamp, complete with a variety of eye-catching signage (page 17). On page 21, Cody Mathiesen of PM Signs talks about his work on the high-rolling signage at a new casino... he really bet on the right designs (yes, pun intended)! Then, Ernest Florentino of Signs Den is all about colour psychology in his feature, revealing the magic behind two residential projects and the making of their building signs (page 24).

I also had the pleasure of chatting with Lisbeth Lyons Black, director of Women In Print Alliance, about the incredible opportunities for women in the printing world. You won't want to miss this conversation (page 27). And last, but not least, we have Amanda Charlebois of Allanson International, who walks us through the ins and outs of LED installations in a project that took home multiple accolades last year (page 31).

Oh, and don't forget—our Last Impression is a Taylor Swift special. Talk about a sign of the times! 2025 is shaping up to be an exciting year for the sign industry, and we can't wait to take this journey with you. So, let's chat, connect, and celebrate all the incredible work happening right now. Are you ready? We sure are!

Signed, sealed, delivered,



Marika Gabriel **EDITOR** 





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## A CONCERT FOR THE ERAS.



TAYLOR SWIFT THE ERAS TOUR Presented by **O**ROGERS

# SEARCHING FOR SIGNS: A 'Tayronto' transformation

By Farheen Sikandar

Photos by Farheen Sikandar

he Eras Tour was Taylor Swift's largest and longest tour. Kicking off in March 2023 and ending in December 2024, it travelled across five continents and had 149 shows. Each show was more than three hours long; it covered 11 albums (all of Swift's "eras"), with roughly 16 outfits, and had a setlist of 46 songs. Grossing more than \$2 billion worldwide<sup>1</sup>—and being the first tour in history to do so—it became a symbol of success for Swift and the places where she performed.

Cities welcoming Swift went the extra mile to polish up real nice with multiple types of signage, murals, pop-ups, photo-ops, and themed spaces dedicated to her. Toronto was no stranger to this. One could not ride on the subway or drive past a highway without seeing multiple signs about "A Concert for The Eras." Downtown Toronto was decked up for Swifties, and signage captured it all.

The "Taylor effect" referred to the tour's impact on the economy—significantly boosting tourism and hospitality. Toronto, for example, was projected to make more than \$280 million in revenue from the six sold-out shows at Rogers Centre.<sup>2</sup> With Vancouver, B.C., being the last leg of the Eras Tour and the only other Canadian city to host it, the economic impact of The Eras Tour was projected to exceed expectations there.<sup>3</sup>

Signs and displays lit up the city as Toronto fully embraced The Eras Tour—one of 2024's cultural movements. This author set out to discover just how deeply the city had immersed itself in the Taylor Swift phenomenon.

#### Big reputation

Starting with the Swiftie staple on Rogers Centre: two giant inflatable friendship bracelets. Shawn Kolodny, a U.S.-based contemporary artist and sculptor, designed the 3D bracelets, which travelled and adorned each stadium. The friendship bracelets read "Taylor Swift" and "The Eras Tour." The entire installation was 42 m (140 ft) long, and each circle, forming the beads of the bracelet, was 2 m (7 ft) in diameter.

What began as a fan tradition of trading hand-made bracelets at the concert grew into a movement, with stadiums following suit towards the end of the tour. From the Caesar's Superdome in New Orleans to Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, they made it to Rogers Centre in Toronto. They were installed at the last stop of The Eras Tour—B.C. Place in Vancouver.

Fun fact: The tradition of trading friendship bracelets came from Swift's  $10^{\rm th}$  studio album, "Midnights," which has the lyric "so make the friendship bracelets / take the moment and taste it" on the song "You're on Your Own, Kid."









#### Another name goes up in lights

Ontario-based POP Marquee set up letters spelling out "YONGE" and a heart symbol at College Park on Yonge St. Beside this sign was a pastel floral installation with friendship bracelets on it, flanked by an "89" (Swift's birth year) on one side and a sequined backdrop on the other. This made for the perfect photo-op for Swifties, alongside a "parTAY" event at Sankofa Square.

#### Paint dreamscapes

When fans and visitors were near Rogers Centre and CN Tower, they were greeted with a friendship bracelet mural. Curated by Toronto-based chalk artist Jo the ChalkChick, the bracelet spelt out "TORONTO." It featured vibrant colours—red, purple, yellow, cyan, black, and white—all reminiscent of Swift's albums. Near the entrance of the CN Tower, the artist also painted a mural of Swift holding up a hand heart.

#### Life of the party

The most advertised event for those two weeks was Taylgate '24 (Toronto's Version).<sup>5</sup> Taking place at Metro Toronto

Convention Centre (MTCC), walking distance from The Eras Tour venue, it was a paid pre-concert for all attendees and fans. It featured many food vendors and sponsors, a makeup station by MAC, friendship bracelet stations, photo booths, merchandise, and many dance parties.

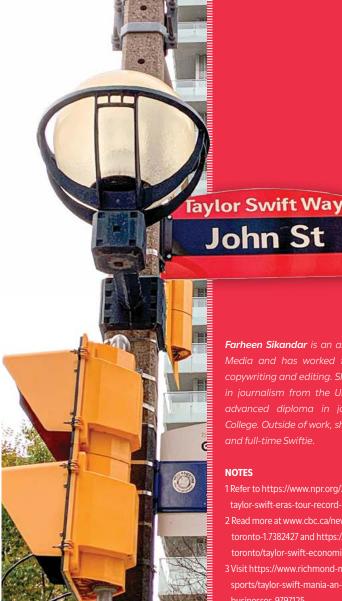
#### So many signs, so many signs

Multiple brands and companies customized their marketing to appeal to Swifties, transforming downtown Toronto for the two weeks Swift performed in the city: sparkly, bright, and celebratory.

Every corner at the core of downtown was covered in static out-of-home (OOH) and digital out-of-home (DOOH) billboards, with Swift's name covering all blank spaces. A key colour was red because Rogers is the official sponsor of The Eras Tour in Canada. Rogers' official partner for the tour, the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), also took over Union Station and painted it blue with ads.

All of this was combined with the City of Toronto welcoming visitors and Swift herself, with street signs dedicated to her, sidewalk stickers to guide international





Farheen Sikandar is an associate editor at Kenilworth Media and has worked for more than six years in copywriting and editing. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Toronto and an advanced diploma in journalism from Centennial College. Outside of work, she is an avid reader, dreamer, and full-time Swiftie.

#### **NOTES**

- 1 Refer to https://www.npr.org/2024/12/09/nx-s1-5222234/ taylor-swift-eras-tour-record-sales.
- 2 Read more at www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/swiftmaniatoronto-1.7382427 and https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ toronto/taylor-swift-economic-impact-1.7352467.
- 3 Visit https://www.richmond-news.com/entertainment-mediasports/taylor-swift-mania-an-economic-gift-for-vancouverbusinesses-9797125.
- 4 Learn more at www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/ music/2024/10/25/artist-explains-how-he-hung-friendshipbracelets-on-caesars-superdome/75820161007/
- 5 For more information, visit https://torontosun.com/news/ local-news/taylgate-the-next-best-thing-to-taylor-swifts-6toronto-shows.

Swifties and visitors, wayfinding for concert nights, and a digital board at Union Station showcasing the city's favourite song, album, and its anticipation of her sixth re-recorded album, reputation (Taylor's Version). All the colours were inspired by The Eras Tour's official poster and the concert's themes.

With all the efforts and events held in the city, Toronto put Swift's name at the top of its list. After all, it had been a long time coming.



"Toronto Channel Letters has impressed us with their commitment to making things right and fabricating great signs."

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## **Building a wrap empire**

#### How M2 Graphix accelerated its success by mastering every wrap

**By Ginny Mumm**Photos courtesy Roland DGA

rom folding boxes in a college job to wrapping vehicles that turn heads across B.C., Mike Merryweather's journey has been anything but conventional. The founder of M2 Graphix, Merryweather has built a thriving wraps business with a reputation for innovation and quality. Here is a look at how this Westshore, B.C.-based company became a leader in vehicle graphics and branding.

#### An idea is born

Merryweather's fascination with graphics started when he worked at an educational services company during college. Watching the company's graphic designer in action ignited a passion for visual storytelling. His bosses recognized his interest and talent and sponsored him to study graphic design. After cutting his teeth at Disney Interactive, he co-founded a 3D animation, web design, and branding company in 1997. Over the years, the business morphed into what is now M2 Graphix.

#### From pixels to print

M2 eventually expanded its offerings to include vehicle graphics. "The transition to wraps was surprisingly natural," says Merryweather. "We were tired of designing solely on screens. In 2005, we bought our first digital printer—a 30-in. Roland DG VersaCAMM printer/cutter—and began experimenting."

Merryweather and his partner started small, designing vehicle graphics and wrapping their own cars to refine their skills. The journey wasn't without its hiccups, but



their persistence paid off. By 2017, Merryweather had become a certified vehicle wrapper, and demand for their work skyrocketed.

#### **Humble beginnings**

M2 Graphix started in Merryweather's basement suite. As the business grew, so did their ambitions. They initially sublet 185.8 m² (2,000 sf) in a larger facility, eventually taking over the entire space. Today, their 557.42-m² (6,000-sf) facility in Westshore, B.C., is a testament to their success. With large bays, they can accommodate 12 to 14 vehicles at once. "That's a huge advantage over smaller shops. It's especially helpful when wrapping fleets or larger vehicles like Class A motorhomes, boats, dump trucks, and even 12.1-m (40-ft) trailers," says Merryweather.

To power their production, they use two Roland DG TrueVIS large-format inkjets—a 1625.6-mm (64-in.) printer/cutter and a 1625.6-mm print-only model—as well as a CAMM-1 GR2-640 64-in. large-format cutter. "I didn't know much about printers when I bought a Roland DG printer/cutter the first time around, but the

quality from their printers is amazing," said Merryweather. "Plus, all their devices come with [raster image processing] RIP software included, which is a big advantage."

"We've been extremely impressed with the vibrancy of the colours—especially orange, which contributes greatly to our printer's expanded gamut. Also, our printers provide highly consistent colour, which is especially important for larger jobs such as fleet graphics." In addition to vehicle bays, the facility features a welcoming front entrance with seating, monitors showcasing the company's work, and a mezzanine level dedicated to production.

#### A variety of vehicles

From supercars to snowmobiles, the team at M2 Graphix wraps it all. "Pick a vehicle! We have wrapped yachts, RVs, dragon boats, jet skis, golf carts, funny cars, and even semi-trucks and trailers for a local driving school," Merryweather shares.

Beyond vehicles, the team's expertise extends to walls, windows, and floor graphics. "We always say, if





you can wrap a car, you can wrap a wall," says Merryweather. Along with wrap graphics, the shop provides other types of branding, such as banners, business cards, murals, and many hand-out decals and stickers. "Our printer/cutter's integrated contourcutting feature is also handy for these projects."

Recent wrap projects include a 24.3-m (80-ft) Sistine Chapel-inspired ceiling wrap for a residential client, and custom-printed veneer wraps for high-end audio systems. Architectural vinyl wraps are also gaining popularity. These materials mimic natural surfaces such as wood, marble, or steel, providing a cost-effective way to refresh interiors. "We're currently working on cabinet wraps for a yacht renovation," Merryweather says.

#### **Building on success**

Merryweather notes that his company is seeing increasing requests for vehicle graphics versus other types of vehicle signage. "For instance, we don't do vehicle magnets now, and we used to do a fair amount. In the last five to 10 years, vehicle graphics have grown to the point where almost every company is putting at least some type of decals on their vehicle," said Merryweather.

"It's been rough for companies in the past few years. People want their branding to be seen, and they want to make the most out of their investment. We are doing lots of partial wraps where we put clear wraps on white vehicles, which can often make them look as if they are fully wrapped," he said. "Most people we work with are trying to create as much interest and

awareness for their brand as possible without breaking the bank. Bigger companies, however, are turning to full wraps."

"One of my favourite things to do when we drive around is to see how many of the vehicles on the road we've wrapped. We've wrapped fleets of two vehicles on up to hundreds, so we can usually spot a few we've done just about anywhere we go," he added.

#### **Community connections**

M2 Graphix is deeply embedded in the local community. Their *Trunk-or-Treat* Halloween car show draws more than 1,000 visitors annually, with all proceeds going to charity, including donations to the local children's hospital. "We bring all of our best wraps from the year there for visitors to see, along with providing full custom signage, branding, and stickers for the event," said Merryweather. They also sponsor *Layed Out Field of Dreams*, Vancouver Island's largest car show.

Charity work is another passion for Merryweather. M2 Graphix collaborates with organizations such as the Superheroes of Victoria, a volunteer group supporting more than 50 charities. "I'm a huge comics fan, so wrapping their vehicle was a blast," Merryweather says. The partnership later expanded to include their website, business cards, and branding.

Local clients include many companies working in the construction industry. "This area is booming, and we have a lot of construction industry clients, including [heating, ventilation, and air conditioning] HVAC providers, plumbers, electricians, and paving



companies. The construction industry probably accounts for 50 per cent of our commercial work," he said.

M2 Graphix also serves the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the local Medi-vans, restaurants, sports teams, Cops for Cancer, and other community-based organizations. They provide local middle schools and high schools with gym graphics, among other graphic needs. Although the local speedway has closed, M2 Graphix continues sponsoring the National Hot Rod Association's (NHRA's) funny car and drift teams. "Supporting these teams helps us stay connected to the motorsports community while showcasing our work," Merryweather adds.

#### The road ahead

Looking to the future, M2 Graphix is doubling down on vehicle graphics. "We want to be the go-to wrap destination for Vancouver Island," Merryweather says. The company's plans include refining internal processes, investing in team training, and partnering with more local businesses to expand their one-stop-shop approach.

With a skilled team, cutting-edge equipment, and a passion for innovation, M2 Graphix is driving the future of vehicle branding—one wrap at a time.

**Ginny Mumm** is a freelance consultant for digital inkjet printer/cutter provider Roland DGA. For more information, visit www.rolanddga.com.





## Out of home, into

#### Key trends that will shape the ad landscape in 2025

By Kayla Caticchio

s the advertising landscape continues to evolve, out-of-home (OOH) is undergoing a seismic transformation, propelled by technological advancements and growing pressure to make the industry more automated and sustainable. These circumstances are redefining how advertisers plan, execute, and measure OOH campaigns and unlocking new opportunities for OOH media owners willing to embrace change. Many OOH trends we saw in 2024—from automation and artificial intelligence (AI) to sustainability and growing demand for cross-regional OOH campaigns—will continue in 2025.

#### Accelerating automation, advancing measurement

While programmatic digital out-of-home (pDOOH) has made OOH transactions more efficient, the process of purchasing guaranteed digital and static inventory still relies on manual workflows. In 2025, we expect to see a shift toward more automated workflows and processes. Advertisers want OOH to be as easy to transact as other ad mediums such as Connected TV (CTV), paid social media, online, and mobile ads. To do this, they need tools that simplify inventory discovery, provide pricing transparency, and streamline scheduling.



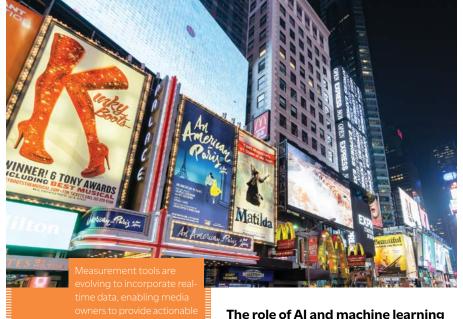


## the future

For media owners, now is the time to prioritize integrations with more scalable, automated OOH platforms. Solutions enabling media buyers to reserve, schedule, and manage campaigns easily will streamline workflows and attract a broader pool of advertisers. Additionally, offering robust measurement capabilities will be critical. Advertisers want data proving campaign effectiveness, such as metrics for brand lift, web traffic, and app downloads, which brings OOH measurement on par with other ad channels.

Measurement tools are also evolving to incorporate real-time data, enabling media owners to provide actionable insights for their clients. The ability to report on audience engagement, campaign performance, and even regional differences will help media buyers make more informed decisions and optimize future campaigns. In this competitive landscape, media owners who invest in technology partnerships and data-driven tools will stand out as leaders.





AI and automation are connected, with AI and machine learning (ML) inspiring new ways to automate for efficiency. Though both are still in early adoption stages within the OOH sector, they have tremendous potential to transform the industry in the coming years. From optimizing inventory management to automating creative adjustments based on audience engagement, AIand ML-powered tools will open new doors for media owners and advertisers.

To this end, we expect to see a surge in AIdriven solutions tailored specifically for OOH in 2025. For instance, AI could help analyze traffic patterns, weather data, and audience demographics to determine the most effective times and locations for ad placements. ML algorithms could identify trends in campaign performance, enabling advertisers to adjust their strategies on the fly for maximum impact.

Media owners who embrace these innovations will gain a competitive edge. By integrating AI tools into their operations, they can offer advertisers more precise targeting, faster campaign execution, and deeper insights into audience behaviour to stay ahead in an increasingly data-driven marketplace.

Sustainability takes centre stage

Sustainability has become a necessity for brands and businesses striving to meet consumer expectations and regulatory demands. Consumers, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, are helping to drive this shift.1 Nearly half of Gen shoppers favour brands with strong sustainability initiatives, and 55 per cent of adults in the U.S. believe businesses should prioritize climate change as a critical issue. Advertisers are taking notice, and many are evaluating the environmental footprint of their campaigns, including the OOH inventory they book.

Fortunately for OOH, studies have shown that the medium is one of the most sustainable ad platforms available,2 with Outsmart and KPMG highlighting its minimal environmental impact compared to other channels. For media owners, however, the shift presents an opportunity to lead by example, and we expect many will rise to the challenge in 2025 with new strategies to reduce their carbon footprints.

#### Global campaign execution

Historically, OOH has been rooted in local relevance, leveraging hyper-targeted placements to engage specific communities. While this remains a core strength, advancements in programmatic technology are enabling OOH campaigns previously reserved for a single region to now go global. Cross-regional and international campaigns are on the rise, driven by industries such as travel, automotive, and consumer technology that aim to reach audiences across multiple markets.

To capitalize on the growing demand for multinational campaigns in 2025, media owners must expand their inventory offerings and build partnerships with supply-side platforms (SSPs) that are integrated with global demand-side platforms (DSPs). Dynamic content capabilities are also essential, allowing advertisers to adapt real-time messaging to suit local contexts and conditions.

Moreover, media owners can play a crucial role in guiding brands through the complexities of international OOH campaigns. This includes offering insights into cultural nuances, local audience behaviours, and the best inventory options in each region. Providing consistent measurement and reporting across markets will also be vital for maintaining advertiser confidence and optimizing campaign performance.

#### Preparing for the future

2025 is poised to bring OOH media owners and buyers a wealth of new growth opportunities. By investing in automation and AI, more sustainable practices, and ensuring their inventory is accessible globally, they can better meet the evolving demands of advertisers, expand their revenue potential, and contribute to the overall expansion of the OOH business. As all these trends continue to take shape, staying proactive and exploring new technologies and partnerships to help industry professionals remain relevant in a rapidly changing market is essential. The future of OOH is more data-driven and sustainable-and now is the time to start planning for it.

#### **Notes**



# A fresh take on supermarket signs

#### By Khuram Shahzad

Photos courtesy Khuram Shahzad, Century Signs

n November 2024, Fresh St. Market opened its doors in North Vancouver, taking over a location that had previously housed an Independent Grocers Alliance (IGA) store. The new grocery store, known for its commitment to fresh, local products, was designed to offer an updated experience for shoppers while retaining a connection to its community roots. This rebranding project was led by Century Signs, a long-time partner of Georgia Main Food Group, which owns both Fresh St. Market and IGA. Century Signs had been responsible for the initial branding of the IGA store, and this continued partnership made the sign shop the natural choice for the redesign.

The rebranding project kicked off in February 2024 and lasted nine months. Its phased approach allowed the store to remain operational throughout the process. While certain departments were temporarily closed to allow for updates, other parts of the store remained open, minimizing disruptions for shoppers. These phases focused on installing new signage, infrastructure, and decor to align with Fresh St. Market's brand and vision.

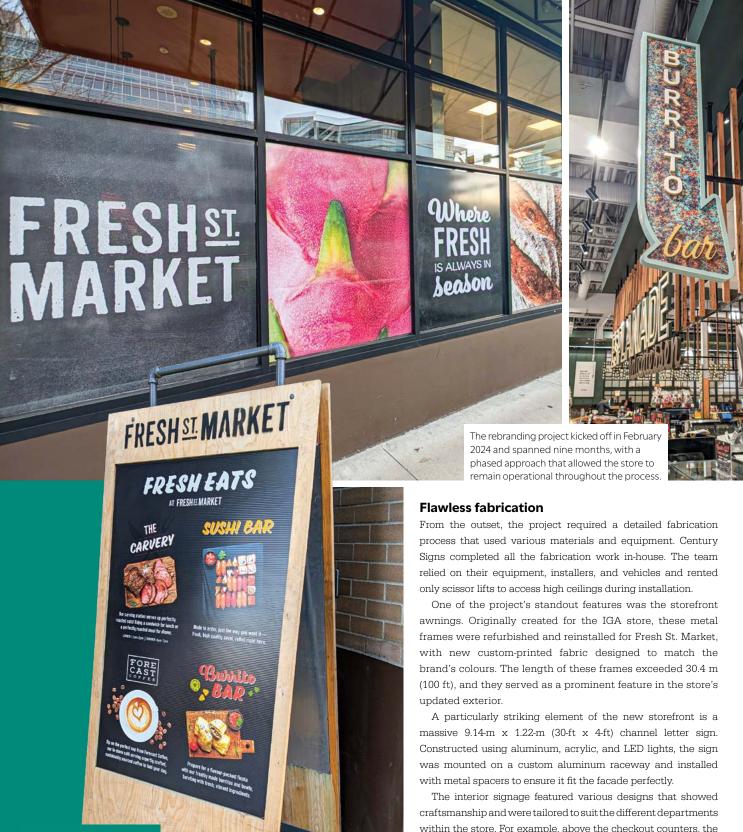
#### Fresh features

This was the largest project by Century Signs in 2024, comprising more than 100 different signs and a variety of fabricated metalwork. Each sign was designed to serve practical and esthetic functions, guiding customers through the store while enhancing the shopping experience. The list of extensive signage elements included storefront awnings, storefront channel letter signs, exterior window graphics, wall murals, wayfinding signs, hanging signs, freestanding signs, and parking lot signs.

While the signs were diverse, they all shared a common goal: to maintain the consistency and integrity of Fresh St. Market's visual identity while offering a functional role in navigating the store.

The Fresh St. Market team provided the design work. Their vision for the space was clear, and their creativity in providing a strong set of designs helped guide the entire project. The challenge, then, was to translate those designs into physical elements, ensuring each sign was both visually appealing and well-crafted.

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The interior signage featured various designs that showed craftsmanship and were tailored to suit the different departments within the store. For example, above the checkout counters, the marquee-style channel letter sign draws attention. The "ESLPANADE DELI" and "Good Bakes" signs feature medium-density fibreboard (MDF) dimensional letters and illuminated signs for a vibrant glow.

The produce section was highlighted by six wheelbarrows featuring 3D letters that spelled "GARDEN," while the Kitchenware area was given a rustic touch with a handpainted, corrugated "SHIPYARDS" sign. The use of foam







letters and painted polyvinyl chloride (PVC) panels helped create a dynamic yet cohesive visual environment.

The meat section featured a distinctive "CHOP HOUSE" sign, designed with illuminated channel letters that created a consistent glow from every angle. In addition to the main sign, this section included a double-sided blade sign and a cowshaped display made from coated foam—an element that added character and thematic relevance to the store.

Another interesting aspect of the project was the large-scale mural behind the checkout counters. A hand-painted mural that had been a feature of the previous IGA store was preserved. To integrate it into the new design, a custom-fabricated metal window mullion structure was added, giving the impression that customers were looking at the mural through a window frame.

#### **Fitting execution**

The installation process was meticulously planned. Since the store remained open, the team began with exterior signage, which caused less disruption to customers. Once the exterior was complete, attention turned to the interior. Certain sections of the store were then temporarily closed off while work was being done, requiring careful

co-ordination and scheduling. Century Signs and Fresh St. Market worked diligently to minimize disruption to the store's daily operations. Each phase focused on updating a specific department, and over the course of nine months, departments like deli, produce, meat, and bakery were temporarily closed while new signage and infrastructure were installed.

All signs, awnings, and infrastructure were delivered by Century Signs' fleet of vehicles and installed by their in-house team. Rented scissor lifts were used to install high-reaching interior signs, while the remaining equipment was handled by the company's regular tools and vehicles.

The final product was a fully updated store that effectively communicated Fresh St. Market's commitment to local products while creating a visually cohesive and inviting environment.

#### **Facing forward**

As with any large-scale project, challenges arose throughout the process. For the installation of large metal structures, such as the deli's hanging bar system and the shipyard canopy, on-site assembly was required. This was due to the narrow entrance doors, which made moving the large components into place difficult. This meant redesigning some components to simplify on-site assembly, even though much of the work could have been completed in the shop.

The installation also presented a logistical challenge. To ensure the work was completed on time, the installation team often worked overnight to avoid interfering with store operations. The careful staging of the installation helped ensure that the signage was added efficiently, with minimal disruption.

Century Signs drew on its extensive experience in branding for large retail chains to keep the project on track. Careful planning and collaboration with the Fresh St. Market team—who came up with the innovative, out-of-the-box branding—ensured the transition was smooth and that all elements of the project were executed to a high standard.

#### **Final flourish**

Reflecting on the project, the team expressed satisfaction seeing the work come together. The complexity of the task was met with a high level of professionalism, and the result is a store that stands out in North Vancouver both for its design and selection of fresh, high-quality products.

Khuram Shahzad is a seasoned professional with more than a decade of experience in the signage industry. As a marketer, he possesses a keen understanding of customer needs and excels at capturing their attention online and offline. His expertise in brand promotion has consistently driven increased revenues, showcasing his ability to bridge the gap between customer expectations and business goals effectively.

their in-house team.



# A royal flush for a grand opening

By Cody Mathiesen

Photos courtesy PM Signs

hen the Bear Hills Casino, located in Alberta, wanted a comprehensive mix of signs to help establish the casino's visual identity as it threw its doors open, PM Signs was chosen to bring the vision to life. From exterior signs that light up the landscape to interior wayfinding signage guiding visitors through the space, the company oversaw a transformation that has satisfied the casino, the contractor, and visitors.

Bear Hills Casino & Travel Resort is owned by the Louis Bull Tribe, one of the Four Nations of Maskwacis and part of the Cree nations. PM Signs won the contract for the project after submitting a competitive proposal to Carlson Construction, the project's general contractor. After looking at the concept design, we scaled it up and recommended the best materials to suit the project.

The project consisted of three phases, each essential to creating a seamless guest experience. The first phase was designing and installing large-scale signage for the building's exterior, including the primary identification signs visible from afar. Next came the key feature of the project, which was the 6.09-m (20-ft)-tall pylon sign designed to capture the attention of drivers and visitors as they approached the casino. The final phase consisted of a thorough wayfinding package, which included signage for rooms, lounges, the kitchen, slots, washrooms, and entrance/exit features, ensuring guests can easily navigate the expansive facility.

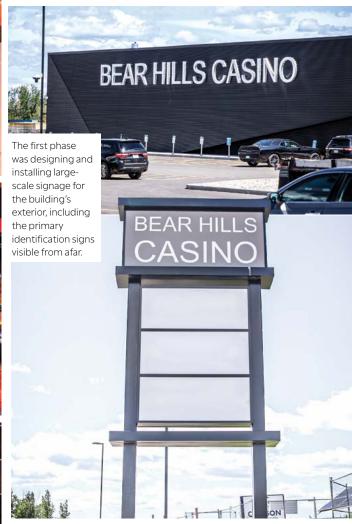






In total, PM Signs crafted 1.5-m (5-ft)-tall LED channel letters for the exterior, a towering 6.09-m (20-ft) pylon sign, and 304.8-mm (12-in.) channel letters for interior wayfinding. Some interior signs, like those for washrooms, were acrylic non-lit signs, while others used LED lighting to enhance visibility.

The exterior signage was made from aluminum with white plastic faces for the LED channel letters, while the pylon was built with sturdy steel and other materials that would ensure stability in all weather conditions.



Like any large-scale project, the installation presented several challenges, all met with careful planning and technical expertise. The first challenge was the casino's exterior wall, which sloped at an angle and required PM Signs to carefully calculate how to mount the signage so it would be levelled. This meant customizing the mounting poles to ensure the sign aligned correctly.

During the spring, when the pylon was being built, wet, muddy conditions created a few complications. Drilling for the foundation required water to assist with the process, making it messy but manageable. Despite these conditions, the pylon was securely installed and is now one of the most striking features of the casino.

The interior signage posed another challenge—PM Signs couldn't begin fabrication until final wall sizes and configurations were confirmed. With a tight timeline leading up to the grand opening, the team had to work quickly to complete the interior wayfinding package on time.

The installation was a co-ordinated effort that required precision and expertise at every step. The team surveying the building, creating an installation pattern, and pre-drilling holes for the mounting poles made the process easier. They also ran the necessary electrical wiring before mounting each LED channel letter individually.







Interior signage was mounted onto the walls, with the team running wiring behind the walls to connect the signs to power supplies.



PLAYERS CLUB

ICV° a 4.2-94.2

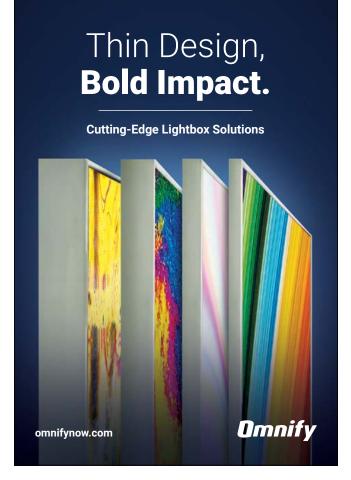
For the pylon installation, the team drilled holes, inserted steel cages, and poured concrete with anchor bolts to secure the structure. Once the concrete set, the poles, cabinets, and cladding were installed, followed by electrical hookups.

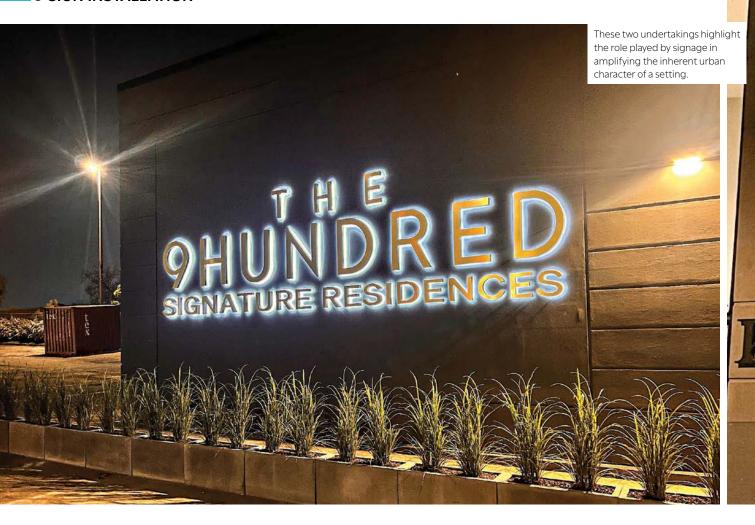
Interior signage was mounted onto the walls, with the team running wiring behind the walls to connect the signs to power supplies. Some washroom signs were peel-and-stick decals, while others were securely pin-mounted to the drywall.

Excellent collaboration between PM Signs and Carlson Construction made the project's success possible. Carlson Construction's project managers communicated clearly about wall timelines and electrical placements, ensuring everything was installed on schedule. The execution shows the importance of collaboration, flexible design, and perfect planning. We were thrilled to have worked on the project and are proud of the tremendous response from visitors and residents. A casino isn't built in a day. In fact, the journey to building this casino began decades ago—but that's a story for another day.

Cody Mathiesen is vice-president of PM Signs.

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## Setting the tone for

By Ernest Florentino
Photos courtesy Signs Den Graphics

n the realm of residential signage, the selection of colour palettes and materials plays a key role in setting the overarching ambiance of an entire community. Visualize, if you will, a suburban enclave adorned with signs fashioned from weathered wood, meant to evoke a sense of coastal tranquility. Similarly, if one were to think of a contemporary urban setting, perhaps you picture sleek signage, bedecked in bold, vibrant tones, with a certain air of modernity. Each choice in colour and material establishes a distinct narrative.

Two undertakings by Signs Den Graphics Inc., a signage company in Ontario, highlight the role played  $\,$ 

by signage in amplifying the inherent urban character of a setting. The company was tasked with enhancing the visual identity of two condominium projects by Harhay Developments: 9Hundred Signature Residences and Kingsway Crescent. For this purpose, Signs Den chose a meticulous approach to design, material selection, and colour. Consistent with both projects was the use of illumination to make the signs stand out.

To meet the client's goal of enhancing brand identity, Signs Den's expertise in crafting high quality signage solutions was combined with a deep understanding of colour psychology and material selection.



## the home

#### **Project one**

The 9Hundred Signature Residences project included four signs: three indoor signs and one outdoor. The indoor signs were a sleek, rectangular sign featuring the 9Hundred logo in brushed gold on a matte black background at the entrance; and illuminated signs. The outdoor sign was 6.1 m (20 ft) halo-lit channel letter sign, offering subtle illumination and enhancing brand visibility, even in low-light conditions, at daytime or night. Also crafted was a brushed gold finish of the real metal logo in the reception area, standing at 2.1 m (7 ft), to align with the project's overall esthetic.

The 9Hundred project presented unique installation challenges. The team had to adapt to the special stucco surface of the exterior wall for the 6.09-m (20-ft) sign and find solutions





to mount the reception logo on a grooved wall. This was done with the help of carefully printed hard templates, which skilled installers placed by drilling into the grooved wall with precision.

#### **Project two**

The Kingsway Crescent project included two sign installations, one indoor and the other outdoor. The outdoor logo sign—featuring LED halo lighting and computer-numerical control (CNC)-cut acrylic letters of 1.2 m x 1.5 m (4 ft x 5 ft), along with a 3D metal logo—was placed on the exterior concrete wall to create a cohesive brand experience for residents and visitors. Under this sign is an illuminated logo followed by the words "Kingsway Crescent." The indoor sign, present at the reception desk, includes black channel letters.

Signs Den specializes in creating visually appealing designs that embody simplicity and elegance. The project was a collaborative effort, which saw various contractors play different roles for both projects. This smooth collaboration ensured the highest quality and consistency across all signage elements. Working closely with Harhay Developments, Signs Den ensured that each sign met exact specifications, incorporated specific fonts and materials to achieve a seamless integration with the architectural design of each building. The careful selection of materials and finishes—such as brushed gold and matte black aluminum composite material (ACM)—not only enhances the visual appeal, but also ensures durability and longevity.

**Ernest Florentino** owns Signs Den Graphics Inc., a sign shop which describes itself as "your friendly neighbourhood sign and printing shop" based in Mississauga, Ont.

9 HUNDRED

SIGNATURE RESIDENCES



## Women who print progress

## How the Women in Print Alliance is fostering opportunities in an evolving industry

#### By Marika Gabriel

Photos courtesy PRINTING United Alliance

he printing industry has historically been male-dominated, but there has been a growing movement to encourage and support women in the field in recent years. Organizations such as the Women in Print Alliance (WPA) are at the forefront, creating spaces for women to connect, grow, and lead in this industry.

In this interview with Sign Media Canada, Lisbeth Lyons Black, director of the WPA, shares insights into her work advocating for women in the printing industry. From creating empowering networking events to supporting professional development, Lisbeth highlights the importance of fostering a welcoming environment and providing valuable opportunities for women to thrive in the printing sector.

SIGN MEDIA CANADA (SMC): What has been the journey of the WPA, and what does the future look like?

Lisbeth Lyons Black (LLB): The WPA started informally several years ago, founded by a dedicated group of women in the industry who recognized the need for an organization to support one another, publicize the opportunities in the printing industry, and create space for women to thrive and grow professionally. The group partnered with PRINTING United Alliance and hosted an annual breakfast or lunch at the PRINTING United Expo, which was widely attended and well-received. But this event was only once a year, and the excitement would fade until the next expo.



act in person.

ANOWLEDGE CENTER

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Recognizing the need for year-round engagement, the group, again in partnership with PRINTING United Alliance, committed to creating infrastructure, including a newsletter and website, and hiring a professional staff director (myself). The next logical step was to launch a paid membership program, allowing women or companies to sponsor seats for professional development. With support from corporate sponsorships, we can produce higher-level and more content for women, keeping it going year-round.

We officially launched this membership program on August 1, and we've sold more than 350 seats so far. It allows women to access quarterly professional development series and other benefits. I was excited to see that Women in Print Australia also launched a similar paid membership program, showing that women in the industry are responding to the need for community support and opportunities to improve their professional acumen and advance their careers.

#### **SMC:** How does WPA support women in advancing their personal brands and visibility?

**LLB:** There are two main pillars of this membership. The first is community building and networking, which is especially important for women in smaller companies or isolated roles, such as being the only woman on a sales team or in the C-suite. They value connecting with other women in similar positions in different companies, regions, or even countries. This sense of community is a key part of the WPA.

The second pillar is workforce development. From my experience as a chief lobbyist for the printing industry, a recurring issue has been the struggle to find qualified workers, especially as older, predominantly male workers retire. Expanding the workforce to include more women is vital. Women have long worked in print, but the industry has historically been perceived as male-dominated, partly due to

physical job requirements. However, many of these barriers have been removed as printing becomes more digital.

We aim to demonstrate that there are successful women in various industry segments, showing younger women, those returning to the workforce, or women transitioning from other industries that there are pathways to success in printing. The industry is becoming more gender-friendly, and the WPA can help highlight these opportunities.

This approach benefits both women and the industry. Women are drawn to workplaces that align with their values, such as gender equality and sustainability. By supporting initiatives like the WPA, companies signal their commitment to creating an environment where women can thrive. This attracts the next generation of workers and demonstrates a genuine commitment to diversity beyond just optics.

So, while what we do for women and what we do for the industry may seem separate, they are deeply interconnected.

## SMC: What trends in the printing industry are creating more opportunities for women and attracting them to alliances like this?

LLB: One major shift we've seen is the transition to digital print, which has eliminated some physical or perceived barriers that once limited women's involvement. This has created a more level playing field for women in the industry. Additionally, in the U.S., there's been a strong push to promote women in STEM, both in education and the workforce, which benefits the printing industry. Many print education programs in the U.S., at both junior colleges and universities, have women making up half or more students. Supporting these programs is key to getting more women into the industry.

The challenge, however, is that while many women enter these programs, not all end up in the printing sector, as the skills they acquire are transferable to other manufacturing





industries. This highlights why initiatives like WPA are important. The print industry competes with other sectors for talented workers.

and the second is workforce development.

Another trend is the influence of the younger generation, particularly through social media. Many TikToks, for example, focus on unboxing and cool packaging, which has sparked interest in packaging as a part of the print industry. This trend, though small, contributes to the industry's modern appeal and could bring more women into the workforce.

While I don't have scientific data, I've observed that today's younger generation-high schoolers and people in their early 20s-are more focused on the esthetics and sustainability of packaging than past generations. This shift, combined with the industry's growing focus on sustainability, attracts more women to print sectors they hadn't considered before. The industry's image has changed; what was once seen as a "dirty" job is now regarded as high-tech and clean. I've even taken lawmakers into printing facilities, and they've been surprised by how modern and pristine they are. These advancements, particularly the growing interest in sustainability, are making the printing industry more appealing to younger women entering the workforce. Whether TikTok or influencers in the beauty industry unboxing products, packaging plays a big role in consumer choices. Luxury packaging, such as cosmetics or high-end hair products, is a major driver, drawing attention to printed products. I'm not suggesting that everyone should be an influencer, but their focus on packaging has made it more prominent, even subliminally.

For women studying print, the packaging side often feels glamorous. However, as they enter the industry, they might find their passion in other segments, such as wide-format print, out-of-home (OOH) advertising, or even direct mail. That's why initiatives like WPA are so important, as they showcase the diverse pathways within the print industry. Print touches everything. By exposing women to different

print verticals, we help them find their true passion within an industry they may not have initially considered. This variety keeps the industry dynamic and appealing to a wide range of people.

#### SMC: How can printing companies attract more women?

LLB: The key thing companies in the printing industry can do is continue promoting the narrative that their workplaces are welcoming and respectful and provide opportunities for women to grow and thrive. Women want the chance to succeed, and many companies say they value this, but there are still issues to address. For example, women in the industry often face microaggressions, like being overlooked in vendor interactions. At expos, for example, a female CEO might be ignored. At the same time, a male colleague is given attention, or women in sales are assumed to be there for administrative tasks instead of their expertise. These issues are not unique to the print industry but are prevalent across various sectors.

WPA works to raise awareness about these challenges, helping ensure the industry doesn't develop a reputation as outdated or closed-minded. By highlighting these issues, we hope to foster an environment where companies are seen as welcoming and offering opportunities for women.

Many printing companies are small-to medium-sized and lack dedicated diversity and inclusion roles. These alliances offer a turnkey solution for companies, providing professional development opportunities for their female employees. For example, a company can join the WPA, purchasing five seats for \$500. This allows their female employees to access professional development resources, such as learning to advocate for themselves, negotiate, create an executive presence on LinkedIn, and more. These opportunities help women feel more committed to their employer, benefiting both the women and the company.



#### SMC: What is unique about the WPA?

LLB: The WPA stands out due to its strong connection with PRINTING United Alliance, which allows us to access valuable resources and expertise. One of the key advantages of this partnership is having professional female staff advisors, like Onamica Dhar, an economist at PRINTING United Alliance. She volunteers her time to share insights on crucial industry trends such as artificial intelligence (AI), providing content and programming that benefits women in the print sector. This connection with PRINTING United Alliance also enhances our ability to offer advocacy support, especially in workforce development and legislation that benefits women in manufacturing, such as tax changes to support certifications and continuing education.

For members, the WPA provides a variety of benefits, including a free monthly newsletter and paid membership options that offer elevated networking opportunities, special events, and educational programming. For instance, our annual in-person event at PRINTING United has grown significantly, with a sold-out luncheon in 2022 and 2023,

attracting hundreds of women. We're also expanding to regional meetups to give women more opportunities to connect in person, especially those who cannot travel to larger events.

In addition to these in-person events, we offer virtual professional development workshops—our quarterly sessions, for example, cover topics such as imposter syndrome and intergenerational management. These workshops are live and then archived on our website for ongoing access. Our Q1 workshop will focus on managing different generations in the workplace, which is especially important as companies now often have four generations of employees. These resources provide ongoing professional development, helping our members grow in their careers while strengthening the print industry.

#### SMC: How important are these initiatives?

LLB: The concept of being "the only" in the workplace, like being the only woman on a sales team or the only female leader at the executive table, can be quite isolating. While women may have strong relationships with their male colleagues, there are unique aspects of the female experience that are important to address together. For instance, one professional coach I worked with called it "cuss and discuss," which captures the value of having a space where women can vent and problem-solve together. This is essential because there are aspects of work and life, such as the challenges that come with, say, menopause, that women may feel more comfortable discussing with other women who understand their experiences.

Having a forum to discuss issues with fellow women allows for support and understanding. Women-only spaces help provide solutions, empathy, and solidarity, especially for those who may feel alone in their work environment.

### SMC: Were there any resources or programs from the WPA this past year that particularly resonated with women?

LLB: The WPA events have been extremely popular, with women eager to connect in person. For example, in 2023, their event in Las Vegas, Nev., sold out with a waiting list. These in-person gatherings provide women with a chance to discuss relevant topics. Their virtual workshops, such as the O4 session on imposter syndrome and the O1 workshop on intergenerational management, also encourage networking and learning. The use of chat features during virtual workshops allowed for real-time interaction, further enhancing the community feel. Additionally, by offering free student memberships, the alliance fosters a welcoming space for the next generation of women entering the industry.

30 February 2025 • SIGN MEDIA CANADA www.signmedia.ca



## A sign suspended in light and innovation

#### By Amanda Charlebois

Photos courtesy Robert Blyth/Stalaich Installs Inc.

he grand opening of the FOUFOU food hall at Royalmount in Montreal, Que., was a milestone for real estate firm Carbonleo and the team behind the project. Designed by Lemay-Michaud and executed by Icubic, this undertaking showcased a blend of innovation and precision. Central to the project, which took place between June 2023 and August 2024, was the collaboration with Allanson International, whose lighting systems brought the vibrant signage to life.

#### A vision takes shape

The scope of the FOUFOU food hall project included a mix of exterior and interior signage. Installed by Stalaich Installs Inc., the most striking part of the project was a set of channel letters suspended at an angle on the ceiling, illuminated by red-green-blue (RGB) lighting.

Complementing this was another set of channel letters mounted on bars over the exterior entrance and wayfinding and menu signage throughout the venue. Icubic, known for tackling unique challenges, was tasked with developing and executing the signage and saw their ingenuity put to the test.

#### From design to fabrication

Lemay-Michaud crafted the project's visual identity, while Icubic, led by Jean-Philippe Dumontier, co-owner of the company, spearheaded the engineering and execution. Jean-Philippe's hands-on involvement was instrumental from the project's inception to completion. His ability to coordinate between design, fabrication, and installation ensured all parties worked harmoniously, overcoming challenges and delivering exceptional results.

The fabrication involved:

- Materials: 12-mm (0.5-in.) polyvinyl chloride (PVC), aluminum tubes and angles, 1.27-mm (0.050-in.) aluminum sheets, and 3/16 acrylic sheets.
- **Dimensions:** The largest pieces measured 7,468.7 mm x 3,099.6 mm (294 in. x 122 in.) overall, with individual "Fou" letters spanning 3,892 mm x 3,099.6 mm (153 in. x 122 in.), constructed in three segments each.

Icubic integrated Allanson's lighting systems to achieve dynamic illumination, making the signage a centrepiece.

The key components included are 318 active clustered RGB (ACL-RGB)-3-40 mods, 1 ACL-WIFI-103 controller,

are cut to precise dimensions for assembly. The RGB ighting modules are integrated into the channel letters. The vibrant RGB ighting is tested, oringing the FOUFOU signage to life.



5 ACV125-120-277 power supplies (AC Voltage), and 5 ACL-3063-3A signal amplifiers.

The ACL-WIFI-103 controller, with Service Set Identifier (SSID) password protection, ensured seamless operation and secure access to the lighting controls. This advanced technology was vital in achieving the desired colour transitions and brightness levels.

#### The challenges

Every project comes with its challenges, and FOUFOU was no exception. According to Robert Blyth of Stàlaich Installs, the team faced several hurdles:

- **Fabrication:** Extended finishing times impacted timelines for other ongoing projects.
- Installation complexity: Positioning the ceilingmounted letters required precise co-ordination, especially over a mechanical escalator. The uneven ceiling led to gaps that needed to be filled by professional caulking teams.
- Weight and scale: With letters measuring up to 3.04 m (10 ft) in height and up to 1.5 m (5 ft)



deep, installation demanded meticulous planning. "It was like orchestrating a symphony," Blyth explained. The team used skyjacks, plumb lasers, and ground support to align rods with ceiling points before gradually hoisting and securing the letters.

#### A showcase of ingenuity

The final stage involved connecting LED wires through each letter to a master access point in the ceiling. This intricate wiring ensured uniform lighting and smooth operation across all signage. Despite the challenges, the result was nothing short of spectacular.

Reflecting on the project, Mr. Dumontier noted, "This was one of our most challenging yet rewarding projects. Seeing the FOUFOU signage illuminate the space was a proud moment for our team. It has also been an excellent marketing opportunity, showcasing our ability to execute large-scale, complex installations."

#### A bright future

The FOUFOU food hall signage is a testament to the power of collaboration and cutting-edge technology. Allanson's lighting solutions and Icubic's expertise transformed a design vision into a radiant reality. This project not only enhances the Royalmount experience but also sets a benchmark for innovation in architectural signage.

The project received the following accolades at the annual AOIE Soirée Reconnaissance Awards: Installation Project of the Year, awarded to Stalaich Installs Inc., owned by Robert Blyth; Unique Sign of the Year; Coup de Coeur (a favourite); and Best Sign of the Evening (People's Choice) was awarded to Mr. Dumontier and the Icubic team.

Amanda Charlebois is the senior marketing manager at Allanson International Inc., a company with nearly a century of innovation in lighting solutions. With a deep-rooted passion for the lighting industry, Charlebois is dedicated to promoting high-quality products that illuminate spaces and enhance environments. Her role allows her to blend industry expertise with genuine enthusiasm, working alongside a talented team committed to delivering excellence



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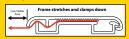


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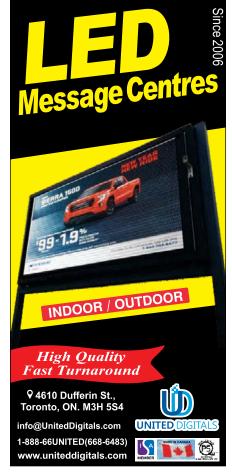
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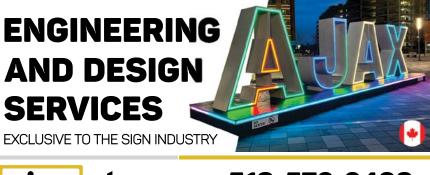
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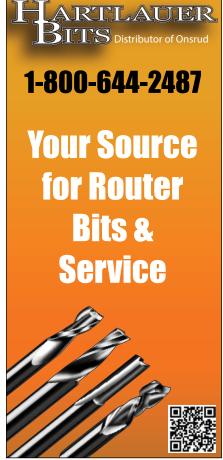






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# See the lights, see the party

even illuminated marquee letters spelling out "SWIFTIE" were installed near John St. and Richmond St. in Toronto. Ontario-based designer and manufacturer POP Marquee installed the letters for The Fifth Social Club Toronto's outdoor space at RendezViews.

POP Marquee's in-house fabrication team made each letter from aluminium composite. Designed for outdoor use, they use a proprietary method to deflect the weather. Each letter stood at 1.82 m (6 ft) and was lined with programmable red-green-blue (RGB) bulbs. The entire sign lit up red—the namesake of Swift's fourth studio album, and the lights were remote-controlled via light strings placed at the front of the panel.

"The client wanted a giant SWIFTIE marquee display; we suggested adding one of our pink Christmas trees. We worked collaboratively with their marketing team to develop a Swiftmas tree giveaway, and we donated the tree as a prize," says Richard Cowan, founder of POP Marquee, who delivered and assembled the letters on-site.

The installation process took two people less than two hours to install. Since the client wanted the sign mounted on top of a sea container facing Richmond St., the letters were secured using custom pallets alongside additional tethering and concrete weights.

POP Marquee also provided a stacked "SHAKE IT OFF" 0.9-m (3-ft) sign in RGB LED marquee letters for the client.

- Farheen Sikandar

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