Few designers have the opportunity to design systems as uniquely diverse as their world audiences but even fewer designers are considering the uniqueness of regional audiences.

hidden shaka

JESSICA RING
Assistant Professor, Graphic Design
Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

My first trip to Zihuatanejo was wonderfully magical. There was a feeling about the place that I had not experienced elsewhere. Although I find it hard to describe, much of the allure came from the sense of discovery that was satisfyingly foreshadowed. Many of the visual clues were different than what I typically use in my day-to-day encounters. Instead of looking at a map or for a sign, I stumbled upon the best, most secluded beaches and wooded hideaways by constantly scanning my surroundings for clues of care alongside the past or small trailing paths, some of which were quite treacherous. These were signs that would not mean much at home, but here led to little wonderlands. That sensation of traversing the unknown and ending up in my own secret gem of a paradise seemed to make the place so special. It was also a bit of an adventure, as though I wasn’t supposed to be there since there were no official postings marking these marvelous locations.

I recently returned, after a six-year absence, to find that some of the magic had dwindled, it wasn’t that I was not overly familiar with the place. Rather, the place was more familiar to the general public. Signs appeared where none had been previously. Guidebooks and maps pointed out all of the formerly veiled locations. It no longer felt like perhaps a couple of other lucky adventurers. Instead, my previously private sanctuary were clearly identifiable and sprinkled with tourists. I realized that although, in my typical life I wholeheartedly appreciate intrinsically the detailed wayfinding systems of transit systems and museums, I was delighted that the visual clues are not so clear. A place where the history of the place and the landscape itself is that the maps and signs exist in the memory of the earth and the locals who pass along with the odd visitor to follow literally in their footsteps. Perhaps it is human nature to love design, when we should simply let nature design.