

Front Door



Front doors are an apt place to begin this exploration of private spaces, as they indicate the access point of enclosed spaces. Represented in many forms, they signify our needs for privacy and security, whilst assisting in ventilation, admittance of light and barriers against unwanted environmental factors, such as noise.

The significance of the front door to many people with cognitive and sensory impairments predominately lies in its identity; it has to be recognisable with a clear understanding of the transition from one realm to another.

The information listed below discusses several factors that contribute to understanding thresholds from the perspective of those with cognitive and sensory impairments.

■ What are your first impressions?

Important doors create an impression of what lies beyond; therefore, as a significant cue it is valuable for the door to create a comprehensive first impression for someone with cognitive impairments. In order for a door to be an effective indicator it has to be identifiable, this may be through the use of a particular style (usually one that is distinctive or is familiar), familiar fittings or personal objects (plant by the door) or colour. The photo above was taken from the case study, Croftspar Place, here they use the colour yellow to signify the main threshold and staff block.

Think about the door to your house, how does it differ from others, name plate, colour, fittings, objects?

■ Is it easily distinguished from other doors?



As previously discussed, doors represent the transition from one place to another. In order to correctly identify which door represents personal space behind it has to have some features that are familiar to the individual.

The adjacent photo (Croftspar Place) illustrates how colour and contrast can distinguish between several doors. Individuals recognise that they live behind a certain colour. As the eye ages many people suffer from Colour Agnosia, a condition that reduces colour sensitivity principally caused by the yellowing of the lens. Strong colours in combinations of reds, oranges and yellows are the easiest, with blues, violets and greens the hardest. Strong colours are more successful over pastel or

muted colours on a background that contrasts the important elements, such as that shown in photograph above.

■ What might it remind you of?



The style of the door can indicate the nature of the threshold, whether formal or informal. What type of building do you think the adjacent photograph indicates? What contributes to your observations? If residential how is the atmosphere created?

A canopy or partition walls can help create a comfortable and sheltered entrance, as well as emphasising the primary entrance from a greater distance, helping in orientation. A canopy in a distinctive style (as shown adjacent) is memorable and creates an individual place. Familiar furniture in the form of a wooden bench and potted plants create a welcoming entrance whilst maintaining a sense of formality.

■ Do you know where it leads?

Additional cues that clarify where the door leads can be valuable, this might include the use of windows, either set as a panel within the door or adjacent. This allows the individual to recognise the space beyond before committing to entering.

■ How does it make you feel, relaxed and welcome?

The main entrance into a space can be daunting if you do not know where you are and what to expect, this vulnerability creates an opportune moment to establish a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere to set a non-threatening tone to the spaces beyond. Main entrances can be lively and active social spaces where people are coming and going, this creates an opportunity to welcome and interact with individuals. This can re-orientate individuals and introduce them to the layout of the building.

■ Do you know how to behave?

‘Thresholds are the “lines” or “realms” that distinguish one space and way of being/acting/behaving from another’.ⁱ

When these areas of transition are uncertain or vague the understanding of appropriate behaviour is also unclear. Ways of creating a distinctive architectural change of transition might include differences of ‘detail, material, scale, volume, light texture, rhythm or opacity’.ⁱⁱ

■ Do you ring a bell, knock, or use your own set of keys?

As memory can be significantly affected with a decline of cognitive functions it is important that support in accessing locked doors is made available to

reinforce maintaining skills. Suggestions in regulating access include; making one master key for all locks, use of a locked key holder accessed with pin number, multiple keys left with reliable neighbours/family, keys easily identifiable (giant key or keys attached to a large colour block) and kept in a regular location e.g. allocated key hook.

- What happens when you express your intention?



If the action to enter the building is via a bell or knocker it can be useful if there is a sound that alerts you that your request has been made, and that a response is quick and clear.

- What is the expected response?
- Are you able to express your intention?
- Can you see / hear / touch the bell, knocker, or handle?

As this project aims to focus primarily on cognitive/sensory impairments it is presumed that physical accessibility issues have been addressed. The importance of creating a space that is understood is the core focus; this can be difficult, as it will vary from person to person. It is therefore important for each designer to consider what styles of fittings and fixtures will be most easily understood, this includes items such as the doorbell, handle, knocker, all of which should be accessible and as easy to use as possible.

- Might it be a good place to sit, pause and get your bearings?



A common problem with diminishing visual acuity is the lens of the eyes ability to adjust to changes of light intensities, often experienced when moving from area to area such as outdoors to indoors. This transition can lead to a sense of disorientation and balance and can cause confusion.

Creating an opportunity to sit whilst this transition occurs can be greatly beneficial, as shown in photograph adjacent (Tor Nursing Home).

ⁱ Brummett, W. *The Essence of Home: design solutions for assisted living housing*. p61

ⁱⁱ As above