

Synthesis Of Art Deco and Sundanese Script Visual Identities in Asia Afrika Signage

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Abstract:

The Asia Afrika area in Bandung is a heritage district characterized by strong Art Deco architectural features and high historical value as a heritage tourism destination. Within this context, signage functions not only as a medium for information and spatial orientation but also as an element that contributes to spatial experience and place identity through Experiential Graphic Design (EGD). This study analyzes the visual and physical condition of signage in the Asia Afrika and Braga corridors and examines how Art Deco visual characteristics and Sundanese script may be positioned within a contextual heritage signage system. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed through visual observation, photographic documentation, and literature review. The documented signage was examined across three analytical parameters: legibility, visual consistency, and contextual appropriateness. The analysis identifies reduced legibility associated with material degradation and small text, inconsistency across signage categories, and limited use of Sundanese script beyond street-name identification. Rather than treating Art Deco and Sundanese script as decorative additions, the study proposes a dual-identity signage approach in which historical architectural character and local cultural identity are coordinated within a unified EGD system. The contribution of the study lies in operationalizing these three evaluation parameters as a contextual basis for assessing and developing signage in an urban heritage environment.

Introduction

The Asia Afrika area in Bandung is a heritage tourism destination with high historical value as the site of the Asian–African Conference and as one of the centers of Art Deco architectural development in Indonesia. Historic-city and place-identity studies highlight the relationship between the built environment and visitors' experience (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Relph, 1976). In the context of heritage tourism, a signage system plays a vital role not only as a medium for information and spatial orientation but also as an element that shapes the sense of place by connecting visitors with the historical memory of the area. According to Calori and Vanden-Eynden (2015), Experiential Graphic Design (EGD) is a field that involves the use of typography, color, imagery, form, and technology to communicate information within the built environment in order to create a cohesive narrative. Urban imageability depends in part on recognizable elements that help people form a mental representation of the city (Lynch, 1960). In heritage tourism, interpretation similarly connects the significance of historic places with the visitor experience (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

However, field observations indicate a significant gap between the image of the area as a historical conservation zone and the visual condition of the existing signage system. The main problems identified include physical material degradation and visual style inconsistency. For example, historical

information boards installed on heritage buildings, such as Maison Bogerijen, show severe material deterioration that significantly reduces legibility. This condition limits the effectiveness of historical information delivery to visitors. The observed deterioration is documented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Physical condition of historical information signage showing material degradation and reduced legibility.

In addition to physical problems, inconsistencies are also found in the application of visual identity. As illustrated by the orientation map in Figure 2, the existing wayfinding uses a modern-generic visual style that is disconnected from the surrounding Art Deco architectural context. In contrast, the Art Deco style (Solikhah, 2024), which was popular during the 1920s and 1930s, is characterized by strong geometric forms, bold lines, symmetrical compositions, and elegant sans-serif letterforms. These visual characteristics have the potential to be adopted into environmental graphic elements to strengthen the visual identity of the area. Art Deco elements also appear in contemporary Bandung interiors; Febrian and Widia (2025), for example, documented geometric and ornamental applications in the lobby of *él Hotel Royale Bandung*. This interior-design example provides local stylistic context rather than direct evidence about signage performance.



Figure 2. Existing orientation map design with a modern-generic style that does not reflect the historical character of the area.

Furthermore, the application of Sundanese script as a representation of local identity has not been optimal. West Java Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2003, as amended by Regional Regulation No. 14 of 2014, provides a legal framework for the preservation of regional languages, literature, and scripts (Pemerintah Provinsi Jawa Barat, 2014). However, its implementation in signage within the Asia Afrika area remains subordinate and inconsistent; it appears only on street name signs but is absent from other informational media. In the context of Experiential Graphic Design, vernacular or local typography can strengthen regional identity (*local genius*) in public spaces. The street-name sign with Sundanese script is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Application of Sundanese script on street name signage, but not consistently implemented on other signage elements.

Previous studies offer complementary perspectives on signage and the built environment. Ar Razi and Lestari (2021) evaluated the user experience of Bandung public-transport stop signage, while Nugroho et al. (2024) developed a wayfinding signage system for Bandung Techno Park using an Environmental Graphic Design approach. Architectural research by Solikhah (2024) traces the development of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne in Bandung. These studies inform the functional and architectural context, but they do not directly establish a unified signage framework combining Art Deco visual characteristics and Sundanese script in the Asia Afrika heritage area. This is the specific design problem examined here.

Accordingly, the central argument of this study is that the problem of signage in the Asia Afrika heritage area should not be reduced to isolated issues of physical maintenance or stylistic inconsistency. It is also a problem of visual coherence between informational function, historical architectural character, and local cultural identity. The proposed contribution is therefore not simply the simultaneous use of Art Deco forms and Sundanese script, but a dual-identity signage approach that positions both as coordinated components within an Experiential Graphic Design framework. In

this sense, Art Deco provides a visual relationship with the built heritage context, while Sundanese script provides a local cultural marker that can strengthen place specificity when applied systematically.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the visual effectiveness of the existing signage system in the Asia Afrika and Braga corridors through the parameters of legibility, consistency, and contextual appropriateness, and to formulate design recommendations derived from those findings. The study therefore asks how the existing signage performs across these three parameters and how the relationship between Art Deco visual characteristics and Sundanese script can be translated into a more coherent heritage signage strategy. The study does not attempt to test visitor preference or behavioral response; its analytical scope is focused on the visual-design characteristics of the documented signage and their relationship to the heritage environment.

Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to provide a factual description of visual signage phenomena in a heritage area without manipulating the research objects. This method was chosen because it is relevant to the objective of interpreting the meaning and condition of design artifacts within their natural environmental context.

The research location is focused on the Asia Afrika Street and Braga Street corridors in Bandung. This area was selected because of its significance as a conservation zone associated with Art Deco architectural heritage and as a major heritage tourism destination (Sulistiawan et al., 2023; Solikhah, 2024). The analytical objects are Environmental Graphic Design elements grouped into three categories represented in the field documentation: (1) identification signs, including building and street identity markers; (2) information and interpretive signs, including orientation maps and historical information boards; and (3) directional signs or wayfinding signage. The scope is therefore limited to these documented sign categories and does not claim to represent every regulatory or commercial sign in the area.

The study drew on three complementary sources of evidence:

1. **Visual Observation.** Visual observation was conducted to examine physical aspects (materials and dimensions), visual aspects (typography, color, and composition), and environmental aspects such as visual clutter.
2. **Photographic Documentation.** Photographic documentation was carried out using long-shot images to capture environmental context and close-up images to record typographic details and material deterioration.
3. **Literature Review.** Literature review was conducted to examine theories of Experiential Graphic Design, the history of Art Deco typography in Bandung, and standard guidelines for Sundanese script.

The data were analyzed through a structured visual-analysis procedure. First, the photographic documentation was inventoried and assigned to the three signage categories defined above. Second, each documented sign was examined using observable visual evidence, including typographic size and hierarchy, color contrast, material condition, composition, visual style, use of Sundanese script, and relationship to the surrounding architectural context. Third, these observations were interpreted through three evaluation parameters derived from wayfinding and Experiential Graphic Design principles: legibility, consistency, and contextual appropriateness (Calori & Vanden-Eynden, 2015; Gibson, 2009; Mollerup, 2013). This procedure was used to reduce reliance on general impressions by requiring every evaluative statement to be connected to a visible feature in the documented signage.



The three evaluation parameters were operationalized as follows:

1. Legibility refers to the extent to which information can be visually accessed through text size, typographic hierarchy, color contrast, material condition, and the likely reading distance of a pedestrian viewer.
2. Consistency refers to the degree of visual continuity across signage categories, including the repeated or divergent use of typography, color, form, composition, and local-script treatment within the overall signage system.
3. Contextual appropriateness refers to the relationship between signage and the heritage environment, including whether its visual language supports or conflicts with the Art Deco architectural character and whether local cultural identity is represented coherently through Sundanese script.

These parameters function as analytical lenses rather than quantitative performance scores. The study therefore evaluates visual evidence comparatively across the documented signs and uses the results to formulate design implications. Because the study does not include interviews, questionnaires, or behavioral testing, claims regarding visitor preference, comprehension, or usability are treated as outside the scope of the present analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Evaluation of existing signage against three visual-design parameters. Source: Visual analysis of documented signage in this study.

Evaluation Aspect	Theoretical Reference	Existing Condition	Findings	Implications
Legibility	Gibson (2009)	Text size is relatively small and color contrast is low on historical information boards	Information is difficult to read at normal pedestrian distances	Reduces effectiveness of information delivery
Consistency	Calori & Vanden-Eynden (2015)	Visual styles vary between orientation maps, information boards, and directional signage	Visual identity of the area is not consistently formed	A unified signage design system is required
Contextual appropriateness	Australia ICOMOS (2013)	Signage design uses a modern-generic style that does not reflect the Art Deco architectural character	Signage is not visually integrated with the heritage environment	Weakens the visual identity of the heritage area

Table 1 summarizes the three analytical parameters and their principal implications. The photographic evidence indicates that the problems observed in the area are interconnected: material condition affects legibility; differences in graphic treatment weaken consistency across sign categories; and generic or visually contrasting forms reduce contextual integration with the heritage environment. The following analysis is therefore organized according to the same three parameters established in the Methods section.

Legibility of the Existing Signage System

The historical information boards provide the clearest evidence of a legibility problem. Peeling surfaces and faded color reduce figure-ground contrast, while relatively small text creates a dense information field that is difficult to access from a normal pedestrian position. In this case, material degradation is not merely a maintenance issue; it directly interferes with the informational function of the sign. The same evidence also shows that legibility depends on the relationship between physical condition, typographic scale, contrast, and viewing context rather than on typography alone. Figure 1 shows the deterioration discussed in this assessment.



Figure 4. Vertical signage placement that is visually inconsistent with the surrounding classical architectural elements.

Visual Consistency across Signage Categories

The orientation map, identification signs, and other vertical signage do not display a stable visual grammar. The orientation map (Figure 2) uses a modern-minimalist treatment dominated by black and yellow, while the street-name sign (Figure 3) employs a different decorative form and includes Sundanese script. The vertical “Smoking Area” sign (Figure 4) introduces another visual language through its elongated format and high-contrast red field. When these elements are read as parts of one environmental graphic system, their typography, color, form, and compositional logic appear unrelated. The issue is therefore not that every sign must look identical, but that the documented signs do not demonstrate sufficient visual continuity to be perceived as parts of a coordinated heritage signage system.

Contextual Appropriateness and Local Identity

Contextual appropriateness concerns both the relationship with the Art Deco built environment and the representation of local cultural identity. The documented orientation map and newly installed vertical signage use forms that are visually generic or strongly contrasting in relation to the surrounding heritage architecture. At the same time, Sundanese script appears on the street-name sign (Figure 3) but is absent from the orientation map and historical information boards. This selective use makes the script function as an isolated marker rather than as a consistent component of the signage system. The evidence therefore points to an imbalance: the area has recognizable historical and local identity resources, but these resources are not yet coordinated across the documented sign categories.

Cross-cutting Observation: Visual Clutter

Visual clutter reinforces the three problems above because contrasting shapes, colors, and sign formats compete for attention within the same pedestrian field. The issue is not simply the presence of multiple signs, but the absence of a clear hierarchy and shared visual logic among them. In a heritage environment, such competition can weaken both information prioritization and the visual continuity between signage and architecture. This observation supports the need for a system-level design guideline rather than isolated redesigns of individual signs.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the primary problem of the Asia Afrika signage system is systemic rather than purely cosmetic. Legibility, consistency, and contextual appropriateness operate simultaneously: a sign may contain correct information but still fail as an environmental graphic element when material degradation, typographic hierarchy, graphic inconsistency, or weak contextual relation disrupts its communication. This interpretation extends the analysis beyond the description of damaged or visually different signs and positions signage as part of the spatial experience of a heritage district. Research on cultural-tourism experience design has likewise described how activities and encounters with local heritage can be organized as an interpretive visitor journey (Sudhiastiningsih, 2016). Although conducted in another Indonesian setting, that work provides a conceptual comparison rather than evidence about visitor behavior in the Asia Afrika corridors.

From the perspective of legibility, the deteriorated historical information board demonstrates how material condition and graphic organization jointly affect access to information. Gibson (2009) emphasizes the importance of rapid recognition in wayfinding, while the present evidence shows that recognition can be compromised before content is interpreted, because fading, small text, and dense composition reduce visual accessibility. Consequently, maintenance standards should be treated as part of communication design rather than as a separate technical issue.

The consistency problem is equally important because the documented signs employ different graphic languages without an evident system of coordination. In Experiential Graphic Design, consistency does not require uniform repetition; it requires enough continuity in typography, color, form, hierarchy, and placement for users to recognize related elements as belonging to one

information environment (Calori & Vanden-Eynden, 2015). The contrasting examples in Figures 2–4 therefore indicate a gap between the presence of individual signs and the formation of a coherent signage identity. This gap explains why replacing individual signs without a shared design logic would be insufficient.

Contextual appropriateness introduces a second layer of identity. The heritage setting is strongly associated with Art Deco architecture, while Sundanese script represents a local cultural resource that is already visible in selected street-name signage. The analytical implication is that these two identities should not be treated as competing styles or as decorative motifs to be combined indiscriminately. Art Deco-derived geometric structure, proportion, and typographic character can establish continuity with the historical built environment, while Sundanese script can operate as a culturally specific layer within the information hierarchy. Their synthesis is therefore most defensible when governed by functional hierarchy, legibility, and consistent placement rather than by visual ornamentation alone.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a dual-identity signage approach with three design principles. First, functional clarity remains primary: Latin-script information, symbols, contrast, and scale must support immediate orientation and reading. Second, historical contextuality should be expressed through controlled Art Deco-derived visual characteristics rather than literal stylistic imitation. Third, local cultural identity should be incorporated through a consistent and legible role for Sundanese script across relevant signage categories. This proposition is consistent with a conservation approach that considers cultural significance in the management of heritage places (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). The contribution is therefore a contextual design proposition within EGD rather than a claim to a new universal theory. The study is also limited by its visual-documentation method: it does not establish the installation chronology of every sign or measure user responses through interviews, questionnaires, or behavioral testing. These issues can be examined in subsequent research.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the signage system in the Asia Afrika and Braga heritage corridors does not yet operate as a visually coherent environmental graphic system. The analysis across three parameters identifies interconnected weaknesses: legibility is reduced by material degradation and limited typographic accessibility; consistency is weakened by divergent visual languages across signage categories; and contextual appropriateness is reduced by the limited relationship between generic signage forms, Art Deco architectural character, and the selective use of Sundanese script.

Accordingly, future design intervention should prioritize a system-level guideline rather than the isolated redesign of individual signs. Such a guideline should establish minimum requirements for legibility and durable materials, define a coordinated graphic language derived selectively from Art Deco characteristics, and specify a consistent hierarchical role for Sundanese script alongside Latin characters. These recommendations are derived from the visual evidence analyzed in this study and should be tested further through user-oriented evaluation before implementation.

The scholarly contribution of the study is the formulation of a dual-identity signage approach in which historical architectural identity and local cultural identity are coordinated through the EGD parameters of legibility, consistency, and contextual appropriateness. The approach reframes the synthesis of Art Deco and Sundanese script from a stylistic combination into a structured design relationship between information function, heritage context, and local identity.

Within the limits of a descriptive visual study, this approach offers a contextual basis for developing heritage signage in the Asia Afrika area and may provide a comparative reference for other urban heritage environments in Indonesia. Its transferability, however, should be evaluated against the specific historical, cultural, architectural, and user conditions of each location rather than assumed as a universal model.



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