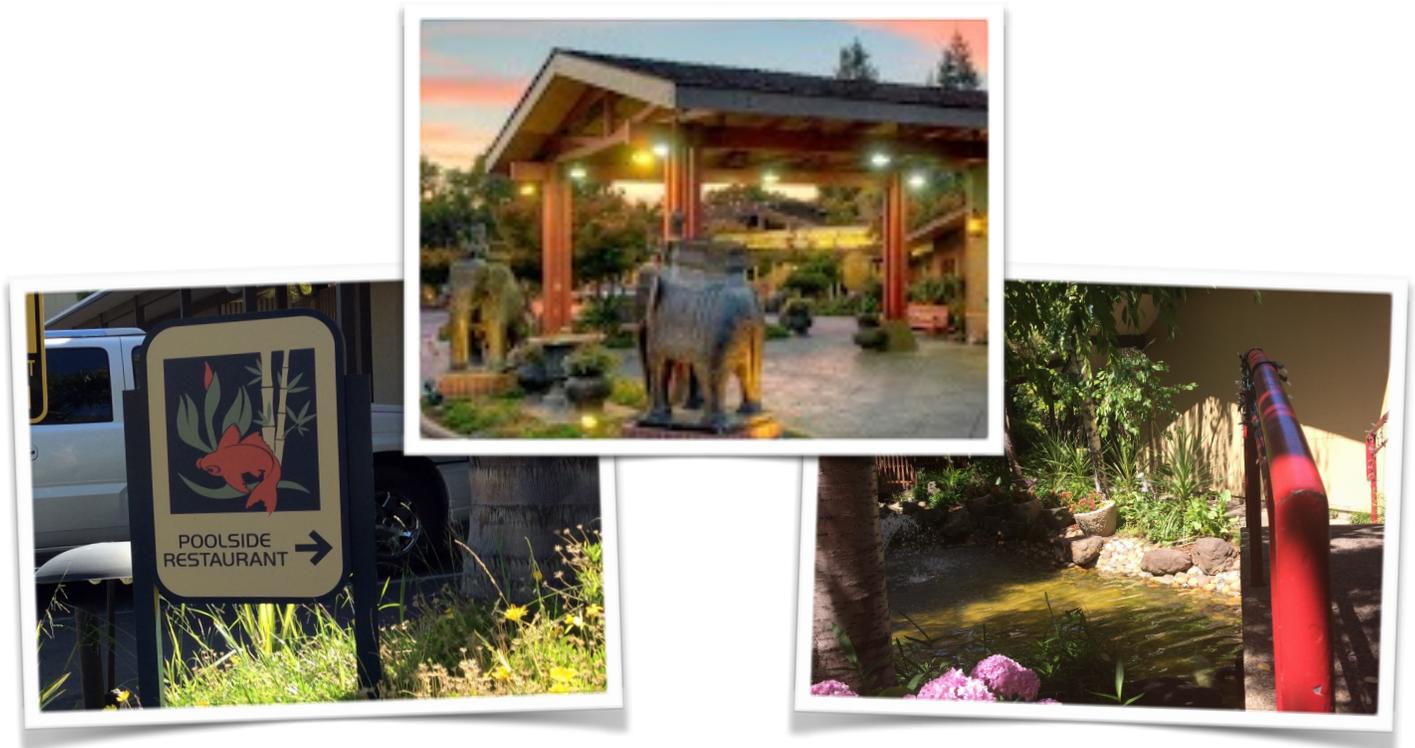


# Dinah's Garden Hotel



## Accessible Identification and Wayfinding Proposal

Sharon Toji

# Dinah's Garden Hotel



**First Impressions:** Upon driving onto the property, the first impression is how different and charming the layout of the hotel is, compared to the usual motel-like structure one encounters. You immediately look forward to exploring what might be around the corner. However, if you are in a wheelchair or have difficulty with some kinds of pathways, you might also wonder if you will be able to get around as easily as it seems when you first glimpse the lobby building. Experience says that there could be obstacles ahead!

There is accessible parking right next to the lobby building, but the parking signs are not up to date, and need to be brought into legal compliance. Although that doesn't really affect the usability of the spaces, it's good practice to "cross the t's and dot the i's" to avoid potential lawsuits. Be sure that the towaway signs at the entrances to the parking lots are also correct and up to date. That means it's best to use white



signs with black characters for the towaway signs and fill in the information on how to retrieve a towed car. Otherwise, the general public is apt to ignore the sign if it is blue and white, expecting that it has information for those who are disabled. Obviously, it is a regulatory sign that must be observed by those who do not have a disabled access placard. The State Board that deals with disabled access and keeps track of lawsuits puts incorrect or missing parking signs among the top ten reasons for legal complaints and lawsuits in California dealing with disabled access!

Looking at some other parking spaces around the hotel site, we would recommend placing site maps at several of these locations. The site map near Building 300 is fairly easy to read. It can be enhanced by including a few indicators useful to persons who use wheelchairs. For instance, accessible public restrooms could be labeled with the wheelchair symbol. The elevator locations can be noted. A sign like that would be particularly appropriate near the entrance to Buildings 600 A and B, since that is where the accessible parking is located.



Another problem with the wayfinding signs that are strategically scattered around the site is that there is a regulation stating that no text shall be less than 40 inches above the ground or finish floor. Because of the many trees and shrubs around the area, it would be difficult to place every sign at eye level. However, as many as possible should be raised to a height where they can't be easily obscured, especially by vehicles parked in front of the signs. Certainly specific directional information should be large enough to

see from a distance and be located at a reasonable height about the

ground. Otherwise, it is useless. Many of those low add-on directionals identify the room numbers of buildings. The extremely unorthodox and illogical numbering scheme of the 600 buildings particularly makes the information on these signs especially vital, so they need to be displayed where they are highly visible.



In addition, directional signs installed above eye level need to have larger characters so they can be seen from further away, and also need to have adequate space between the lines of type and the characters. Otherwise, the characters may blur together for people with limited but usable vision. We recommend that after the room identification signs have been replaced and some paths have been upgraded for accessibility, a plan be prepared for how best to guide people around the campus. Some of the signs already in place can be utilized, but strategic changes and additions should be planned.

**Design Considerations:** Neither the ADA nor Title 24 are concerned with aesthetic design considerations. However, it is always true that less cluttered environments are easier for people to deal with and that is especially true of people who have sensory based disabilities. The basic aesthetic of the large building identification signs at the hotel is not only visually pleasing, but the signs are also easy to read with reasonable dark on light contrast and non-glare surfaces. A few of the characters in the typeface might be considered a bit decorative in nature, particularly “L,” but the signs are still readable so we don’t think a change is necessary. The danger, however, is that clutter may take over as more and more elements are added to the sign program.



That is especially true of the rooms that have special themes and names. Having a clutter of signs around every room does not enhance the property or reflect the peaceful atmosphere of the water

features and unexpected artworks.

Another issue is that, in what we see as an ill-advised attempt to carry the logo color scheme throughout, the building wall signs have a rather garish scheme that also fails in compliance due to lack of

contrast. In addition, a secondary typestyle is used that is too condensed to be legal, and some of the type is much smaller than 5/8 inch, which is the allowed minimum. These signs need to be completely replaced. Since they deal with room identification, we will plan to present designs for these signs in the first phase.



Although the door number signs are obviously not legally compliant, they can be left in place as long as legal signs are provided adjacent to the doors. However, it does seem as if this is going to add more clutter, and eventually, when it is time to repaint the doors, it might be well to just remove them.

## **A Building by Building Tour**

**Lobby/Reception Building:** The Lobby/Reception Building is spacious and fairly easy to navigate. However, it's difficult for someone who is either short or in a wheelchair to get attention because of the counter height. When a correct counter is added, make sure that

if it is not visually obvious when you enter, that a sign with a wheelchair symbol (ISA or International Symbol of Accessibility) directs to the accessible counter.

The Conference Room is evidently sometimes used by guests. However, as long as the practice is to inform everyone of the location and guide anyone who wishes assistance, a sign is optional. The general rule, except for restrooms, marked exit doors and already numbered or named rooms and spaces, is that tactile signs must only be provided to accompany existing visual identification signs. However, the local fire departments have been increasingly strict about identifying all rooms and spaces for security purposes. Certainly, electrical and mechanical rooms must always be identified for the convenience of the Fire Department during an emergency. It doesn't hurt to inquire.

At this time, there don't appear to be any signs for the offices. Those are not required. However, restrooms, even when for employees only, do need signs, unless they are executive restrooms used solely by the occupant of the office where they are located. Both exit doors will require tactile exit signs, and if the entrances are accessible, they will need International Symbols of Accessibility. The building does not appear to be identified in any way, although its prominence speaks for itself. If desired, a tactile sign could be placed adjacent to the entrance doors, perhaps most importantly at the rear door.

**Poolside Restaurant:** Other than a small inside dining area and a couple of private dining rooms, the enclosed facility is used mostly by employees to prepare and pick up food. However, the law in California does require that work spaces be accessible. Therefore, we assume that a few tactile exit signs may be required, and if there are

employee restrooms or lockers, those will need signs. The outside dining area doesn't need signs, and the informational signs on the gate should continue to use non-glare materials. Be sure that high dark to light contrast for text and background is preserved. As we continue with the exterior wayfinding phase, we can look at those signs a second time, and make sure they are highly readable.



**Building 100:** This building houses the Fitness Center, so is an important destination. Any informational signs within the Fitness



Center should be reviewed, even if they are temporary printed signs, to be sure they follow standards for non-glare surfaces and high dark and light contrast. It appears that there may be two exits, so those doors need tactile exit signs. Since we don't have floor plans with detail, we aren't sure if there is a restroom within the Fitness Center. If so, it will need a sign.

On the exterior, since the Fitness Center is identified, it needs a tactile sign. The "Hours" may need to be larger, and need to be measured to be sure they are 40 inches above the ground. Although the current visual "Fitness Center" sign is attractive and easy to read, adding a tactile sign to the group will look very cluttered, so perhaps the design can be repeated with changes to add the required tactile text.

**Building 200:** Building 200 isn't remarkable in any way. There are no "named suites" so the room identification signs can use the most simple design.



**Building 300:** Building 300 is unique only in that it houses the laundry, so that sign needs to

incorporate braille and raised characters, and the hours need to be larger and easier to read with better inter character spacing.



There does appear to be one special named suite on the second floor, which requires one of the slightly larger room ID signs with the suite name added, if that design is chosen. The walkway on one side of Building 300 leads to the lobby and the Poolside Restaurant, whereas on the other side, you can reach the various water features.

**Building 400:**

Building 400 is the first



of the one

story buildings, and is made up of special named suites. Thanks to having only one story, even the room numbering makes sense, but with only four suites and a utility room, and its position right at the edge of the access road, it certainly presents no problems.

**Building 500:** Building 500 is the second small unit with only one story. The major signage complication is presented with the presence



of the FDR Suite at the end of the unit. The FDR Suite (506) is entered through a common foyer with suite 505, so the hallway signs are confusing, and the confusion is compounded by the presence of a plant that obscures the name of the suite. The large brass numbers on the door were meant, I believe, to express the importance that the family gave to the suite, named to honor FDR even though he never stayed there. However, at this point, the effect is just overwhelming, rather than impressive. As a person who shares in the admiration of FDR, I will make sure we do our best to propose some changes for this unit signage that might make it less confusing, and at the same time make the name of the suite more visible.

**Buildings 600A, 600B and 600C:** As someone who is very conscious of the need to make facilities easy for wayfinding not just by guests of various abilities and disabilities, but also by emergency personnel should someone need emergency assistance for something like a heart attack, or an emergency arise requiring the presence of first responders or a swat team, I believe these three buildings present the greatest argument for renumbering. All numbering convention has been abandoned here! That said, the only other course if these numbers are to be retained is to try to make the wayfinding signage as readable as possible, and place it in the most logical locations.

Aside from the problematic scheme, there are at least three rooms that appear to deviate from the progression of numbers that has been established. We need to establish if these are deliberate, or if they are errors. In 600A, on the second floor, the odd numbered rooms are 611, 613, 617, 619. Why is 615 skipped, since floors 1 and 3 numbers are 605 and 625, and then 607 and 627? In 600C, the progression on

the even side is 682 and 686 on Floor 3, and 672 and 676 on Floor 2, but 662 and 669 (an odd number) on Floor 1.



There are a number of large floor and room directories at the two elevators that need to be redesigned. They are so crowded with information, that I doubt that most people really look closely at them. The unorthodox numbering is what triggers the necessity of so many extra signs in this area. With a more logical system, where each floor would have a sequence starting with the floor number, not only would emergencies be handled more quickly, but many fewer signs would be required.

Another major problem is accessibility, since the elevator that provides the closest access to the upper floors of Building 600A appears to be reachable only by steps. There is no direction to an accessible path of travel. I believe it is going to be vital to come up with some kind of wayfinding map for this area. It is not practical, particularly since the doors are very heavy, to have to enter 600B and proceed all the way to the rear and out the door to reach an easily accessible elevator.



If we take a closer look at this building sign, we can see that the room numbers for the first floor of 600C are included on the sign, but are too low and too small to really have much effect. Unfortunately, these signs were designed and placed without observing the ADA and Title 24 regulations for wayfinding signs.



The major entrance to the 600 building complex between 600A and 600B appears to be inaccessible to anyone with a mobility problem, due to the steps that approach the elevator. Without directional signs, you have no clue that if you wind around behind the structure you can get to the elevator and save many steps if you need to go upstairs in 600A or 600B.

Ironically, although this is the least accessible entrance to the complex, the accessible parking is placed here, and I understand that this is where tour busses unload, which might bring individuals who need access.



If we proceed further along the street we find the accessible entrance between 600B and 600C. However, there is no accessible parking there, and the distance to the upper floors of 600A is daunting. You need to take the elevator to the upper floors of Building B, proceed through the hallway, out the door, and then across to Building A. Yes, it's true that you normally wouldn't have a room there if you use a wheelchair or walker, but if someone comes in a group, they don't really want to be separated from everyone else. The best solution seems to be to provide an accessible path to the elevator between 600A and B and to the first floor of 600A and to design easy to read and highly visible signs or site plans that solve the problem by outlining the path.

**Directional Signs:** Before we move on to the last building, Building 800, let's take a look at some of the other sign types on the property.



These small post and panel signs are very readable, but they are also mounted very low. That is one problem to solve, and the other is to determine accessible pathways. These signs give us no clue as to whether or not someone with a mobility problem could navigate the path. And the restroom sign, very important, is way too small to read from a distance.

**Restroom Signs:** There are two restrooms on the premises, side by side, that people who are enjoying walking around the gardens can



use. Unfortunately, the signs identifying them are completely inadequate. Metal signs are virtually impossible to make truly accessible, because of the process that is used to make them. These have incredibly sharp edged characters, and the braille is flat on top, which makes it

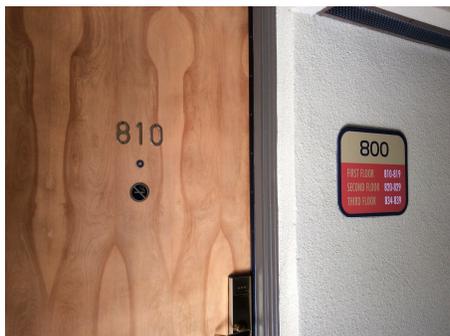
sharp and unreadable as well as illegal. The posted sign attempts to be welcoming to all, in the spirit of acceptance, but would be unnecessary, and the situation would be just as welcoming, with correct tactile signs identifying a non-gender specific



pictogram, along with the required high contrast geometrics that every California restroom must have. Even though these signs are supposed to be readable by touch, even if they did not have such uncomfortable edges, and even if the braille were not illegal, they would be much too high off the ground for many people to read. The close-up photograph of the tactile elements shows just how important it is, when choosing a manufacturer of tactile signs, to pay attention to detail. Check out samples of the signs to see if you could read the raised characters.

### **Building 800:**

Building 800 is not accessible by anyone with a mobility based disability unless they go in and out by car, and have assistance to open the elevator door, and it is impossible to make it so without incredible expense. However, that does not mean that people with sensory disabilities could not enjoy staying there, so making the signs accessible is important.



The current sign system in Building 800 is, for the most part, similar to what we find in the smaller buildings. The door numbers are a little smaller, and there are some difficult situations where the stairways are very close to the doors and create an obstacle to mounting the signs properly. If the doors open inward and have closers, the federal exception could be used, and the tactile sign could be mounted directly on the door. Suite 811 is a good example of this problem, which must repeat on other floors as well.



There is an elevator down a short corridor entered from the outdoor walkway, and an overhead sign clearly directs to it. There are also room signs on each side of the hallway entrances. Those signs could remain for the time being.



The elevator itself is ancient, and the door is so heavy that it is not accessible to anyone without quite a bit of upper body strength. The hoist ways are too small to have normal signs, which are really meant to be accessed from inside the elevator. Instead, there is a huge shiny brass sign on the inside of the door at each level. We suggest removing that sign and replacing it with something easier to read, both visually and by touch, so someone with a vision impairment could be sure that they had reached the correct floor.



Below, in the basement, the elevator might be usable by someone in a wheelchair who arrived by car, although they would likely need assistance to open the elevator door. The elevator in the basement has a huge floor directory, which is outdated and very hard to read, so it should be replaced.

The basement is the location of employee areas such as a locker room and break room. They are not identified, but do have signs indicating they are employee only areas. Those signs only need to be checked for

minimum type sizes relative to mounting height and a matt finish, since they are very readable in terms of contrast. However, if there are toilet facilities, it might be necessary to provide tactile signs for those. They can still be labeled for staff only use.



The only room that currently has a room sign is the boiler room. Therefore, a tactile sign must be provided for it. In any case, the local Fire Department probably requires that the boiler room be identified.

Another state regulation that should be followed is to provide evacuation plans for the building. The regulation provides that these plans must be located in elevator lobbies, outside enclosed stairwells, and at main public entrances. The building does not really have a main public entrance other than a short set up steps leading up to the floor one walkway, but there should be a plan located at each elevator. Although the stairwells are not fully enclosed with doors, putting one at each level within the short corridor leading off the exterior walkway would be the best opportunity to comply with the law.

### **Summary and Conclusion:**

Dinah's Garden Hotel is a unique and charming property with beautiful grounds and meandering pathways for guests to explore. Deep inside, it is difficult to remember that a major thoroughfare runs

just outside the front entrance. There are wonderful visual surprises around every turn, sculptures, ponds with koi, and resting places with views. Making it accessible for people with disabilities is a worthwhile endeavor, and signs can help by showing the most accessible pathways for guests to use. However, it's also important, while adhering to rules for easy readability by people with various levels of visual ability, not to disturb the harmony of the grounds with over signing or garish designs. The well designed logo provides us not only with a spice of "Chinese red" but with a restful green and muted bamboo colored light golden brown to use.

Since required tactile room identification signs are completely missing from the property, other than for a couple of very unattractive, illegal and unreadable restroom signs, the obvious first task is to provide those signs, and to use their design as the lynchpin for additional signs that are vital to understanding the unorthodox room numbering in some of the buildings.

As soon as the final plan is worked out for improving the accessible pathways through the property, new exterior wayfinding signs should be designed to supplement the attractive large building identification signs that utilize the logo. The only problem these signs have is that some have appended panels with directions to specific room numbers or other facilities, and those are much too low to be accessible or legal. Since we don't want to provide more signs than necessary, if directions need to be provided by some other means, such as a few well-placed and carefully designed site plans or additional post and panel wayfinding signs, hotel management may want to consider removing extraneous panels that no longer serve a purpose.

## **Numbering – A Final Pitch:**

Although we realize we have belabored the problems with the numbering system well beyond what management desires, since they consider the subject closed, it is impossible not to conclude without one more idea. We have four buildings with no numbering problems at all: Lobby/reception, 400, 500 and 800. We have three buildings that are small and the numbering is not very confusing: 100, 200 and 300. If management might rethink the possibility of renumbering only the three 600 buildings, multiple explanatory signs could be removed and not replaced at all in some cases, or replaced with much smaller signs.

A system could be used that would be immediately grasped by most people, who are used to associating room numbers with floor numbers. At the same time, the possibility of an emergency that might be exacerbated by the unorthodox and difficult to grasp numbering would be alleviated.

Although one of the reasons expressed by management for not changing the numbering is that the numbering is historic, and that there are long-time guests who ask for specific rooms by number, the 600 buildings seem the most unlikely for that reason to be used. There are no special suites or facilities in these buildings, and they are the furthest from amenities like the pool, restaurant and lobby building. The need to provide new room signs for the buildings provides the best opportunity to solve the numbering problem where it makes the most sense to do so. Therefore, we make one last pitch, for the sake of accessibility for all, that management considers this compromise. Although the ADA never specifically provides regulations to deal with cognitive based disabilities, they do exist as hidden disabilities and because the guest rooms are so isolated from

the central core of the hotel, if a guest gets confused, there is no easy way to summon help. It is well known among wayfinding experts that easily grasped numbering systems are a primary way to aid in access to confusing facilities, and we are great proponents of that. People who are blind rely on logical numbering schemes that relate to floor levels to find their way.

No matter what is decided about numbering the 600 buildings, we conclude on a positive note. We believe that once the new room signs are installed, the accessible paths have been determined and identified, Dinah's Garden Hotel will be more beautiful than ever, and can then be enjoyed by many more people with disabilities.