

Thoughtful Design in Caffiends

During our site visits one of the things that stuck out every time is that while the design of the space seemed eclectic in comparison to other comparable coffee shops or student spaces on campus, the overall result was never overwhelming or chaotic for visitors. Rather, the things inside the space, especially their inclusion and placement, reflected a special care and understanding of student needs which was unique to the place. We believe this goes a long way in creating a comfortable and intimate space for students and fosters a strong sense of community, therefore, the theme we chose to examine in relation to the space was 'Thoughtful Design'.

Caffiends is located inside the main Victoria College building (known as Old Vic) at the University of Toronto. Before returning to the site, we studied existing maps of the area of the site, looked at where it was located and the space around it. The area surrounding the Old Vic entrance has lecture halls, libraries, student housing, some green space and other assorted university buildings. However, it's hard to say that the surrounding area is part of the 'neighbourhood' of Caffiends. Caffiends is tucked away in the corner of the first floor of Old Vic just to the side of its Alumni Hall, and there's usually minimal signage to guide the way. To get there you have to walk through the grand front hall, which is usually bustling with activity, especially since there is a popular lounge area right in the middle of it. The architecture and interior of the front hall is very distinctive and has an old-world charm, which is why the more organic and hipster-esque vibe of Caffiends can be a bit of a shock when you first arrive at the door. The design of Caffiends is so unique that it feels far removed from the great hall of the building it resides in and the greater university space outside, almost like an oasis in the midst of it all.

Going into this process we knew we wanted our map to show the thoughtful design of the space, showing specifically what exactly is in the place and where it is for people who have not visited Caffiends. We believe these design decisions play a very important part in how and why Caffiends can foster such a sense of community in its limited space. Therefore, we decided a floor map of the room was the best way to represent the place. During our walkthrough of the site and the surrounding areas we made rough notes of where things were placed and took pictures and videos from various positions to guide our mapping process. We then used an online application, SmartDraw, to create a floor map which shows a birds eye view of the room. This map has its limitations, it's not exactly to scale and doesn't quite capture the clutter of lights and decorations in the space. Perhaps it is impossible to capture that clutter

accurately through a map format (the annotations in the second version of the map might help a little more though). However, the floor map does show the thoughtful design elements that produce the unique look and feel of Caffiends which we wanted to highlight.

When approaching Caffiends, the first two things you see is a bin outside the door with a sign to leave dirty dishes in it and the huge wooden door which is fully open. As The map shows many things jammed into a small room. The focal point of the room, which draws the eye immediately when walking in is the massive wooden counter covered in assorted drinks and treats for sale along with a plethora of coffee-related paraphernalia. Behind the counter is a big window with decorations hanging in front of it and various syrups and containers on the window ledge which provides some natural light.

There are three main seating options for visitors, the ledge to the side of the room with barstools where people perch at, the very cozy couch tucked into the corner by the door for casual lounging and the seats at the table in the middle. The seats are missing from one side of the table however, allowing a clear walking path and line of sight to the counter from the door. Behind the middle table are two microwaves tucked in the corner, which invite students to bring their own food and warm it up, a stark difference from other places which usually do not allow outside food. Behind the table is also a community bookcase for visitors looking for a diversion along with a mess of plugs, extension cords and chargers for students to easily plug their devices into as they sit at the table.

There are many other eye-catching things around the room such as the three-pane poster board above the bookcase which provides information on the social justice roots of the cafe and the plethora of things on the wall such as pictures of student volunteers and art created by the greater community. There are also many posters, pamphlets and messages which display the things that are happening to students on the coffee table and corkboard by the couches. Instead of feeling messy or disorganized, however, these things around the room seem organic and purposeful.

The design of the room clearly indicates what Caffiends is and what it stands for. The signs, art and furniture arrangements do not just say but actually show that Caffiends is a student-run, volunteer-operated Caffiends that creates an intimate community where students can study, relax, and interact.

Map

