



Painted by hand in vivid colors or in bold contrast, these signs were left to the elements and faded with time. Coined "ghost signs" because they "appear" stronger when the light is just right.



Coca-Cola Sign Saved with New Technology & State Grant

For three weeks in September 2011, scaffolding appeared around the huge Coca-Cola/Angell's Delicatessen sign painted on the east wall of the historic building home to CooperSmith's Pub & Brewing in Downtown Fort Collins. Thanks to a grant received by the State Historical Fund in 2009, this "ghost sign" got a lot of conservation and a little restoration to ensure this faded advertisement from 1958 keeps Old Town looking historic. To the untrained eye, the sign looks almost unchanged. In reality, the technology ensures we will enjoy the sign for many years to come. Funding for this project was a collaborative effort between the State Historical Fund, the Downtown Development Authority, the City of Fort Collins, Progressive Old Town Square LLC, and the Fort Collins Historical Society. For more information and a self-guided tour, visit fcgov.com/ghostsigns.

The Conservation Technology

The City sought a professional with expertise in architectural and paint conservation and Deborah Uhl of Ethereality was selected. After extensive research, a conservation process was agreed upon. First, the masonry was repaired and the surface cleaned. A revolutionary product, Avalure AC-315, followed to both consolidate and re-saturate the painted brick exterior. This product protects the sign, preventing any further deterioration. In addition, small missing elements such as the artist's signature block (bottom left) were in-painted to look old. Then a protective railing was installed to prevent any further damage to the sign.



DEBORAH UHL RE-ADHERING PAINT

The Ghost Sign's History

This sign was painted over several previous advertising signs. The paint analysis done in 2011 showed as many as 27 layers of paint! Don Brown, owner of the Brown Sign Company and one of the best known sign painters in Fort Collins, painted the topmost layer, a Coca-Cola and Angell's Delicatessen sign, in 1958. The tenant of the building (J.L. Hohnstein Block) was the Angell family, who operated a deli until the late 1960s. As was common practice, the Coca-Cola Company agreed to paint the name of Angell's Delicatessen in the sign in exchange for the "privilege" of advertising Coca-Cola on the building's wall.



DON BROWN AT WORK, CIRCA 1956

Wall sign painters were known as "wall dogs." This title reflected not only the grunt work of sign painting, the often monotonous task of transferring standardized images from paper to brick walls, but also their commitment to their art. Unlike previous generations of wall dogs who had to work freehand, Brown painted this sign using a pounce pattern of his own design. He drew the sign full size on paper and perforated an outline of the letters. Then he temporarily hung the paper sign on the wall and used a powder "pounce bag" to leave a pattern as a guide. In a 1985 newspaper interview, Brown remembered how passersby "would stop to admire the work as it progressed, remarking how steady Brown's hand was." Coca-Cola paid Brown \$400 for his work.