

Visual Spotting of Local Elements in Airport Arrival Interiors

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Abstract

This paper examines how local elements in airport arrival interiors are visually detected by visitors and how this perceptual process contributes to the formation of spatial meaning and sense of place. The study adopts the concept of visual spotting to describe the rapid identification of visually salient local features, including regional colors, traditional motifs, materials, and cultural symbols. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this research synthesizes interdisciplinary studies on visual perception, interior design, and airport experience. A total of 24 peer-reviewed articles were systematically selected from major academic databases and analyzed through thematic synthesis to explore how early visual recognition shapes first impressions in arrival environments. The findings indicate that visual spotting operates as a preattentive mechanism that determines which local elements are perceptually registered during initial encounters. Elements with high visual salience and strategic spatial placement are more likely to be detected, thereby enhancing spatial legibility, accelerating place recognition, and strengthening the representation of regional identity. This study positions visual spotting as a critical link between interior design strategies and sense-of-place formation, highlighting the importance of integrating perceptual considerations into the design of airport arrival environments to improve visitor experience and reinforce culturally meaningful spaces.

Keywords: *airport interiors; local elements; sense of place; visual salience; visual spotting*

Introduction

Airports, as contemporary public spaces, function not only as transportation infrastructures but also as cultural interfaces that communicate regional identity. Beyond their operational role, airport interiors, particularly arrival areas, serve as the first spatial encounter between visitors and a destination. This initial encounter often shapes visitors' cognitive and emotional impressions of place. Previous studies indicate that first impressions are strongly influenced by visual perception, particularly the ability of individuals to rapidly detect salient features within complex environments ([Goldstein, 2019](#); [Rosenholtz, 2016](#)). In airport interiors, local elements such as regional color

palettes, traditional motifs, indigenous materials, and cultural artefacts act as visual markers that signal local identity upon arrival.

The formation of a sense of place has been widely discussed in environmental psychology and human geography. Seminal works by [Relph \(1976\)](#) and [Tuan \(1977\)](#) describe sense of place as an experiential construct emerging from the interaction between perception, memory, and symbolic meaning embedded in space. Subsequent studies emphasize that cultural representation within public environments enhances spatial recognition and reinforces place identity by creating continuity between physical settings and cultural narratives ([Montgomery, 1998](#); [Lew, 2017](#)). In transportation hubs, particularly airports, this role becomes increasingly important, as visitors often rely on visual cues to interpret unfamiliar environments and to recognize the character of a region ([Chang & Yang, 2022](#)). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that cultural authenticity and emotional engagement play a crucial role in shaping visitor perception and satisfaction, as users' spatial experiences are influenced by how they connect with local cultural elements ([Manifesty, 2025](#)).

Parallel to this body of research, studies in visual cognition and attention demonstrate that not all visual elements are perceived equally. Research on visual salience explains that elements with strong contrast, distinctive color, scale, or unique patterns are more likely to be detected rapidly through preattentive mechanisms before conscious attention is formed ([Itti & Koch, 2001](#); [Borji, 2019](#)). This process of rapid detection, referred to in this study as visual spotting, plays a critical role in determining which elements become perceptually dominant in visually complex environments such as airport arrival terminals. Despite extensive research on visual salience and sense of place as separate domains, limited studies have explicitly examined how the visibility and detectability of local elements contribute to the early formation of a sense of place in airport interiors.

This paper addresses this gap through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that synthesizes interdisciplinary research on visual attention, cultural representation, interior design, and airport passenger experience. The purpose of this study is to explore how visually detectable local elements influence early visitor experience and support the construction of a sense of place in airport arrival interiors. The contribution of this research lies in offering a conceptual framework that links visual spotting with place identity formation, while also providing design-oriented insights that emphasize perceptual strategies for strengthening local identity within arrival environments.

Conceptual Background

This literature review provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding how visually salient local elements are perceived and how they contribute to the formation of a sense of place in airport arrival interiors. This section outlines the theoretical foundations for understanding how visually salient local elements are perceived and how they may contribute to the formation of a sense of place in airport arrival interiors. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from visual cognition, environmental psychology, cultural representation, and interior architecture, the discussion positions visual detection as a mechanism linking attention processes with spatial meaning. Rather than presenting empirical synthesis results, this section establishes the conceptual basis required to interpret how visual salience operates in complex environments, how local elements function as cultural signifiers, and how these relationships inform visitors' early spatial experience in arrival settings.

1. Visual Attention and Spatial Perception in Interior Environments.

Visual attention refers to the cognitive mechanism through which individuals selectively prioritize certain visual stimuli while filtering others within a complex environment. In perceptual psychology, attention is understood as a limited processing resource operating through hierarchical stages that determine which environmental elements receive early cognitive processing ([Goldstein, 2019](#); [Chun et al., 2011](#)). This mechanism becomes particularly significant in spatial environments where multiple visual cues compete simultaneously for perceptual priority.

Selective attention describes the capacity of observers to focus on stimuli that appear visually distinctive or contextually relevant. This process is influenced by bottom-up perceptual properties such as color contrast, brightness, scale, and spatial differentiation, as well as top-down factors including prior knowledge, expectations, and cultural familiarity ([Desimone & Duncan, 1995](#); [Wolfe & Horowitz, 2017](#)). Within interior environments, selective

attention therefore shapes how users interpret spatial hierarchy, navigate circulation paths, and recognize dominant design features.

Closely associated with selective attention is preattentive processing, a rapid perceptual mechanism through which specific visual attributes are detected automatically before conscious attention is fully engaged. Research in visual cognition demonstrates that features such as color contrast, orientation differences, spatial position, and repetitive patterns can be registered almost instantaneously within the visual field ([Itti & Koch, 2001](#); [Borji, 2019](#)). Computational salience models further indicate that early visual fixation tends to follow measurable feature conspicuity, including edge density, chromatic saturation, and spatial dominance ([Tsotsos et al., 2018](#)).

Within interior architecture, these perceptual processes are closely linked to spatial legibility and identity recognition. Visually dominant elements commonly function as perceptual anchors that help organize spatial information and support users' early understanding of environmental structure ([Yan et al., 2020](#)). Elements detected during early perceptual stages are therefore more likely to influence first impressions, navigation patterns, and environmental interpretation.

These relationships become particularly pronounced in visually dense public interiors such as airport terminals, where signage systems, architectural features, commercial displays, and passenger movement simultaneously compete for attention. Under such conditions, visually prominent elements are more likely to be processed first, increasing their potential influence on spatial interpretation and memory formation ([Fang et al., 2022](#); [Rosenholtz, 2016](#)). Understanding these perceptual mechanisms provides the theoretical basis for examining how local cultural elements may be rapidly detected within arrival environments.

2. Visual Salience and Element Detectability

Visual salience refers to the degree to which particular elements within a visual field stand out relative to their surroundings and therefore attract perceptual attention. In visual cognition research, salience is typically described as a bottom-up perceptual mechanism driven primarily by measurable physical attributes of stimuli rather than by conscious intention ([Itti & Koch, 2001](#); [Borji, 2019](#)). Elements with stronger perceptual contrast are consequently more likely to be detected during the earliest stages of visual processing.

Consistent findings across visual perception studies identify several attributes that strengthen salience, particularly luminance contrast, chromatic intensity, relative scale, geometric clarity, and spatial positioning. High visual contrast enables differentiation from background conditions, while larger scale or alignment with dominant sightlines increases perceptual exposure ([Rosenholtz, 2016](#); [Goldstein, 2019](#)). Positional hierarchy within the visual field similarly influences detectability by increasing the probability of early visual fixation ([Tsotsos et al., 2018](#)).

Computational salience modelling provides further support for these principles by demonstrating that predicted fixation points correspond strongly with feature density, color variation, and structural edge prominence ([Itti & Koch, 2001](#); [Tsotsos et al., 2018](#)). Such findings confirm that visually distinctive elements can “pop out” prior to deliberate cognitive interpretation, allowing rapid perceptual detection even in visually complex environments.

In interior architectural contexts, salience directly affects spatial legibility and environmental interpretation. Visually dominant installations, contrasting material treatments, or large-scale spatial markers commonly function as orientation anchors that structure spatial understanding ([Yan et al., 2020](#)). In public interiors characterized by high visual competition, elements lacking sufficient contrast or scale may remain perceptually secondary despite their symbolic significance.

Airport interiors represent particularly dense perceptual environments, combining architectural features, information systems, commercial graphics, and continuous user movement. Under these conditions, only elements possessing sufficient visual prominence are likely to be detected during initial perceptual scanning. This early detection process, conceptualized in this study as visual spotting, determines which spatial cues contribute most strongly to first impressions and identity recognition. Understanding visual salience therefore provides a conceptual foundation for examining how local cultural elements may be intentionally designed to enhance detectability in arrival environments.

3. Local Elements and Cultural Representation in Interior Architecture

Local elements constitute an essential component in establishing spatial identity within interior environments. In architectural research, such elements typically manifest through indigenous materials, vernacular motifs, regionally associated color palettes, spatial geometries, or culturally specific artefacts ([Lew, 2017](#)). Beyond their physical presence, these elements function as communicative cultural cues that enable users to interpret the socio-cultural context of a space.

From a semiotic perspective, local elements operate as symbolic carriers embedded within spatial compositions. Interior environments may therefore be interpreted as cultural texts in which meaning is conveyed through material expression, visual patterning, and spatial arrangement. When such symbolic features are integrated coherently, they facilitate recognition and interpretation even during brief encounters ([Hashemnezhad et al., 2013](#)).

The integration of culturally rooted elements has also been associated with strengthened place identity and increased spatial memorability. Interiors expressing localized narratives tend to exhibit greater distinctiveness and stronger associative meaning, supporting users' cognitive linkage between spatial experience and geographic context ([Li & Zhang, 2019](#)). Vernacular design features and culturally embedded visual forms may therefore enhance perceptual richness while reinforcing environmental recognizability ([Ahmad et al., 2020](#)).

Within airport terminals, interior design assumes an additional communicative role as the primary spatial interface between visitors and destination identity. Arrival interiors frequently function as symbolic gateways in which spatial design mediates early cultural encounter. When local elements are sufficiently visible and perceptually prominent, their communicative function is strengthened, increasing their likelihood of contributing to early spatial interpretation and identity formation.

4. Sense of Place in Airports Terminal Environments

Sense of place refers to the experiential relationship through which individuals associate environments with emotional meaning, symbolic identity, and cognitive recognition. Originating in humanistic geography, the concept emphasizes the interaction between spatial form, personal experience, and cultural interpretation in shaping environmental meaning ([Relph, 1976](#); [Tuan, 1977](#)). Contemporary research has extended this perspective to built environments, including transportation hubs, where spatial encounters may be brief yet psychologically influential.

Airport terminals represent a distinctive spatial typology due to their role as transitional gateways connecting global mobility with localized context. Among terminal zones, arrival areas function as critical threshold environments in which visitors encounter destination identity for the first time. Early impressions formed in these spaces are therefore understood to significantly influence subsequent perception and memory of place ([Lin & Chen, 2013](#)).

Environmental psychology research suggests that spatial clarity, visual hierarchy, and coherent environmental cues contribute to cognitive mapping and reduce navigational uncertainty in large public interiors ([Gardner & Martin, 2021](#)). Cultural representation within airport interiors has similarly been associated with increased emotional comfort, perceived authenticity, and improved visitor experience ([Rajput & Bakar, 2020](#)). Locally inspired visual cues, including culturally derived forms, motifs, and material treatments, may therefore function as perceptual anchors that support early place recognition ([Chang & Yang, 2022](#)).

This perspective aligns closely with the concept of visual spotting, suggesting that the speed at which culturally meaningful spatial cues are detected may influence the efficiency of early place recognition. When local elements are rapidly perceived upon arrival, they are more likely to anchor spatial interpretation, reinforce regional identity, and shape visitors' initial environmental narratives.

5. Research Gap: Local Element Spotting in Arrival Interiors

Although research addressing visual perception, cultural representation, and spatial identity in built environments has expanded substantially, limited attention has been directed toward how visitors visually detect local cultural elements within the perceptually dense conditions of airport arrival interiors. Existing airport studies frequently prioritize operational performance, service efficiency, circulation design, or environmental comfort, while perceptual mechanisms associated with cultural recognition remain comparatively underexplored ([Gardner & Martin, 2021](#); [Rajput & Bakar, 2020](#)).

Similarly, visual salience research has predominantly developed within controlled experimental contexts or generalized urban environments, providing limited insight into environments requiring rapid perceptual processing under high visual load. Consequently, the process through which culturally meaningful spatial cues are immediately detected by first-time visitors has not been sufficiently examined within arrival environments.

While cultural representation research commonly addresses symbolic meaning and identity expression, the perceptual effectiveness of such cues, particularly their detectability during early stages of spatial encounter, remains insufficiently theorized. This limitation obscures understanding of how local elements function during the critical initial moments that shape first impressions and early sense-of-place formation.

Addressing this gap, the present study applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to integrate interdisciplinary research and develop a conceptual explanation of how visual spotting of local elements may contribute to early place recognition in airport arrival interiors. This conceptual grounding supports the thematic analytical synthesis presented in the following sections.

Methodology

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine how visually salient local elements contribute to the formation of a sense of place within airport arrival terminals. The SLR approach was chosen to ensure a structured, transparent, and reproducible synthesis of interdisciplinary literature spanning visual perception, cultural representation, interior design, and airport passenger experience, including systematic identification, screening, duplicate removal, and thematic analysis of relevant peer-reviewed studies. Rather than aggregating statistical findings, this review focuses on developing a conceptual understanding of visual spotting as a perceptual mechanism shaping early spatial experience in arrival environments. The review process is informed by Bowen's (2009) qualitative document analysis framework, which emphasizes systematic reading, coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation of textual materials. This framework is particularly suitable for design-oriented and theory-driven research, where meaning is constructed through interpretive synthesis rather than quantitative meta-analysis.

1. Problem Identification

The review is guided by the following research question:

How are visually distinctive local elements detected by visitors in airport arrival interiors, and how does this perceptual process contribute to the construction of a sense of place?

This question frames the review by linking mechanisms of visual perception with spatial meaning-making and place identity formation in transitional environments.

2. Literature Selection Criteria

To ensure relevance and methodological rigor, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were systematically applied in the literature selection process. Articles were included if they were peer-reviewed journal publications published between 2002 and 2024, addressed themes related to visual salience, visual attention, local or cultural elements, sense of place, or airport interior environments, were written in English, and provided full-text access. Publications were excluded if they lacked a clear connection to environmental perception, spatial experience, or place identity, or if they focused solely on technical or operational airport issues without spatial or experiential relevance.

3. Literature Search

The literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar. Scopus and Web of Science were selected as primary databases due to their coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed international journals. Google Scholar was used as a supplementary search source to capture additional interdisciplinary studies that may not be indexed in the primary databases, particularly within design-related and applied research fields. Search terms were applied individually and in combination, such as *visual salience*, *visual attention*, *local elements*, *cultural cues*, *sense of place*, and *airport interior*. The initial search yielded over 400 records. All retrieved records were compiled and duplicate

entries across databases were identified and removed. The remaining records were screened sequentially through title screening, abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the screening process was completed, 24 articles were retained for final analysis. The overall screening and selection process followed PRISMA-based procedures and is summarized in the PRISMA flow diagram.

PRISMA

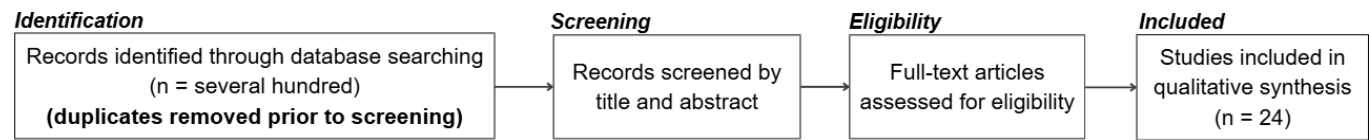


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the literature search and selection process.

Source: Author

4. Content Analysis and Thematic Coding

Content analysis was conducted through an iterative manual coding process adapted from Bowen (2009). Each selected article was examined in full and coded using an open coding approach to identify recurring visual attributes, perceptual mechanisms, and spatial design factors. These initial codes were then grouped through constant comparison and thematic refinement to generate higher-level thematic clusters representing patterns across the reviewed studies. Through this process, five major thematic clusters emerged, namely mechanisms of visual spotting and visual attention, visual attributes of local elements, cultural representation in spatial design, theoretical perspectives on sense of place, and characteristics of airport arrival environments.

5. Synthesis

The findings were integrated through narrative and thematic synthesis, allowing concepts from different disciplinary perspectives to converge into a coherent analytical framework. This approach emphasizes conceptual relationships between visual salience, perceptual recognition, and place identity formation, rather than treating individual studies as isolated findings.

6. Reporting

The results are reported thematically and organized in accordance with JARDS manuscript guidelines, ensuring clarity, coherence, and relevance to interior design research and practice.

Results and Discussion

The results presented in this section are derived from a thematic synthesis of the selected studies rather than from a single empirical dataset. To provide an overview of the scope, focus, and relevance of the reviewed studies, Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics and principal findings of the 24 articles included in the qualitative synthesis. Recurring concepts related to perceptual mechanisms, visual attributes, cultural representation, and spatial experience were systematically identified and grouped through constant comparison, resulting in five major thematic clusters. These themes represent cross-study patterns rather than findings from individual papers. The table highlights how each study contributes to the understanding of visual salience, cultural representation, and sense of place in interior and airport arrival contexts.

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Literature

No	Author (Year)	Study Focus	Context	Key Findings	Relevance to Visual Spotting
1	Rosenholtz (2016)	Peripheral vision	Visual cognition	Object contrast and size determine rapid detection	Theoretical basis for early visual detectability
2	Borji (2019)	Visual salience	Computational vision	Color and luminance generate highest salience	Identifies primary visual attributes for spotting

3	Çöltekin et al. (2020)	Spatial attention	Complex environments	Attention is drawn to visually dominant features	Relevant to visually dense airport interiors
4	Fang et al. (2022)	Cultural patterns	Public interiors	Cultural motifs significantly attract visual attention	Strengthens spotting of local motifs
5	Tsotsos et al. (2018)	Saliency modeling	Computational vision	Placement within sightlines increases visual priority	Design basis for element placement
6	Yan et al. (2020)	Spatial legibility	Interior environments	Large and high-contrast elements improve legibility	Supports visual hierarchy in airports
7	Ahmad et al. (2020)	Cultural interior design	Cultural interiors	Local patterns trigger immediate cultural associations	Spotting leads to cultural interpretation
8	Li & Zhang (2019)	Cultural symbolism	Public interiors	Local colors and motifs enhance cultural memory	Reinforces place image through spotting
9	Lew (2017)	Place-making	Public spaces	Local culture shapes spatial narratives	Relevant for airport arrival storytelling
10	Hashemnezhad et al. (2013)	Place identity	Built environments	Place identity emerges from visual cues	Core theory of sense of place
11	Gardner & Martin (2021)	Airport aesthetics	Airports	First impressions shaped by visual cues	Spotting as early passenger experience
12	Rajput & Bakar (2020)	Environmental cues	Airports	Cultural cues compete with signage for attention	Highlights need for salient local elements
13	Chang & Yang (2022)	Cultural representation	Airport terminals	Local elements strengthen airport identity	Relevant to arrival hall design
14	Lin & Chen (2013)	Sense of place	Airports	Visual identity defines early experience	Spotting as trigger for sense of place
15	Berto (2019)	Environmental perception	Environmental psychology	Attention influenced by dominant stimuli	Theoretical foundation of spotting
16	Stamps (2010)	Visual cues	Built environments	Form and color guide spatial interpretation	Contribution to reading local elements
17	Nasar (2011)	Environmental evaluation	Public spaces	Visual cues activate emotional appraisal	Impact of spotting on first impressions
18	Miller & Shapiro (2021)	Spatial memory	Cognitive studies	Cultural cues enhance spatial memory	Spotting supports place recall
19	Arthur & Passini (2002)	Wayfinding	Architecture	Visual cues guide user orientation	Placement of elements aids navigation
20	Zhang et al. (2020)	Passenger perception	Airports	Visitors interpret interiors via most salient cues	Empirical validation of spotting in airports
21	Lee & Park (2022)	Cultural aesthetics	Transportation hubs	Cultural representation must be visually prominent	Reinforces need for strong visual salience
22	Kauppinen et al. (2019)	Visual attention	Public interiors	Eye-tracking shows focus on high-contrast elements	Empirical evidence of spotting
23	Sasaki (2017)	Cultural identity	Urban public spaces	Cultural creativity shapes spatial identity	Spotting initiates regional identification

24	Ujang & Zakariya (2015)	Place attachment	Public spaces	Strong visual identity fosters attachment	Reinforcement of sense of place
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Source: Author

As shown in Table 1, the reviewed literature spans multiple disciplinary perspectives, including visual cognition, environmental psychology, interior design, and airport studies. Although the contexts and methodological approaches vary, the studies collectively emphasize the importance of visually prominent cues in shaping early spatial perception and interpretation. This diversity of perspectives provides a strong foundation for identifying recurring patterns and thematic relationships across the literature. Based on comparative reading and iterative analysis of the reviewed studies, three interrelated thematic dimensions emerged. These themes explain how visual salience enables the spotting of local elements and how this perceptual process contributes to the formation of a sense of place in airport arrival interiors.

1. Visual Spotting Mechanisms in Arrival Environments

Across the reviewed studies, visual spotting consistently appears as a preattentive perceptual mechanism that operates prior to conscious attention and interpretation. Studies in visual cognition and environmental perception demonstrate that certain visual features, such as contrast, scale, luminance, and spatial prominence, are processed automatically during the early stages of visual perception (Rosenholtz, 2016; Berto, 2019; Borji, 2019). In complex environments such as airport arrival terminals, this preattentive process plays a critical role in determining which elements are detected first by arriving passengers.

The synthesis of the reviewed studies further indicates that airport interiors present a high density of competing visual stimuli, including signage, architectural elements, commercial displays, and passenger movement. Under such conditions, visitors are unlikely to process all available information consciously. Instead, visual attention is guided by perceptually salient features, allowing certain elements to be “spotted” almost instantaneously (Çöltekin et al., 2020; Kauppinen et al., 2019). This process of perceptual prioritization not only determines which elements are noticed first but also influences how users move through and engage with space. Previous research has shown that interior elements such as color, lighting, spatial configuration, and display arrangement can significantly shape visitor behavior and interaction patterns within built environments (Kamila & Sunarya, 2025). Accordingly, visual spotting should be understood not as a deliberate act, but as an automatic filtering mechanism that prioritizes specific spatial cues.

Importantly, the literature suggests that the effectiveness of local or cultural elements in contributing to place identity depends on their ability to enter this preattentive stage of perception. Cultural symbols that are visually subtle or embedded within background surfaces may carry strong meaning yet remain unnoticed during the initial encounter. Conversely, local elements that exhibit strong visual salience are more likely to be detected early and subsequently interpreted at cognitive and emotional levels (Tsotsos et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2020).

From a conceptual perspective, these findings position visual spotting as a foundational condition for sense of place formation in arrival environments. Before meaning, memory, or emotional attachment can emerge, local elements must first be perceptually registered. Visual spotting therefore functions as the entry point through which cultural representation becomes accessible to visitors in airport arrival interiors.

This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2, which demonstrates how visual attributes are processed preattentively, enabling visual spotting before leading to cognitive and cultural interpretation.

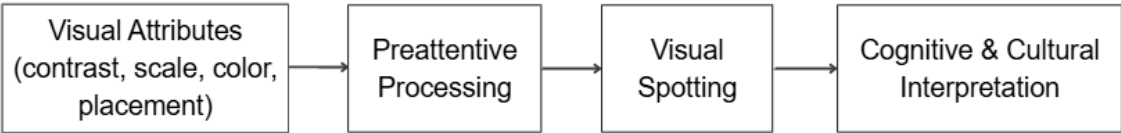


Figure 2. Visual Spotting as a Preattentive Perceptual Mechanism

Source: Author

Figure 2 summarizes the sequential relationship between visual attributes, preattentive processing, visual spotting, and subsequent cognitive and cultural interpretation within arrival environments.

2. Visual Attributes of Local Elements

The synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals that the detectability of local elements in interior environments is largely determined by a set of recurring visual attributes. Across different contexts and disciplinary perspectives, studies consistently emphasize that cultural meaning alone is insufficient to ensure recognition; instead, local elements must possess perceptual qualities that enable them to stand out within visually complex settings such as airport arrival terminals.

- **Color and Contrast**

Color emerges as one of the most influential attributes in enhancing visual salience. High-contrast color schemes, particularly those derived from culturally symbolic palettes, are more likely to attract early visual attention and support rapid recognition ([Borji, 2019](#); [Li & Zhang, 2019](#)). In arrival environments dominated by neutral architectural tones, the strategic use of saturated or distinctive colors allows local elements to differentiate themselves from surrounding surfaces.

- **Scale and Proportion**

Several studies highlight scale as a critical factor in visual spotting. Large-scale installations, oversized motifs, or spatially dominant elements are more readily detected than smaller decorative details ([Yan et al., 2020](#); [Zhang et al., 2020](#)). In airport interiors, where passengers often experience visual overload, increased scale contributes to the establishment of a clear visual hierarchy that directs perception toward culturally significant features.

- **Motifs and Patterns**

Traditional motifs and vernacular patterns enhance visual attention through repetition, rhythm, and geometric clarity. Research indicates that culturally recognizable patterns facilitate immediate association and interpretation, particularly when applied consistently and legibly within interior surfaces ([Ahmad et al., 2020](#); [Fang et al., 2022](#)). These motifs function not only as decorative elements but also as perceptual anchors that support cultural readability.

- **Materiality and Texture**

Material choice and surface texture further contribute to perceptual prominence. Materials with strong tactile or visual textures, such as natural stone, wood, or handcrafted finishes, tend to attract attention and convey authenticity when appropriately illuminated ([Lew, 2017](#)). When combined with adequate lighting contrast, materiality enhances both visual salience and symbolic depth.

- **Spatial Placement and Sightlines**

Beyond individual attributes, the literature underscores the importance of spatial placement. Local elements positioned along primary circulation paths, transition zones, or dominant sightlines are more likely to be detected during initial arrival moments ([Tsotsos et al., 2018](#); [Arthur & Passini, 2002](#)). Strategic placement amplifies the effectiveness of visual attributes by aligning them with natural patterns of movement and gaze.

Collectively, these attributes demonstrate that the effectiveness of local elements depends on the integration of visual properties and spatial strategy. Rather than operating independently, color, scale, motif, materiality, and spatial placement interact to determine whether cultural elements are successfully spotted and interpreted within airport arrival interiors.

Table 2. Visual Attributes of Local Elements and Their Perceptual Effects

Visual Attribute	Perceptual Effect	Design Implication
Color & contrast	Rapid visual detection	Use culturally symbolic yet contrasting palettes

Scale	Visual dominance	Establish hierarchy through oversized elements
Motifs & patterns	Cultural recognition	Apply legible and repetitive vernacular motifs
Materiality & texture	Sensory richness	Combine authentic materials with proper lighting
Spatial placement	Priority in attention	Position along sightlines and arrival paths

Source: Author

3. Spotting and Sense of Place Formation

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that visual spotting plays a decisive role in the early formation of a sense of place, particularly within transient environments such as airport arrival terminals. Sense of place is widely understood as an experiential construct emerging from the interaction between perception, meaning, and memory. In arrival contexts, where encounters are brief and cognitive load is high, this interaction is initiated through visually salient cues that are detected almost immediately upon entry.

The findings suggest that when local elements are successfully spotted during the initial moments of arrival, they function as anchors for place recognition. These elements provide visitors with immediate cues regarding regional identity, cultural context, and spatial distinctiveness (Lin & Chen, 2013; Hashemnezhad et al., 2013). Rather than forming through prolonged engagement, sense of place in airport interiors is often triggered through rapid visual impressions that precede conscious interpretation.

Furthermore, the literature highlights that visual spotting facilitates the transition from perceptual detection to cognitive and emotional engagement. Once visually registered, local elements become reference points for meaning-making, allowing visitors to associate the interior environment with cultural narratives and regional symbolism (Lew, 2017; Sasaki, 2017). This process supports the development of spatial memory and contributes to the memorability of the arrival experience (Miller & Shapiro, 2021).

Importantly, studies also indicate that the absence of visually dominant local cues can weaken place identity, even when cultural references are present in more subtle forms. In visually competitive environments such as airports, local identity risks being overshadowed by commercial signage and functional systems if cultural elements lack sufficient visual salience (Rajput & Bakar, 2020; Gardner & Martin, 2021). This finding underscores that sense of place formation is not solely dependent on symbolic content, but also on the perceptual accessibility of that content.

Taken together, the reviewed studies position visual spotting as a critical mediating mechanism between interior design strategies and the experiential outcome of sense of place. In airport arrival terminals, visually salient local elements act as initial triggers that enable cultural interpretation, emotional resonance, and place identification to emerge within a limited timeframe.

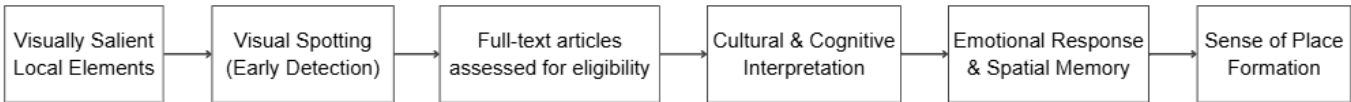


Figure 3. Visual Spotting as a Mechanism for Sense of Place Formation

Source: Author

Overall, the thematic synthesis demonstrates that visual spotting operates as an integrative perceptual mechanism linking visual attributes, cultural representation, and spatial cognition. Across the reviewed studies, visually salient local elements consistently function as early perceptual anchors that structure first impressions in arrival environments. This confirms that perceptual detectability is not merely a visual phenomenon but also a critical mediator between interior design strategies and sense-of-place formation. The findings therefore position visual spotting as a unifying conceptual lens for understanding how culturally meaningful environments are recognized during initial spatial encounters.

Conclusion

This study employed a qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine how visually salient local elements are detected in airport arrival interiors and how this perceptual process contributes to the formation of a sense of place. By synthesizing findings from 24 peer-reviewed studies across visual cognition, environmental psychology, interior design, and airport studies, the review demonstrates that visual spotting functions as a critical precondition for place identity formation in arrival environments.

The findings indicate that visual spotting operates as a preattentive mechanism that enables certain local elements to be rapidly detected within visually complex airport interiors. Attributes such as contrast, color, scale, materiality, motif clarity, and strategic spatial placement determine whether cultural elements enter early perceptual awareness. Only elements that are perceptually registered at this initial stage can subsequently support cultural interpretation, emotional engagement, and spatial memory. Accordingly, the effectiveness of local identity representation in arrival terminals depends not only on symbolic meaning but also on perceptual accessibility.

From a conceptual perspective, this study positions visual spotting as a mediating link between interior design strategies and experiential outcomes. In transient environments such as airports, sense of place is not formed through prolonged interaction but through rapid visual impressions that shape first encounters. Visually salient local elements therefore function as perceptual anchors that initiate place recognition and contribute to the memorability of the arrival experience.

These findings carry important implications for interior design practice and airport design governance. The intentional integration of visually salient local elements reflects key design priorities, including visual clarity, spatial consistency, cultural relevance, and user-centered experience. A design strategy that effectively communicates local identity through perceptually prominent elements can enhance spatial performance by aligning environmental legibility, passenger experience, and regional representation.

Furthermore, this study contributes to an expanded understanding of value proposition levels in airport interior design. At the functional level, visually prominent local elements support orientation and spatial legibility. At the emotional level, they evoke a sense of welcome, familiarity, and cultural connection for arriving passengers. At the symbolic and strategic levels, these elements communicate regional identity and reinforce the airport's role as a gateway representing its locale. Collectively, these layers form a holistic value proposition in which interior design enhances user experience while simultaneously supporting organizational performance and place branding.

While this study is limited to a qualitative synthesis of existing literature, it provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research, including observational studies, eye-tracking experiments, and post-occupancy evaluations in airport arrival terminals. Such studies may further validate the role of visual spotting in shaping sense of place and refine design guidelines for culturally responsive and performance-oriented interior environments.

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