

SARNIA ARENA REBRAND

Environmental Brand Design & Wayfinding System

Justin Francisco / Compass Group Canada / 2024

CLIENT Sarnia Arena / Sarnia Sting (OHL)

ROLE Lead Designer (Solo)

TIMELINE 2 Weeks

SCOPE Full venue rebrand—suites, concessions, kids zone, bars, signage

STATUS Approved, pending implementation

THE BRIEF

New ownership acquired the Sarnia Arena (home of the OHL's Sarnia Sting) and wanted a bold, ambitious rebrand. Budget was not a constraint—they wanted transformative ideas that would elevate the fan experience and make the venue feel premium. The existing spaces were dated and lacked cohesive identity.

THE CHALLENGE

Two weeks. That was the timeline to concept, design, and present a comprehensive rebrand covering multiple venue zones—from luxury suites to concession stands to a kids entertainment area. The scope demanded environmental design thinking: material selection, lighting specification, millwork concepts, 3D signage, and a cohesive visual system that could flex across very different contexts.

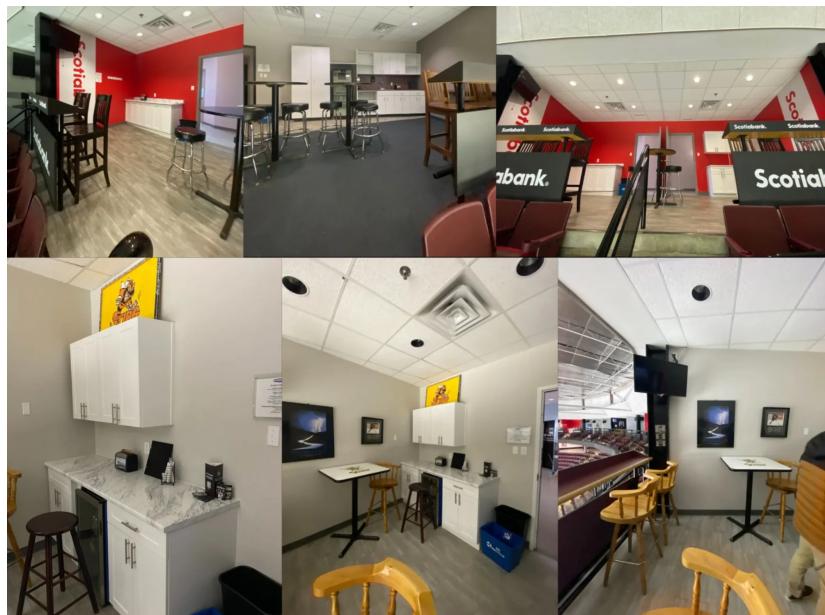
THE APPROACH

The Sarnia Sting's mascot is a bee—which immediately suggested a design direction. I developed a hexagonal visual language that could unify the entire venue: honeycomb patterns in the environmental graphics, hexagonal LED light fixtures as architectural features, and a "buzz"-themed naming convention for the food and beverage destinations.

This wasn't just about graphics—it was about creating immersive branded environments. Every specification had to work architecturally: the materials needed to be durable for a sports venue, the lighting needed to create atmosphere without interfering with sightlines, and the signage needed to function as wayfinding while reinforcing the brand.

BEFORE: THE EXISTING SUITES

Dated finishes, mismatched furniture, no cohesive identity



SARNIA SUITES

The suites transformation showcases the full environmental design approach: signature hexagonal LED light fixtures that echo the Sting brand, warm ambient lighting, premium leather seating, refined millwork with wood slat detailing, a slate feature wall, and custom carpet featuring the geometric pattern system. Local imagery—including the Bluewater Bridge—creates a sense of place.



KEY SPECIFICATIONS

- Hexagonal LED light fixtures
- Premium leather seating
- Refined millwork with wood slats
- Slate feature wall
- Custom carpet with brand pattern
- Local Bluewater Bridge imagery

BUZZSOCIAL

Drinks • Bites • Social Hub

BuzzSocial is the arena's flagship restaurant destination—a social hub where fans can gather before and during games. The hexagonal theme is pushed to its maximum expression here: dramatic honeycomb LED ceiling installations serve as both lighting and architectural statement, while the warm material palette of exposed brick, wood, and leather creates an upscale sports bar atmosphere.



HALL OF FAME

Sarnia Sting Legends Bar

The Hall of Fame bar celebrates Sarnia Sting history while providing a premium hospitality experience. Design elements include limewashed brick for a contemporary industrial feel, an L-shaped bar with black granite countertops, the signature floor pattern throughout, and prominent placement for the "Honourable Inductees" display. A large hockey puck-shaped pendant light featuring the Sting mascot serves as the focal point.



BUZZSPOT

Fast Drinks & Eats

BuzzSpot locations provide quick-service concessions with a consistent brand presence. The bold orange and black graphics with hexagonal patterns create high visibility and reinforce the "Buzz" family of venue destinations.



YOUTH HIVE

Kids Zone

Youth Hive brings the hexagonal brand language to a family-friendly context with brighter, more playful colors (adding blue accents) while maintaining visual continuity. The space includes games, poster-making stations, hot chocolate service, and kid-friendly concessions.



THE SYSTEM

The rebrand establishes a cohesive environmental brand system across the entire venue:

BUZZSOCIAL	Premium restaurant & social hub
BUZZSPOT	Quick-service concession stands
HALL OF FAME	Sarnia Sting legends bar
SARNIA SUITES	Luxury viewing suites
YOUTH HIVE	Family & kids entertainment zone
SNACK STOP	Grab-and-go refreshments
STAMMER'S STATION	Themed condiment stand (Steven Stamkos tribute)
BEER RUN	Self-service grab-and-go beer concept

OUTCOME

The proposal was enthusiastically approved by ownership and external stakeholders—described as "amazing work" that exceeded expectations. The comprehensive approach demonstrated how a unified visual system could transform disparate venue spaces into a cohesive, premium fan experience.

This project showcases the range required for modern brand design: from naming architecture to environmental graphics, material specification to lighting design, 3D signage to wayfinding systems—all delivered under an aggressive two-week timeline as solo designer.

KEY DELIVERABLES

- Complete venue brand architecture
- Environmental graphics system
- Hexagonal LED lighting specifications
- Material & finish selections
- Millwork concepts
- 3D signage designs
- Floor vinyl graphics
- Menu board designs
- Suite upgrade renderings
- Wayfinding system

JUSTIN FRANCISCO

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Currently at Compass Group Canada

Environmental design • Brand systems • Visual identity • Art direction