Keeping Up Appearances

What makes a Main Street business successful? There is no single formula. Product, price, display, service, location and market all play a part. So does the outward appearance of the business.

Many store owners regard appearance as secondary to the more immediate concerns of price, product and service. Too often, the building itself is neglected or mishandled.

Yet experience shows, time and again, that appearance is important to a healthy commercial district. With merchants working together to create an attractive image, the downtown as a whole can benefit.

Through the National Main Street Center, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has demonstrated the value of keeping up appearances. Without gimmicks or themes, it has shown how to build on resources and strengths that already exist in traditional commercial centers across the country. The time-tested methods for keeping up appearances are presented in this publication.

Recognizing the Problem

Most downtowns had their beginnings more than 150 years ago as the hearts of their communities. They grew in times very different than today, when merchants directed their attention to the walking trade and the fastest moving vehicle was the horse-drawn carriage.

The 20th century brought changes to Main Street. With the automobile grew competition from commercial strips and shopping centers. Downtown retailers turned their attention to passing cars, erecting shiny storefronts and eye-catching signs. Main Street stores tried to imitate their competitors.

In many ways, the result has been a sorry one. In too many communities, downtown now appears as a curious cross between neglected old buildings and a commercial strip. It presents a confused image to the shopping public, satisfying neither the pedestrian nor the driving customer.

The key to improving appearances lies in recognizing a simple fact: The traditional business district is neither a shopping mall nor a commercial strip and should not pretend to be either.

With its buildings, history, setting and place within the community, downtown is unique and special. It makes sense to acknowledge these resources and take full advantage of them, to develop the qualities that are already present downtown—qualities a mall or strip will never have.

Taking Advantage of Main Street

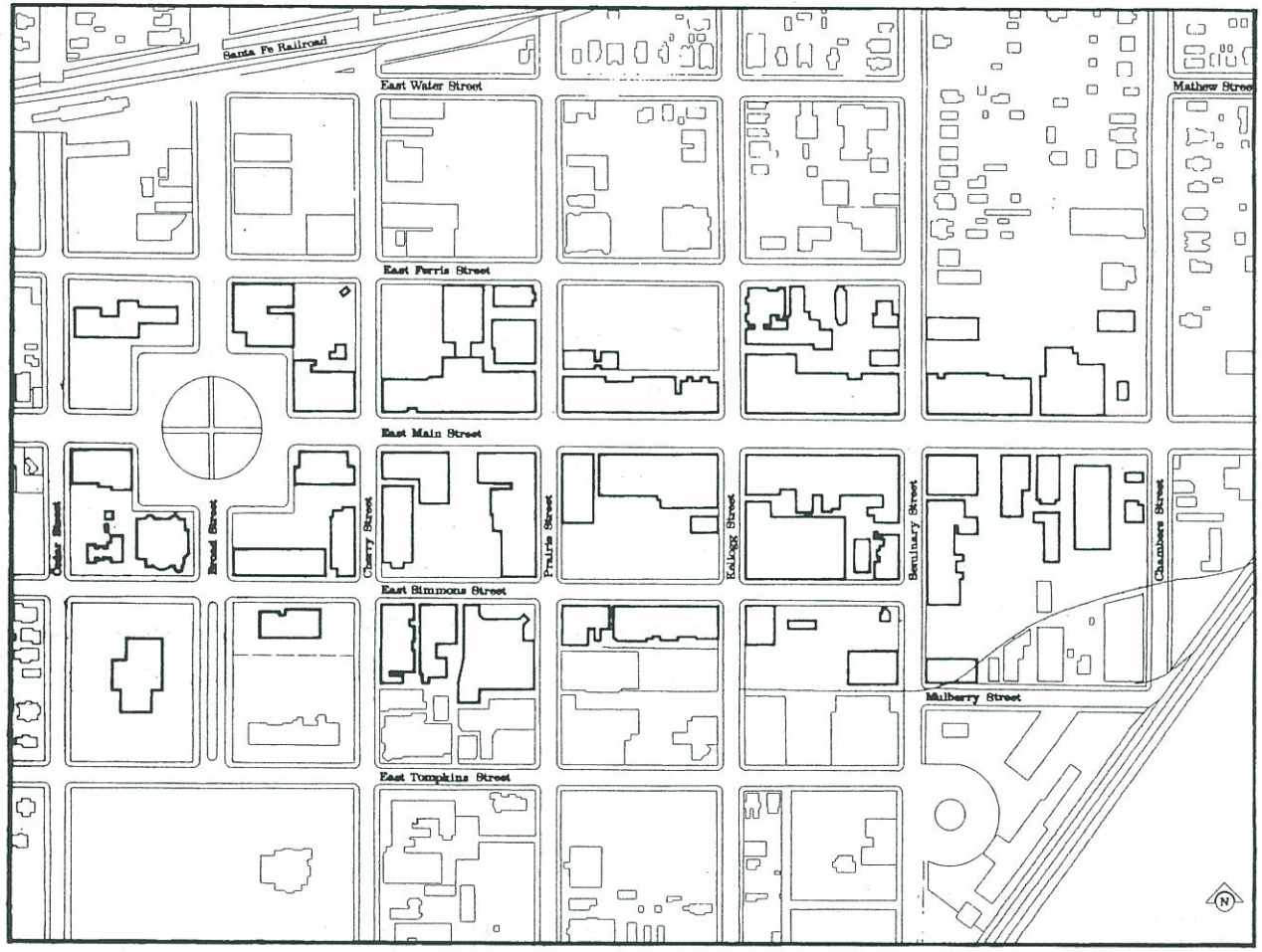
A Main Street revitalization program is intended to help you make the most of your location whether it is on Main Street or in a traditional neighborhood business district. While organizational, promotional and economic restructuring questions are also important to a Main Street revitalization program, this guide is designed to offer advice on the care of your property.

What improvements can make a building work better for you? How can you make it more attractive to shoppers? The following pages present suggestions for improving appearances, as well as ideas for prolonging the life of old buildings.

The practical advice offered here for restoration, rehabilitation or simply better maintenance can be augmented by more comprehensive guides listed in the reference section at the end of this publication. Also consult knowledgeable professionals in your community. Other sources of information and expertise include the State Historic Preservation Office, the state Main Street office, the Technical Preservation Services Division of the National Park Service and the National Main Street Center.

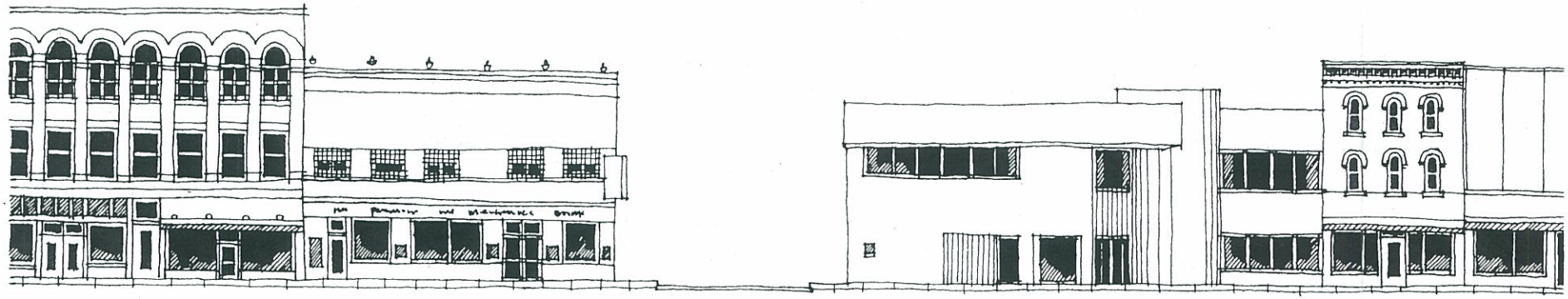
The rest depends on you and your building, your neighbor's buildings, the image you want your business to project, your means and your imagination. The improvements are yours to make.

The Main Street Study Area



Galesburg, Ill., was one of the original Main Street communities. Its downtown is typical of thousands of commercial districts that have been revitalized using the Main Street four-point approach.

Architectural Variety

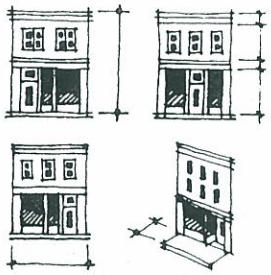


The traditional commercial storefront building can be considered the cornerstone of Main Street. Dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries, these buildings share a remarkable similarity, a consistency that has strengthened Main Street as a whole.

If respect for its historic buildings is maintained, the traditional strength of Main Street can work yet today. But what about "less historic" structures? Or changes already made to buildings? Do they necessarily detract from the character of the traditional business district?

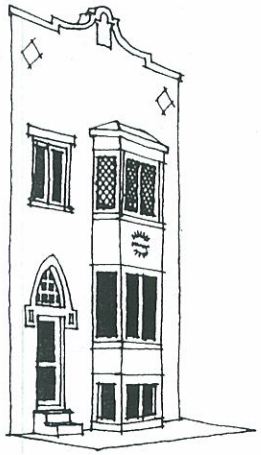
That depends. You will note that recommendations for new buildings (see guideline on "New Infill Construction") call for contemporary design, not fake history. (See "Note on False History" on other side of this page.) In the same way, we can expect changes made over the years to mirror their own times. This reflects the growth and vitality of Main Street.

New and remodeled buildings are evaluated as they relate to their surroundings, as well as for the design itself. Height, width, relationship to the street, roof forms, proportion, composition, rhythm, proportion of openings, materials and colors—these are 10 criteria that should be considered in the design. By relating buildings to each other, new construction and building renovations can be welcome additions to Main Street, rather than unwanted intruders.



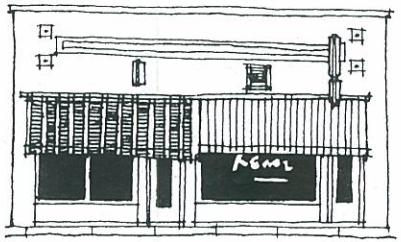
Similarly, the variety of architectural styles that exist along Main Street should be judged on their own qualities, not simply by their age. Before you set out to make changes because your building is not "historic enough," see it for what it is and learn to recognize its own particular values.

In addition to the 10 criteria already discussed, there are other standards that should be used to judge the compatibility of new construction or remodeled facades. For instance, the unaltered facade of a 19th-century building is highly valued because it retains its original integrity. The same holds true, sometimes to a lesser degree perhaps, for an unchanged facade of a 20th-century building. The 1940s and '50s are as much a part of Main Street as the 1890s.



In most cases, regardless of age, many changes have taken place. If the resulting appearance is pleasing in proportions, composition and details and if it respects the other criteria, then the facade is a visual resource for the commercial district. It is not necessary to change a facade simply because it doesn't look historic.

NEW CANVAS AWNINGS AND REMODELED STOREFRONTS FLATTER THE EXISTING FACADE.



Probably the most important characteristic is quality. If in design, construction and maintenance, a facade displays craftsmanship and pride, then it is making a positive contribution to its surroundings.

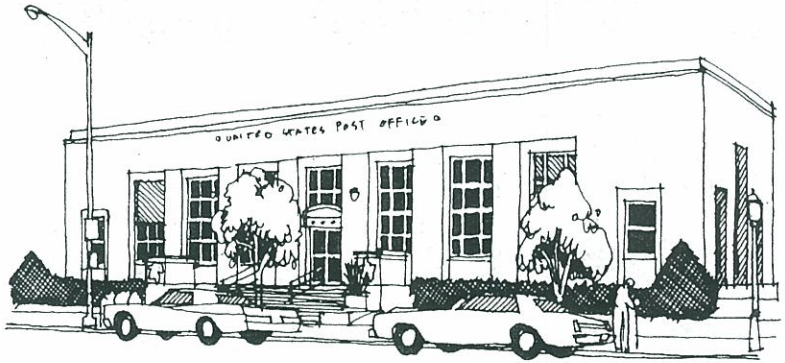
With a critical eye, look at the facade of your building and those of its neighbors. By all means, make improvements where you see they are needed. But, on the other hand, don't be afraid to like what you see.

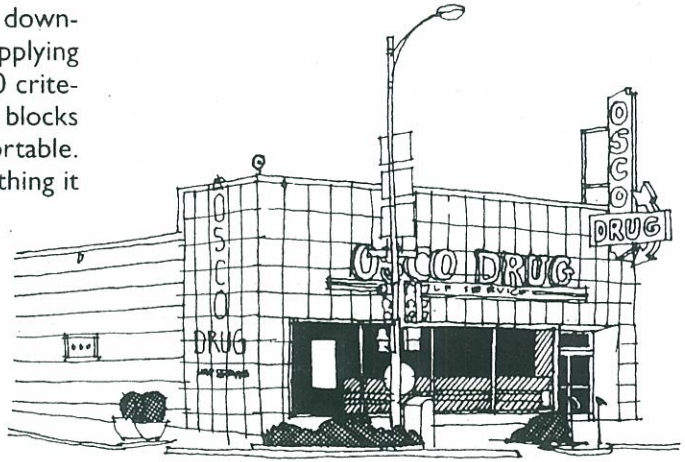
On this page are some examples of the architectural variety present along Main Street. Consider how these buildings, no matter what their age, make a positive contribution to the commercial district's environment.

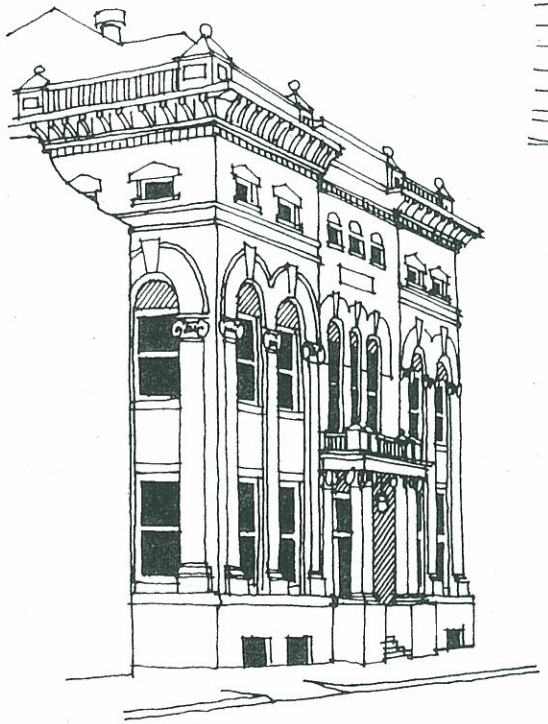
A Note on False History

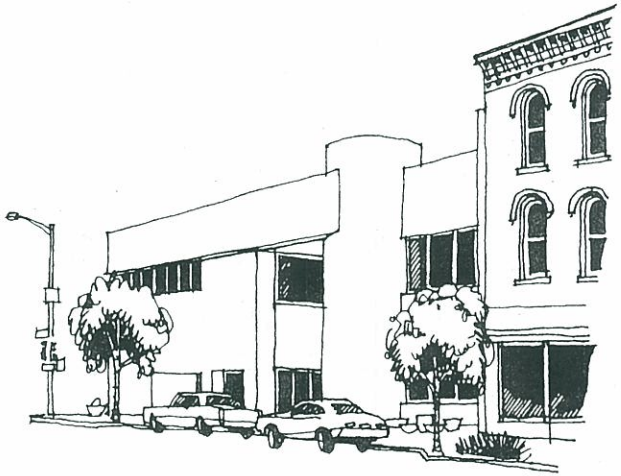
Attempting to make a building look older than it is by applying decorations from earlier styles falsifies the true history of the structure. It also detracts from the true history of the adjacent buildings and the business district, creating a false impression of Main Street. Moreover, creating a "more historic" appearance for a building can be expensive.

Another way some communities attempt to make their downtowns more "historic" is by developing a theme—such as Bavarian or Tudor English—for all buildings. In doing so, the community is denying its true architectural heritage and suggesting that the downtown belongs in another time and place. Applying false themes almost always disregards the 10 criteria for good design on Main Street and creates blocks of buildings that look awkward and uncomfortable. Moreover, turning the downtown into something it isn't is *very* expensive.









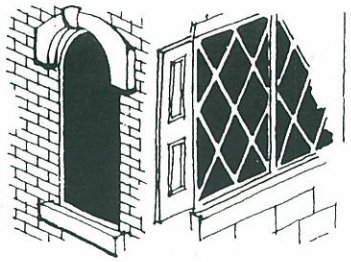
New Infill Construction

The construction of new buildings on vacant lots downtown should be encouraged. Because this type of building fills a "hole" in the built environment, it is called *infill construction.*

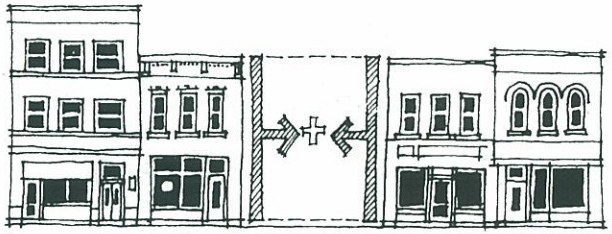
The design of a new infill building, particularly its front facade is a special challenge. It should be designed to look appropriate and compatible with surrounding buildings. Otherwise, the new building will look awkward and out of place.

What is good infill design? There is no pat answer; a good design will vary according to its setting. Professionals generally agree that because an infill building is new, it should look new. However, its appearance must be sensitive to the character of its neighbors.

The infill facade should not pretend to be historic by too closely mimicking older facades. Often, pseudo-Colonial or Victorian details are added to a new building in an attempt to make it blend in with older surroundings. This approach seldom succeeds; instead, it detracts from an area's character by compromising what is authentic and historic.

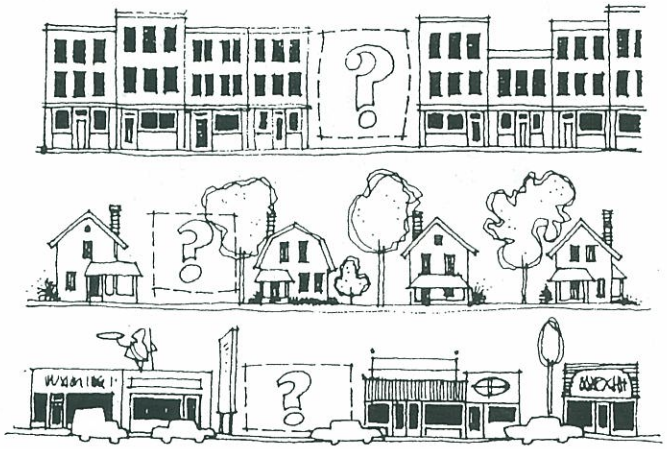


The central idea behind good infill construction is a simple one. To a large degree, the design of an infill facade should be an outgrowth of those around it. If the design of the new facade is based on those of its neighbors, it is sure to be compatible.



This approach strikes a proper balance between the existing architecture and good contemporary design. The modern designer is allowed the freedom of individual talent—within limits.

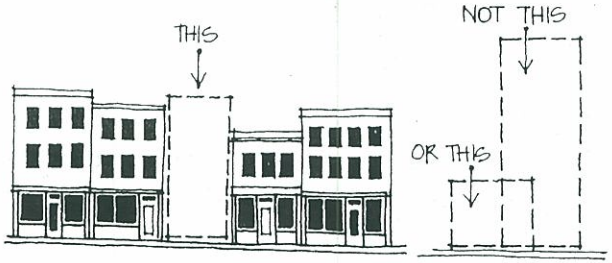
Since a good infill design responds to its surroundings, it is not possible to develop specific guidelines that will apply to all cases. Every site has its own design problems and opportunities.



There are, however, several general concepts that should govern the visual relationship between an infill building and its neighbors.

1. Height

Buildings in traditional commercial districts share a similar height. Infill construction should respect this. A new facade that is too high or low can interrupt this consistent quality.

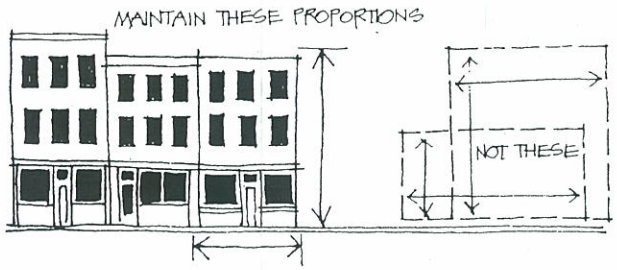


2. Width

The infill building should reflect the characteristic rhythm of the facades along the street. If the site is large, the mass of the facade can be divided into a number of small bays.

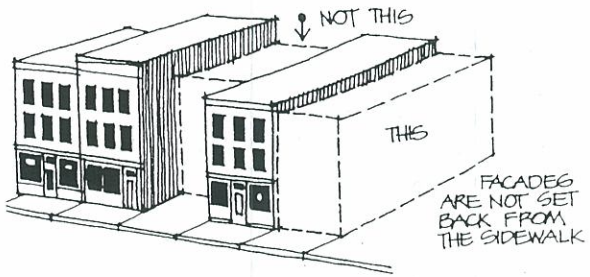
3. Proportion

The characteristic proportion (the relationship between height and width) of existing facades should be respected.



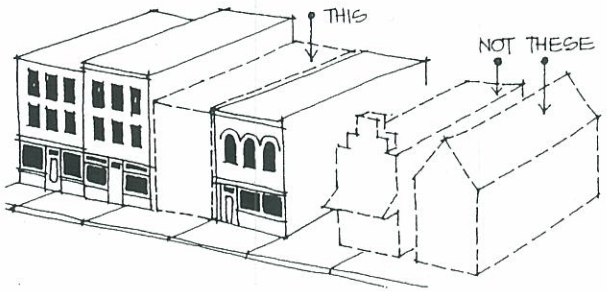
4. Relationship to Street

The new facade's relationship to the street (called the "setback") should be consistent with that of its neighboring buildings.



5. Roof and Cornice Forms

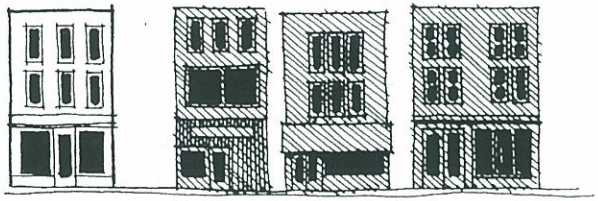
The form of the roof and building cornice should be similar to those on adjacent structures. On Main Street, this usually means a flat roof hidden behind a cornice.



6. Composition

The composition of the infill facade (that is, the organization of its parts) should be similar to that of surrounding facades.

EXISTING FACADES ARE SIMILAR IN ARRANGEMENT

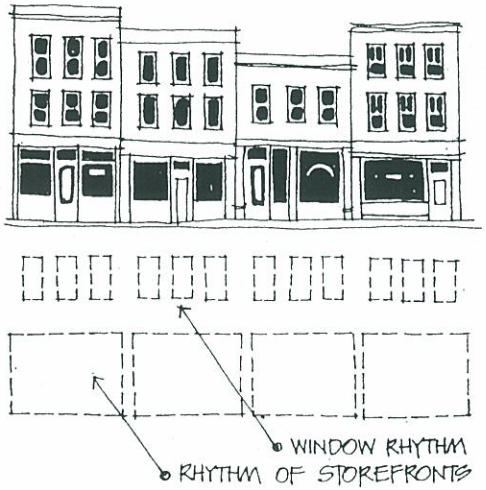


THIS NOT THESE

NEW BUILDING FACADES

7. Rhythm

Rhythms that carry throughout the block (such as window spacing) should be incorporated into the new facade.

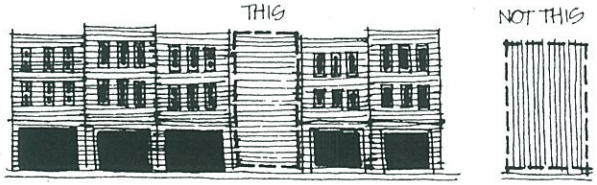


8. Proportions of Openings

The size and proportion of window and door openings should be similar to those on surrounding facades. The same applies to the ratio of window area to solid wall for the facade as a whole.

9. Materials

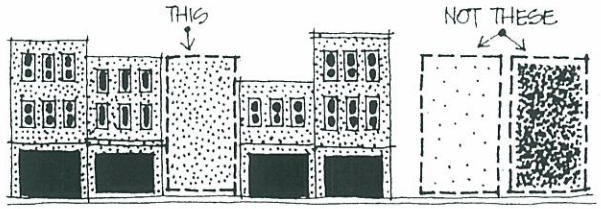
An infill facade should be composed of materials that complement adjacent facades. The new building should not stand out against others.



EXISTING FACADES OF SIMILAR MATERIALS

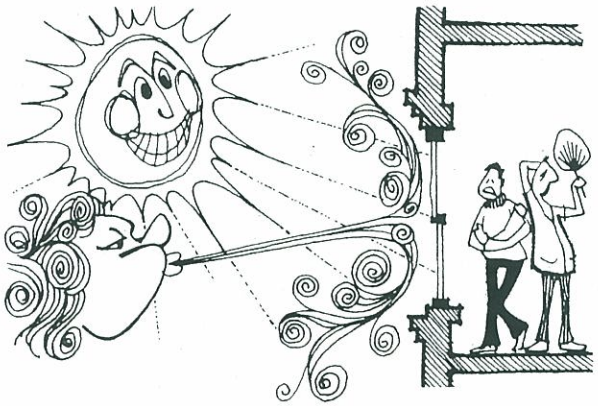
10. Color

The colors chosen for an infill facade should tie it to its neighbors.



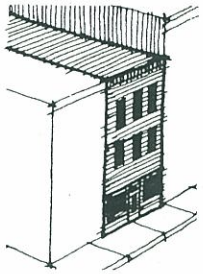
EXISTING FACADES OF COMPATIBLE COLORS

Energy Conservation

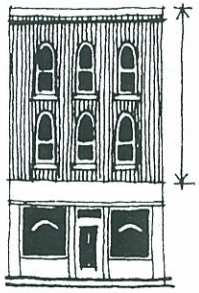


Energy conservation in a building means minimizing its energy needs and maximizing the comfort of its occupants. If properly treated, most old commercial buildings can be as energy efficient as new ones. The process is not particularly costly, but it does require a commitment to identify and solve some specific problems.

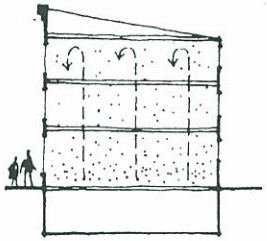
1. The traditional commercial building has some basic characteristics that help save energy.



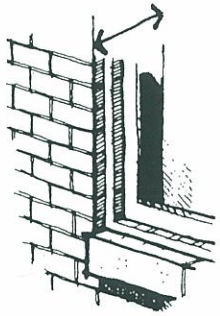
Relatively little of the building is exposed. Sides are usually covered (and insulated) by adjacent buildings.



Above the storefront, the windows tend to be small and widely spaced. Compare this to the typical facade of a new building.



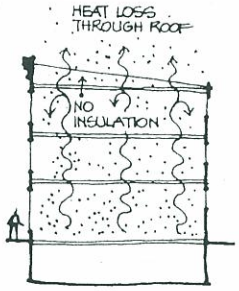
In buildings with several floors, the upper stories trap and use heat rising from the lower floors.



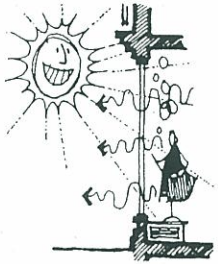
Masonry construction offers good insulation. Also, the walls are usually rather thick.

2. However, old commercial buildings also have some typical energy problems.

In many cases, old windows and doors have not been maintained. Consequently, they leak air and moisture.



Uninsulated flat roofs lose much usable heat during the winter.

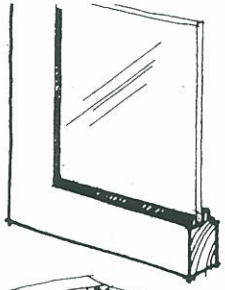


Large storefront windows lose heat in the winter and let in hot air during the summer.

Old heating systems are often inefficient and outdated.

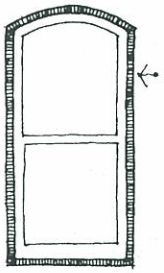
3. Windows and doors should be sealed as tightly as possible. When closed, they should not leak air or moisture.

Repair all windows and doors so that all their parts fit together tightly.



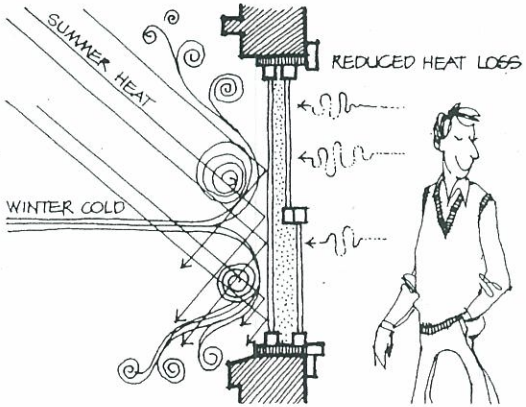
Reglaze all loose or broken window panes.

Carefully weather-strip all window and door openings.



Caulk the cracks between all nonmoving window and door parts, as well as any cracks between the window or door and its openings.

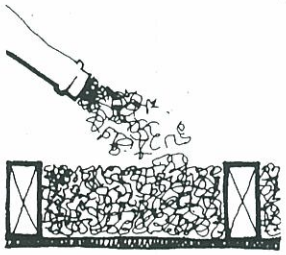
4. Storm windows can greatly reduce winter heat loss through wall openings. While rather impractical for the storefront—the constant opening and closing of the door negates their value—the use of storm windows on the upper facade and the rear and side walls should be considered.



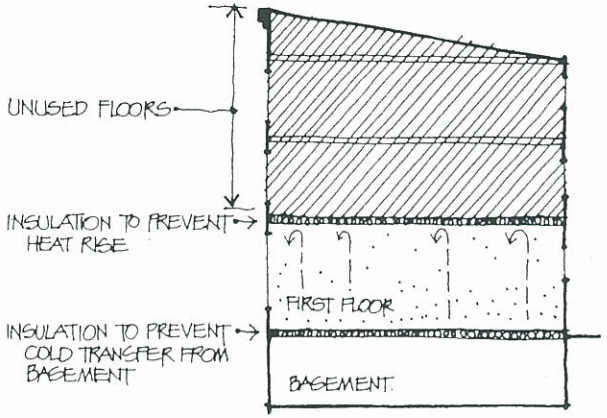
5. Carefully applied insulation can greatly improve a building's energy efficiency. While many kinds are available, two are most appropriate for downtown buildings.

Fiberglass insulation consists of spun fibers attached to a paper backing. It is laid by hand and can be stapled to wood studs for joists.

The paper acts as a moisture barrier and must be installed correctly to prevent maintenance problems. The second type of appropriate insulation is cellulose, a shredded paper treated with a fire retardant. Installed through use of a mechanical blower, cellulose is ideal for relatively inaccessible parts of a building. However, cellulose and other types of blown-in insulation do not usually come with a moisture barrier, thus creating future maintenance problems. And, over time, cellulose compacts, losing some of its insulation value.



As a general rule, the thicker the insulation, the better. Proper placement is also important. The roof is a critical location because much winter heat loss occurs there.

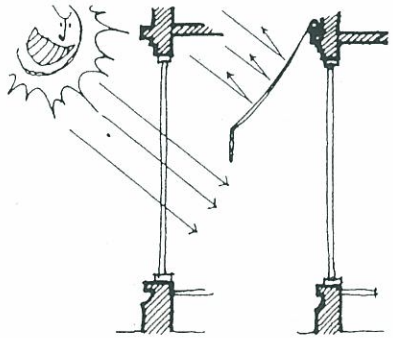


If the upper floors are not in use, consider insulating the second floor to trap heat below it. Insulation of the first floor will protect the store from the cold basement space.

If insulation is installed in the roof, walls, or between floors, be sure to include a moisture barrier and vents. Without them, moisture may become trapped and create maintenance problems.

6. With all its glass, the storefront presents special energy problems. It loses heat in the winter and, if exposed to the summer sun, it gains heat.

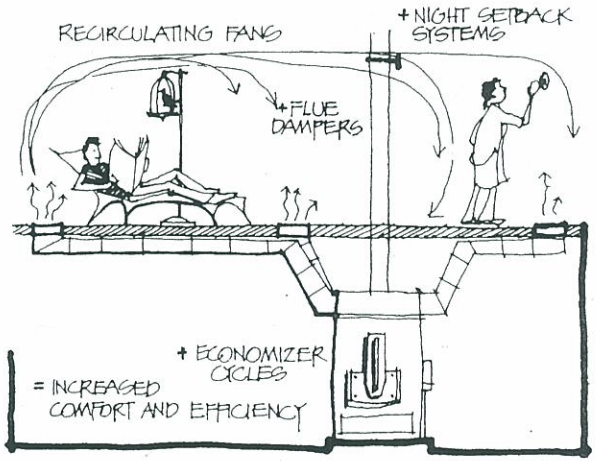
Where the sun is a factor, an awning or canopy can provide a partial solution. (See "Awnings and Canopies" guideline.) An operable awning can be extended in the summer to shade the storefront. Retracted in winter, it can allow sunlight into the store.



Insulated or tinted glass can also reduce the energy inefficiency of a storefront window. While some of the value of insulated glass will be lost by constant opening and closing of the door, the nighttime protection can be substantial.

Locating heat vents near storefront windows can minimize the discomfort of winter heat loss and help prevent condensation on the glass. Good weatherstripping and caulking of storefront windows and doors can also minimize heat loss.

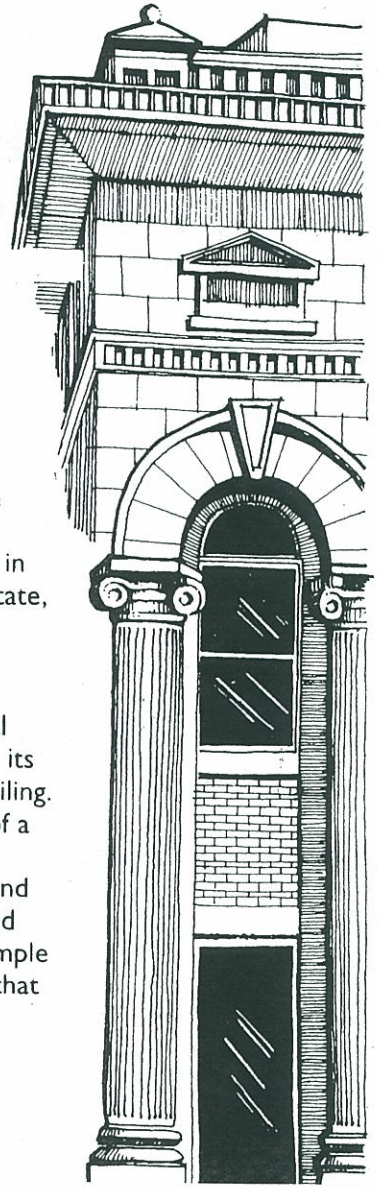
7. If your present heating system is old and inefficient, it is probably wasting energy. Have it checked and consider replacing it if possible. Since a wide variety of systems and heating units are available, carefully consider the benefits and drawbacks of each one.



Does the heating system you are considering have options that will save you money in the long run? Economizer cycles, night setback systems, flue dampers, and recirculating fans are all devices that improve energy efficiency.

If the new heating system requires installation of metal ducts, try to conceal them in the basement. If they must be hung inside the shop, have them designed so that they blend with the building's interior and do not cover the transom windows.

Historic Architectural Decoration



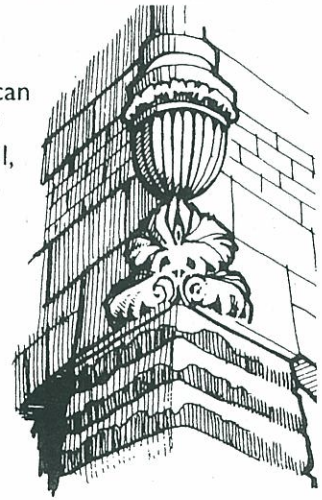
Certainly one of the most striking aspects of the traditional facade is its eye-catching detail. Historically, decoration was freely used to embellish the facade. Often, today, only the decoration of the upper facade remains. Yet even in this incomplete state, details should be preserved.

Much of a downtown's visual character rests in its architectural detailing. You might think of a decoration as an antique. It is a blend of architecture and sculpture, an example of craftsmanship that would be difficult and costly to reproduce today.

Identifying Materials

The first step in preserving detailing is to determine what kind of decoration you have. Basically, six types of materials have been used for decorations.

1. Brick



Decorative brick work can be found on buildings of almost any date. In detail, it ranges from elaborate corbeled cornices and bold window arches to decorated storefront piers. Brick detailing also occurs when bricks are laid in patterns in the upper facade of a building.

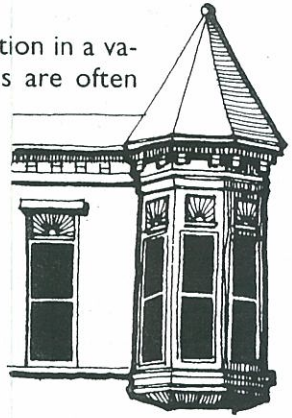
2. Stone

Sandstone, limestone, marble, granite, and other building stones are often found on the facades of Main Street buildings. For decorations, they range from elaborately carved corner details to arches over windows and doors to decorated stone quoins.

3. Cast-Iron and Sheet Metal

Metal decoration is usually found on buildings constructed before 1900. It was generally applied as an add-on to a masonry facade. Building and storefront cornices, window surrounds, and even entire facades can be recognized by the intricacy of the detail. Metal or cast-iron decorations are more durable than wood.

4. Wood

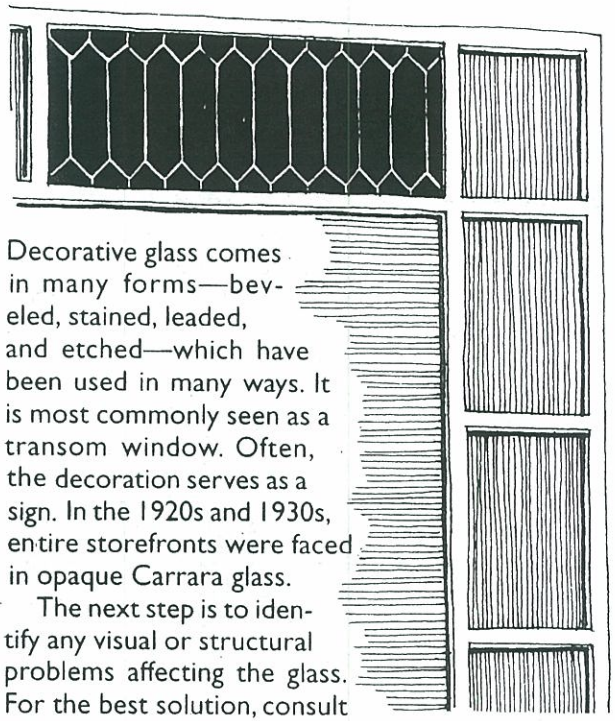


Wood was used for decoration in a variety of ways. Wood details are often subtle, like the moldings around windows. These less ornate details are nevertheless important to the total facade.

5. Terra Cotta

Decorative terra cotta was commonly used from 1890 to 1930. A ceramic material, terra cotta offered flexibility in form, color, and detail. Terra cotta was applied to buildings as a decorative veneer or installed as a masonry unit in combination with brick or stone.

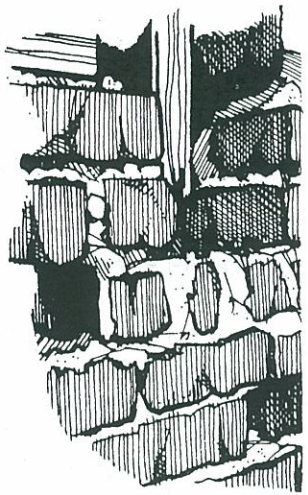
6. Decorative Glass



Decorative glass comes in many forms—beveled, stained, leaded, and etched—which have been used in many ways. It is most commonly seen as a transom window. Often, the decoration serves as a sign. In the 1920s and 1930s, entire storefronts were faced in opaque Carrara glass.

The next step is to identify any visual or structural problems affecting the glass. For the best solution, consult a local, knowledgeable professional or tradesman and be sure to explain that you want to preserve the decorations.

1. Brick Problems



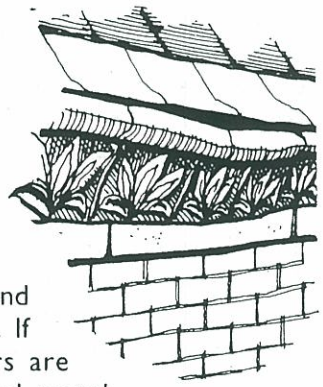
Many of the problems that affect decorative brick are the same as for masonry in general. (See "Masonry Cleaning.") In other cases, decorative brick work has been damaged during an earlier facade remodeling. If this is the problem, new replacement bricks of the same shape may be available or replacement decoration can be molded in a substitute material.

2. Stone Problems

Stone decorations are also subject to many of the problems discussed in "Masonry Cleaning." Decorative stone is subject to erosion from windblown grit and chemicals contained in rain and snow. The surface may also flake off if water penetrates into the stone. These problems require expert advice but can be cured.

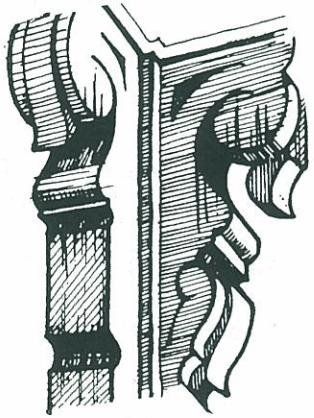
3. Cast-Iron and Sheet Metal Problems

With metal decoration, look for obvious signs of deterioration: corrosion, tears, holes, and missing pieces. Look also for more subtle evidence, such as telltale rust and surface discoloration, often a sign of deterioration from within.



A sagging cornice can mean deterioration in the supporting wood framing. Since the metal decoration is applied to the surface, check its anchoring to the wall. Minor deterioration can be quickly solved by properly preparing, priming, and painting the decoration. If more extensive repairs are needed, a local, skilled metal worker can fabricate replacement parts. But again, remember to communicate your desire to preserve the decoration.

4. Wood Problems

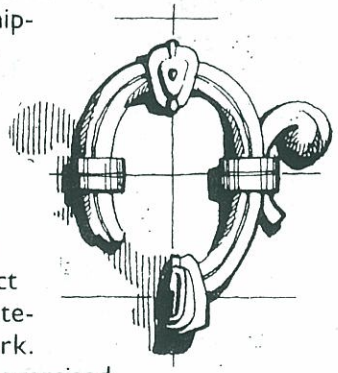


Wood decoration is very susceptible to deterioration. However, problems are easy to prevent through regular maintenance. When checking for problems, look for soft, dry, or split areas in the wood surfaces, especially those exposed to harsh weather.

Up to a point, these problems can be fixed by filling and caulking the wood, then priming and painting. The wood may also be consolidated or hardened by using an epoxy injection. When repair is impossible, consult a local mill shop for a replacement piece that matches the existing detail.

5. Terra Cotta Problems

Since terra cotta is a cast-masonry product, many of its potential problems are the same as those that affect brick. Other problems include cracking and chipping of the glazed surface. Also check for loose anchoring of the terra cotta to the structural wall.

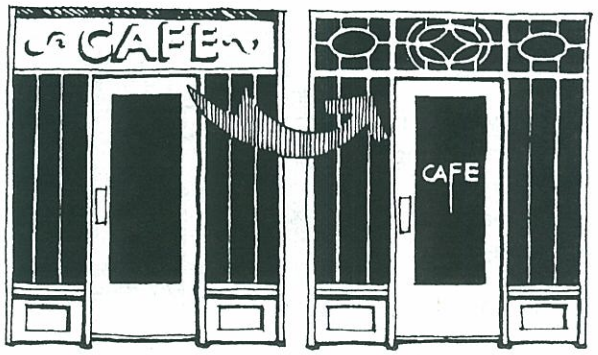


Since terra cotta is the most difficult material to work with, contact an expert for all maintenance and repair work. Great care should be exercised when dealing with this material because replacement terra cotta is extremely hard to find.

6. Decorative Glass Problems

One of the problems with glass decoration is that many times, it is covered up. Look for it in transoms or behind plywood window covers.

Sagging, if it occurs, means that the glass and the frame need to be reinforced with a brace. Other problems often occur with old leaded or stained glass. The metal between the glass panes, called the "came," may be either zinc or lead. Always use the same metal when making repairs.



A General Approach

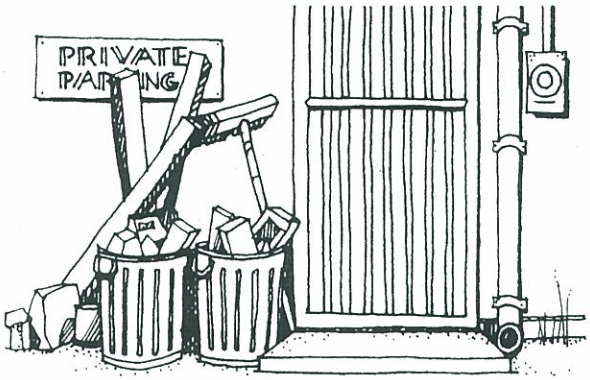
Any historic detail should be treated with care. First, maintain what you have. If necessary, repair or replace the detail by duplicating or complementing the original.

The addition of fake "historic" decoration to make a facade look "old" is not recommended. This will inevitably cheapen the quality of the facade.

A Note on Substitute Materials

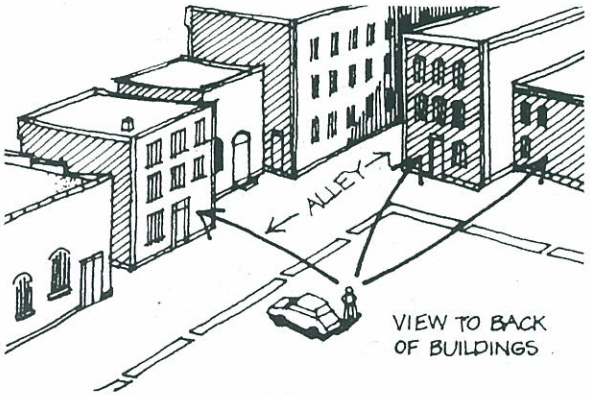
In some cases, it is appropriate, and less expensive, to replace a missing or badly deteriorated architectural decoration with a different material. If a substitute material is considered, it should have the same appearance—texture, color, size, shape, and detailing—as the original. It is also important to be sure that, when the temperature changes, the substitute material will expand and contract at a rate similar to the original.

REAR ENTRANCES



Spaces behind buildings are frequently forgotten. People tend to avoid them because they are usually unkempt and unattractive. Too often, these spaces have been considered strictly service areas, where deliveries are made or garbage picked up.

However, more and more parking areas in traditional business districts are being developed behind buildings, in the middle of the block. The backs of the buildings are coming into full and open view.



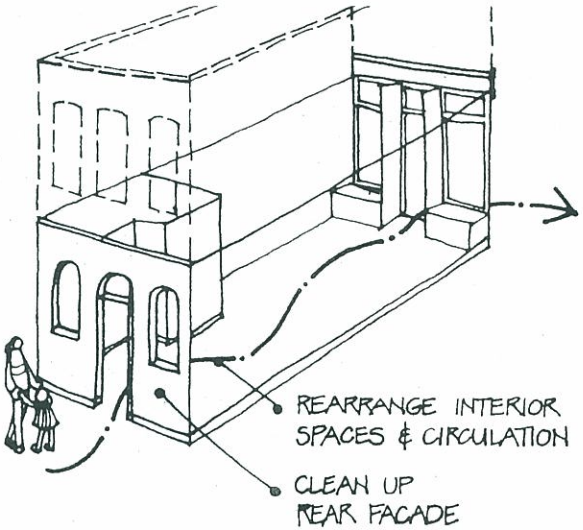
This suggests two things:

- The appearance of the back areas is important to the commercial district.
- Rear entrances can potentially benefit all businesses by allowing direct entry from the parking lot into stores. Customers don't need to walk around the block to reach a shop.

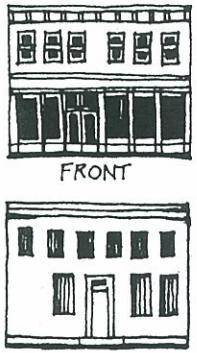
If you don't have an attractive rear entrance to your business but are considering making improvements, think about these issues.

1. Would additional walk-through traffic help or hinder your business? Would a rear entrance be an added convenience to your customers?

2. What changes would you need to make to give your store an attractive rear entrance? How would you handle the circulation, displays, and security throughout the building?



3. Although the two are similar, the rear entrance should not compete with the storefront in importance. In most cases, the rear entrance should occupy a relatively small part of the back facade and exhibit more of a utilitarian character. Still, it should be maintained and developed to support the overall appearance and convenience of the district.

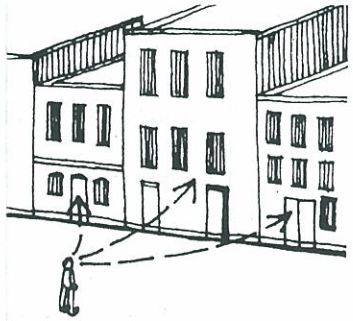


4. Like the storefront, the rear entry requires identification. It should be inviting and attractive. A glass panel in the back door is one way to open your store to potential customers. A small sign on or near the door is another way to identify your business. Be sure to keep it small, and don't clutter the area with too many signs. An attractive metal grille can provide security and add to the visual appeal of a rear entry.

If your building has rear windows on the ground floor, use them for displays; they will also attract people to your door.

An awning or small canopy can be a pleasant addition and a convenience to shoppers during inclement weather. If there is enough sun, planter boxes might also be added, but only if you attend to them properly.

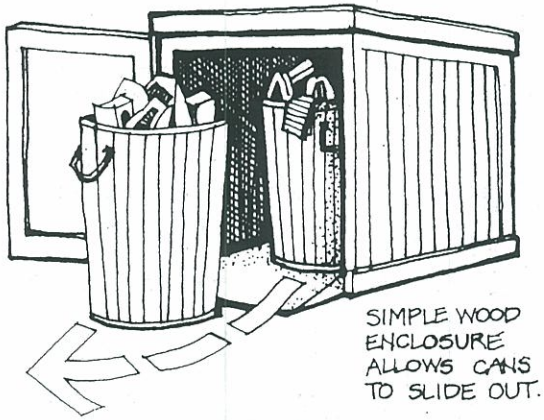
5. Like the storefront, the rear entry should respect its next-door neighbors. Try to make your entry compatible with neighboring stores. Look at the back entrances next to yours.



It might be wise for you and your fellow merchants to get together and plan an attractive approach to the rear facades of your buildings.

6. Normal service activities, such as trash collection, loading, shipping, and storage must also occur with ease. It is possible to accommodate these functions and, at the same time, make the space behind the store more pleasant for shoppers.

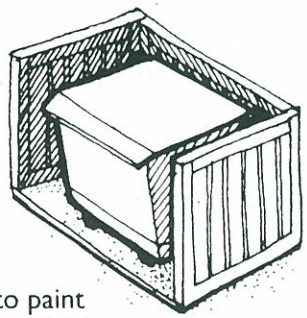
7. If possible, pick a central location for trash collection, one that will serve several stores efficiently. Grouping the containers gives a less cluttered appearance.



SIMPLE WOOD ENCLOSURE ALLOWS CANS TO SLIDE OUT.

8. Simple enclosures can be readily constructed to hide refuse containers and prevent clutter. These enclosures should open from the front for easy removal of full, heavy cans.

Dumpsters can also be screened from view. Before construction, be sure to consult the collection agency and ensure that your design will not disrupt their activities.



Use a neutral color to paint or stain these enclosures. Bright or loud colors draw attention to the screens and containers, when the purpose is to camouflage them. Choose colors that blend in with those of the rear facade.

COLOR BLENDS WITH SURROUNDINGS.

COLOR DOES NOT BLEND.

9. Don't forget about the paved areas behind the buildings or in the alleys. Many times, the paving is full of potholes, which is both bothersome and dangerous for pedestrians.

In addition to paving, watch out for drainage problems. Poor drainage causes puddles and other hazards for pedestrians. Make sure there is adequate drainage away from your building. Also check the storm drain inlets regularly to see whether they need cleaning.

KEEP DRAIN INLET CLEAN SO THAT PUDDLES DO NOT FORM.

Weeds and scrub trees can also be a problem in areas behind buildings. These plants are tenacious and will grow wherever they can. For a better image, keep them under control.

10. Snow removal is another consideration. Just as front walks need to be shoveled, so too do back entrances.

11. The rear facades of commercial buildings have been ignored and neglected for a long time. In many cases, they have been left to deteriorate or have been poorly maintained. Windows on the ground and upper floors are frequently ill-kept, boarded up, or dirty. Electrical and telephone lines are haphazardly attached to many buildings, giving them a cluttered look. With good design and proper maintenance, rear entrances can become attractive and convenient for Main Street shoppers.

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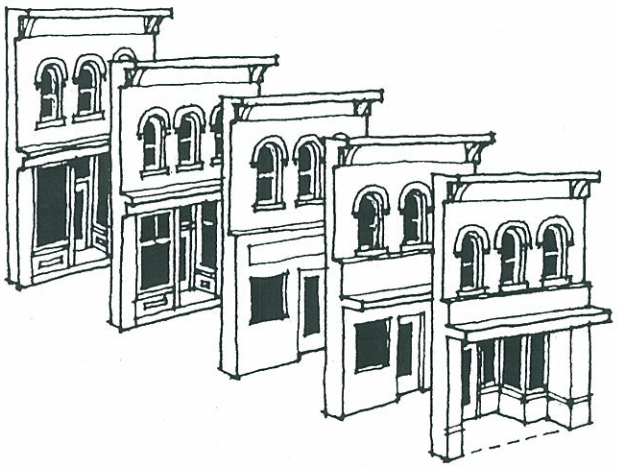
Storefront Design



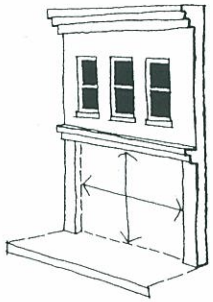
We have looked at the evolution of the traditional Main Street facade and seen the changes that have been, and will continue to be made. Many are concentrated on the storefront. Generation after generation, storefronts change while upper facades and building cornices remain the same, deteriorate or disappear behind cover-ups.

Because of their relatively permanent nature, the upper facade and the building cornice are primarily maintenance and repair problems. (See guidelines on "Cornices" and "Upper-Story Windows.") The appearance of the storefront, on the other hand, is a design issue.

If you wish to restore the original storefront, a little research can be invaluable. Look in the local library for historic photos or postcards of your building. Ask previous owners if they have the original plans. Look for old maps or lithographs of your town; they often contain drawings of downtown buildings. Or your building may have been depicted in an old newspaper advertisement. Finally, examine the facade itself; you may find evidence of its original appearance.

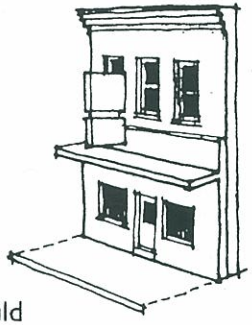
However, you don't necessarily need to recreate the storefront's exact historic appearance. The following are ideas to consider if you are planning to change your storefront. Although each is founded on the traditional storefront, these ideas are not "historic" in nature. They are functional and designed to make the storefront more attractive and accessible to shoppers.

Keeping the Storefront in Its Place

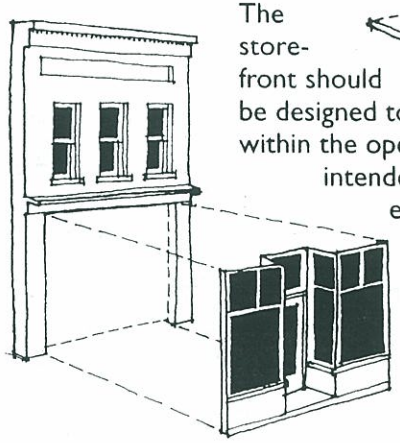


Every traditional Main Street building facade has a well-defined opening which the original storefront filled. It is the area bounded by the enframing storefront cornice and piers on the sides and top and by the sidewalk at the bottom.

Many problems with facades today arise from remodelings in which the storefront has been allowed to stray out of its natural surroundings. In such cases, the storefront no longer looks contained; instead, it looks as if it has been pasted on. One senses that the storefront is "out of control," that it dominates the building facade as a whole.

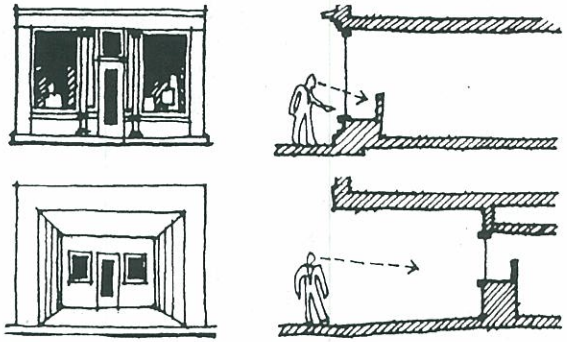


A general rule for future renovations can be stated as follows: The storefront should be designed to fit within the opening originally intended for it and not extend beyond it.



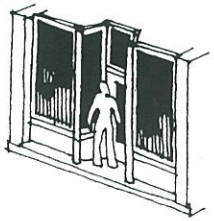
The Slightly Recessed Storefront

To emphasize the feeling of containment, a storefront might be set back slightly (six inches to a foot) from the front of the building.



It is common to see a remodeled storefront recessed as a whole or punched far back (3 to 15 feet) into the facade. Except for buildings constructed in the 1920s and '30s, this treatment is almost never historically accurate. Unless specifically designed to lure customers to the entry, deep recesses tend to isolate the storefront from the street. The pedestrian is not so tempted to stop, look in the window, and enter the store.

The Recessed Entry

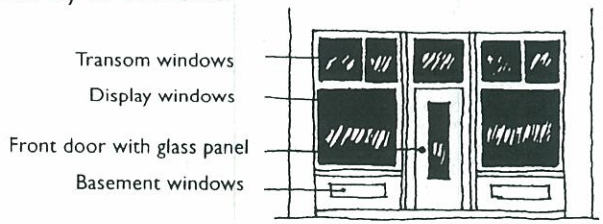


The traditional storefront had a recessed entry at the front door. This configuration accomplished two important things. First, it kept the display windows right next to the sidewalk, in full view of passersby. And, because the entry was recessed, this design emphasized the door. The intimacy of the enclosed and sheltered doorway seemed to invite the pedestrian inside.

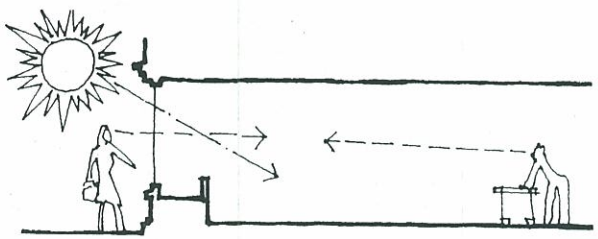
This is a simple and logical storefront design. Regrettably, many storefronts no longer retain this form.

The Storefront Windows

The traditional storefront was composed almost entirely of windows.

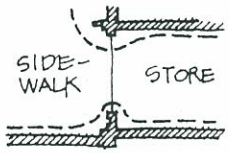


For very functional reasons, the storefront was designed to be as transparent as possible; this allowed a maximum of natural light into the typically narrow, otherwise windowless store space and relieved the closed-in feeling. It also gave the potential customer a good view into the store.



With this minimal barrier between store and sidewalk, the two seemed to merge into one. The store space became part of the public street, readily accessible to shoppers.

Many owners shy away from large storefront windows because of potential glass breakage. But the use of modern tempered glass can substantially reduce this problem.



Although often ignored, the idea of a transparent storefront is as valid today as it was in the past. For this reason, it is recommended that future storefronts, whether in new or existing buildings, be designed with the largest possible window area.

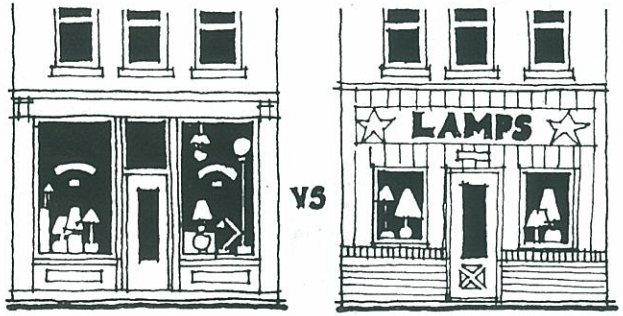
Many original storefronts also contain transoms above the display windows. When used in conjunction with white painted ceilings, these windows permitted sunlight to penetrate deep inside the shop, helping to illuminate merchandise displays and giving a pleasing quality of light. In many buildings, these windows have been covered, darkening the store's interior and changing the proportion and composition of the storefront. Often, simply removing the covering material will reveal intact transom windows.

Storefront Decoration

The design of the traditional storefront emphasized the display windows and entry door. Consequently, the storefront usually had only simple decoration. Shoppers were supposed to look through rather than at it.

At odds with this traditional concept, many remodeled storefronts were inappropriately decorated. Loud colors, patterns, textures, and signs all clamor for the customer's attention. They fight with one another and clash with the upper facade and building cornice. With all this decoration, a shopper hardly notices the display windows.

Merchants are encouraged to adopt a traditional strategy for storefront design, based on the attraction of the goods and services inside. Less emphasis should be placed on decoration for decoration's sake and more on the potential of the display window. (See "Window Displays.")



Choosing Materials

The choice of materials can be critical to the overall success of your storefront design. Again, take a cue from the traditional storefront, whose simple and unobtrusive materials emphasized display windows and the entry door.

Today, many remodeled storefronts are made of materials that look out of place on Main Street because of color, texture, or a combination of the two. Not only do they clash with traditional commercial building facades; often, they are unattractive designs for any building.

As significant as the materials themselves is the way they are used. It is common to see a renovated facade that appears sloppy and disorganized because the materials have been carelessly applied. Haphazard combinations can destroy an otherwise pleasing design.

This problem is particularly evident at the "edges" — where the storefront touches the cornice and piers. (See "Keeping the Storefront in Its Place.")

In addition, the joint between your storefront and those of adjacent buildings should have a neat, controlled appearance. Remember that the visual impact of your facade design extends well beyond your building.

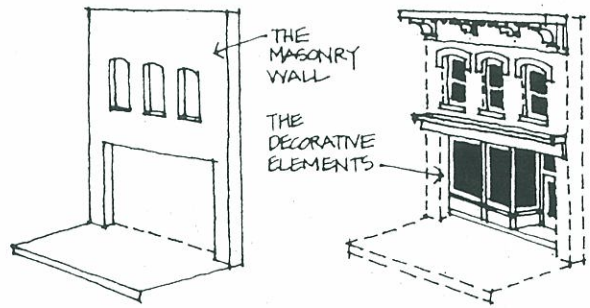
Facade Change as Evolution

The existing Main Street environment is a product of an evolution that began with the construction of the first building and has continued ever since. Facades change; this is natural, inevitable and often desirable.

The goal of this publication is not to prevent or control change, nor is it necessarily to return a facade to its original appearance. Rather, the goal is to encourage sensitive and appropriate change.

The Quality of Change

When it was first constructed, the typical Main Street facade exhibited some basic inherent qualities: (1) an architectural style characterized by its decoration; (2) certain construction materials; and (3) a unified visual composition in which the parts looked related.

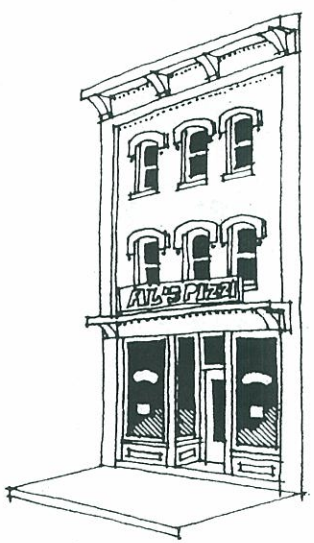


These qualities came together to form a visual resource. *Sensitive change* accepts these facade qualities and builds on them. The result is a harmonious blend of changes and existing elements. *Insensitive change*, on the other hand, ignores and often negates the qualities of the original resource. The result is an unnecessary clash between new and old as the drawing at top of this column illustrates.

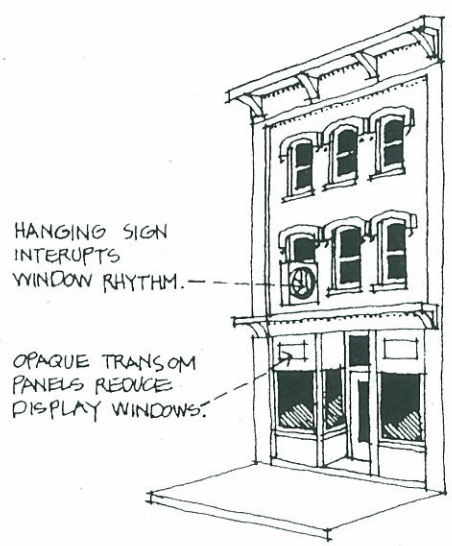
An Example of Change

The series of drawings (below and on reverse side) shows how one typical facade might have changed over time. Consider the effect that changes have had on the original resource.

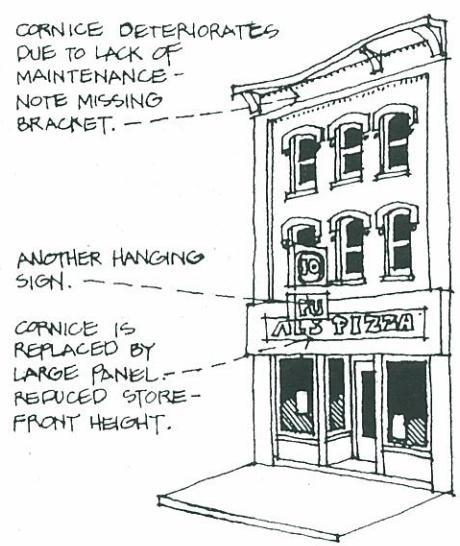
1. The Original Facade- The Original Resource



2. Minor Facade Change

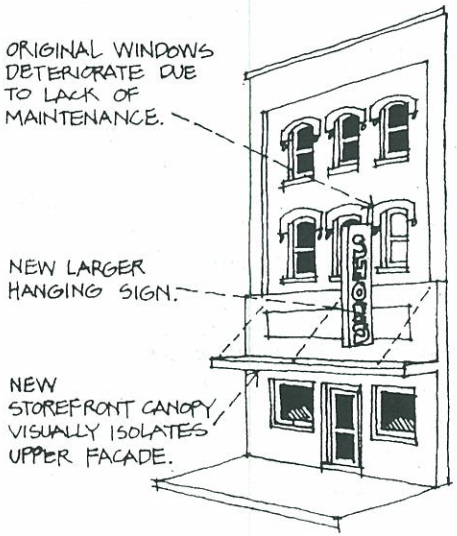


3. More Minor Facade Change

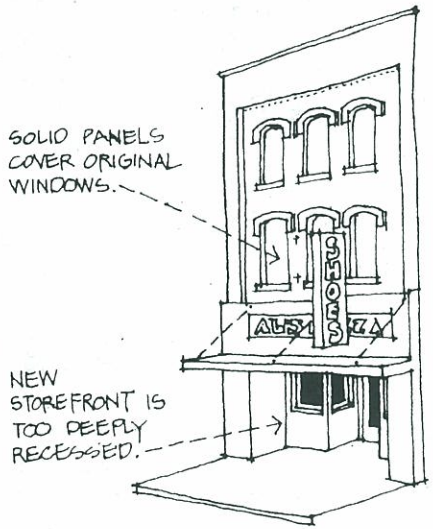


4. Storefront Remodeling - Facade Looks Cut in Half.

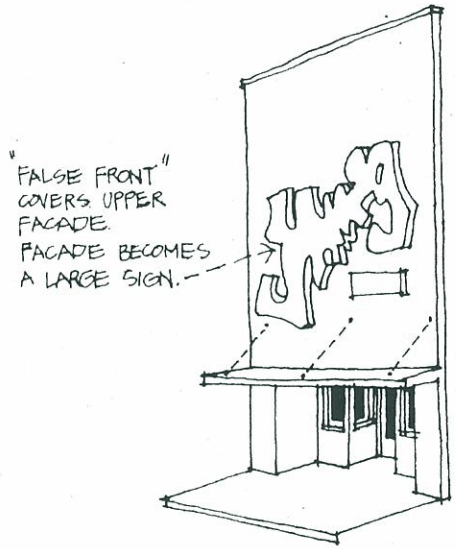
5. More Storefront Change



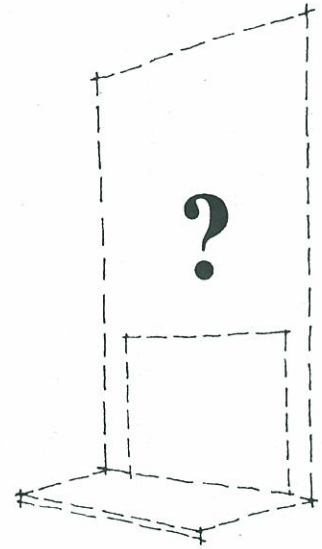
6. Another Storefront Remodeling



7. Drastic Facade Change - The Original Facade Is Gone.



8. The Future - What Direction Will Future Change Take?



Some Observations on the Facade Change

Note how changes to the facade happen gradually and have a cumulative effect on its appearance. While some are hardly noticeable on their own, change upon change over the years has completely transformed the original facade.

Note the changes in signs and the effect on the facade. As they get bigger and more numerous, signs begin to dominate the facade. Eventually the whole facade becomes a sign, obscuring the familiar building pattern.

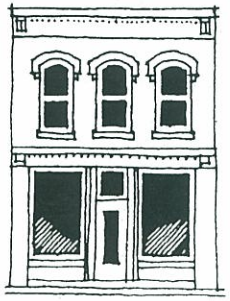
Throughout the series of facade evolution drawings, note how the qualities of the original facade—its rhythms, proportions, materials and composition—have been ignored. Various new storefronts, extending beyond the enframing piers and storefront cornice, and signs have been applied without respecting the original resource.

An Example of Sensitive Change

The facade drawing at right shows the same building facade as in the sequence above. In both, the existing facade has been remodeled. But here, unlike the others, change has complemented the qualities of the old facade.

The upper facade retains its traditional character and window openings. Signs are subtle and well placed. The new storefront fits within the original storefront opening and is enframed by the storefront cornice and piers. It is also similar in design to the original storefront, retaining a recessed entry, large display windows and a kickplate. (See "Storefront Design.")

The Main Street Architectural Tradition



This is the basic building block of Main Street—the traditional streetfront commercial facade. Although built in many sizes, shapes and styles, it was always essentially the same facade.

Facades of this type lined Main Street on both sides. One next to another, they formed strong, solid blocks, marked by the rhythm of repeating parts.

Because it was composed of similar facades, the block had a consistent, organized and coordinated appearance. Facades were related to each other through compatibility in height, width, setback, proportions of openings, composition and rhythm.

With these blocks facing each other, the street took on a distinct character. Compared with the typical residential street, Main Street created a feeling of containment. The street became an outdoor room, filled with activity.

The sidewalk (or the "pedestrian street") was a window-shopper's delight. One after another, the store windows formed a continuous display case of Main Street merchandise.

Thus, the appearance of Main Street today is largely a result of a strong architectural tradition. Beginning with the early buildings of the 1800s and continuing through the 1930s, this tradition controlled how Main Street looked.

The consistency of this building tradition brought about a unity that strengthened Main Street as a whole. If traditional business districts today are to benefit from this unity, changes to buildings must respect this tradition.

Original Facades

A Note of Emphasis

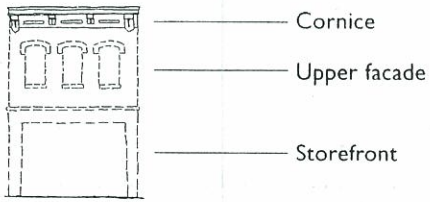
The idea of visual relatedness is crucial to the goal of an integrated Main Street. Historically, Main Street facades complemented and reinforced one another.

Compare these drawings. Notice how the remodeling of old facades has destroyed their continuity. They are no longer visually tied together because their rhythms and proportions have been altered. Each facade is now unrelated to the next, and the character of the building group suffers.

Remodeled Facades

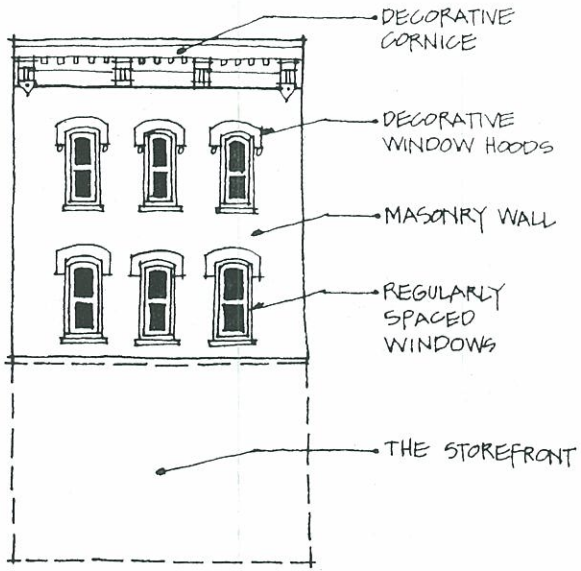
The Traditional Facade

We have looked at the facade as the building block of Main Street. Now let us consider the individual building facade itself. Aside from consistency, what were the typical characteristics of the traditional facade? Essentially, it had three parts.

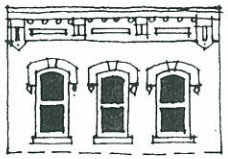


1. **Building cornice**. The traditional building cornice, made of brick, wood, metal or other materials, served to visually cap the building, completing its appearance.

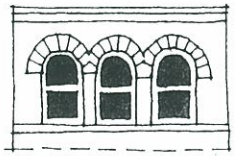
2. **Upper facade**. The upper facade, constructed of brick, stone, wood, stucco or pressed metal, almost always contained regularly spaced window openings surrounded by decorative details.



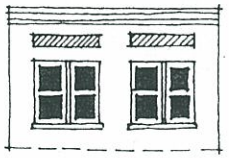
Typical Building Cornices and Upper Facades



Typical building cornices and upper facades in the mid to late 1800s were characterized by boldly decorated cornice and window hoods and narrow window openings.

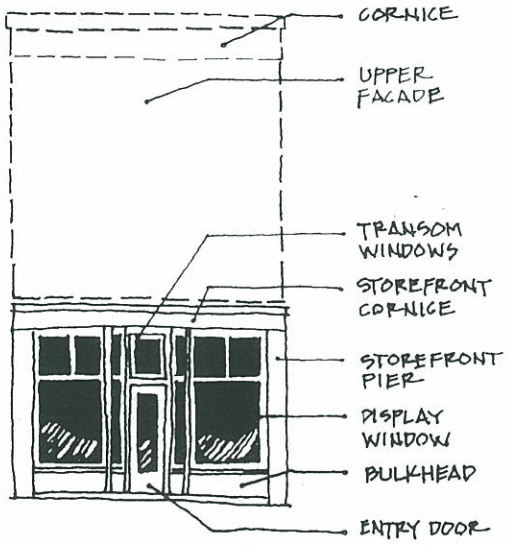


In the late 1800s to early 1900s, these areas of the facade were mostly highlighted by corbeled brick cornices and large, arched window openings.

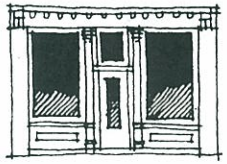


By the early to mid 1900s, typical upper facades were marked by corbeled brick cornices and large window openings with multiple window units.

3. **Storefront**. The traditional chracteristics of the storefront contrast markedly with the more substantial upper facade and building cornice. The storefront was rather delicate in appearance and was composed primarily of large display windows surrounded by enframing piers and a storefront cornice.



Typical Storefronts



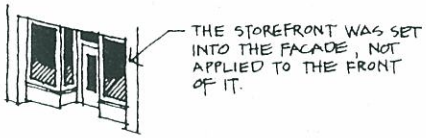
In the mid 1880s to early 1900s typical storefronts were characterized by boldly decorated cornices, cast-iron columns and large display windows.

From the early to mid 1900s typical storefronts had simplified cornices, transom windows over display windows and metal window frames.

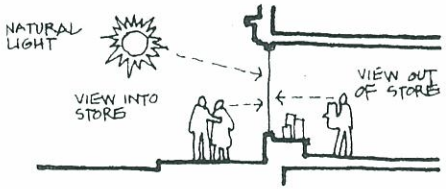
Another Note of Emphasis

Sensitive storefront change is essential to improving the appearance of Main Street. The following qualities should be remembered as important to the traditional storefront:

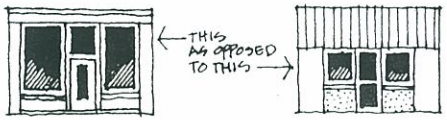
- The storefront was usually slightly recessed behind the enframing storefront cornice and piers.



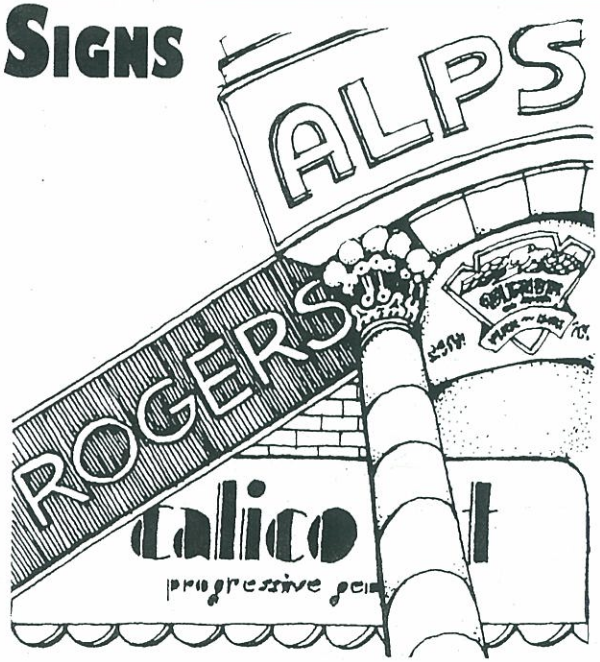
- The storefront was almost all glass.



- The storefront emphasized the display windows.



Signs



Signs are a vital part of any Main Street. With a sign, you call attention to your business and create an individual image. But it's often forgotten that signs contribute to a commercial district's overall image as well. Merchants try to out-shout one another with large, flashy signs.

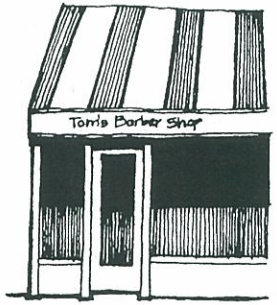
If Main Street is to present a harmonious appearance, its signs must serve both of these images. Consider the following guidelines when designing your sign.

1. Stand back and question the purpose of your sign.

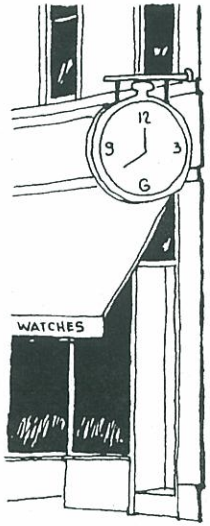
- Does it merely identify your business?
- Do you want to let the personality of your store or office shine through?
- Is it necessary to provide information about your products on the sign?
- What kind of customers are you trying to attract?
- Is the sign meant to be read by pedestrians, motorists, or both?

2. Think about the type of sign you want.

- *Word sign*—This type of sign employs words to describe your business and its products.



- *Symbol sign*—Often, a recognizable symbol conveys the image of a business better than words.



- *Numbers sign*—Some signs use numbers instead of symbols or words; the most common of these are street address signs that help customers locate your business.

Perhaps you'll want to combine words, symbols, and numbers in the same sign.

3. Consider the possibilities of using different materials. Each has unique qualities that can be exploited to create a sign suited to your needs.

Signs can be made from wood, metal, stone, neon, canvas, paint on glass, gold leaf, and etched or stained glass, to name a few. Signs can also be made of plastic. The most suitable use of this material for Main Street is to create signs made of individually formed letters, symbols, or numbers. Vacuum-formed plastic signs are almost never appropriate.

4. You may want to look at photos that show how your building looked in the past to see how signs were related to historic architectural details.

5. Visualize how your sign will appear in relation to the entire facade. The sign should not dominate; its shape and proportions should fit your building in the same way a window or door fits.

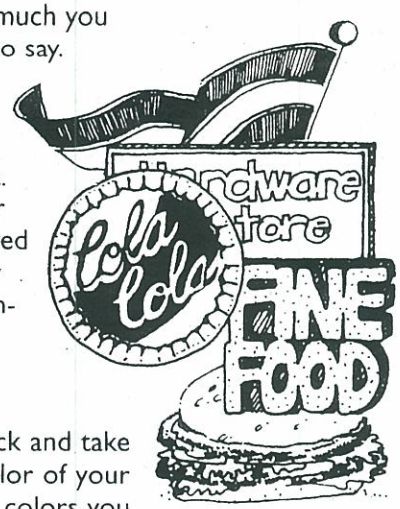
For example, a sign hung under the storefront cornice complements the building's architecture and therefore presents a strong image.

6. Decide where you want to put your sign. There are several suitable options:

- under the storefront cornice
- painted on glass
- on the side of the building
- projecting from the building
- on the awning valance or return
- on the canopy facia

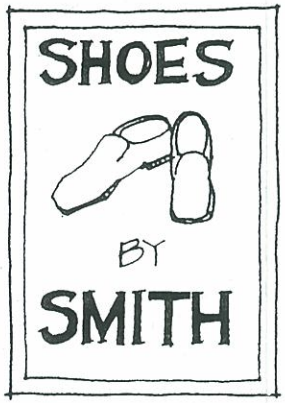
Some types of signs are *not* appropriate, such as signs made of vacuum-formed plastic or oversized signs placed on top of the building or applied over the upper facade.

7. Decide how much you want your sign to say. It is important to keep the message simple and to the point. Remember, your sign will be viewed as part of a very complex environment filled with written and visual messages.



8. Now step back and take a look at the color of your building and the colors you see on the surrounding structures. Take hints from these when selecting colors for your sign.

You will usually get the best results if you opt for a simple color scheme—a range of three colors. Avoid garish, Day-Glo colors; they belong out on the highway!



9. As with colors, lighting is important. If you illuminate your sign at night, the light source should be as inconspicuous as possible. Try to avoid obtrusive or gaudy lighting techniques that merely distract attention from the sign.

Signs can be illuminated with incandescent, fluorescent, or halogen lights. Incandescent lighting is used primarily to "wash" the entire sign with a soft, yellowish light either from above or below. Fluorescent bulbs produce a white light. They are often concealed behind the face of the sign and shine through a translucent material. Fluorescent bulbs are most effective if only the sign's message, not its background, is lit. Halogen lighting produces a white light. While the bulbs are very small and thus can be easily concealed, they are fairly expensive.

10. Express the personality of your establishment through the type style you select. To learn about various styles, look at other signs around town. Think about what each style says about the business and product it advertises. Then, define the image you want your sign to project.

There are three basic styles of type—serif, sans serif, and script—with numerous variations of each.

ABCDabcd
ABCDabcd
ABCDabc

Serif
This is a historically appropriate style, with many variations, from plain to fancy.

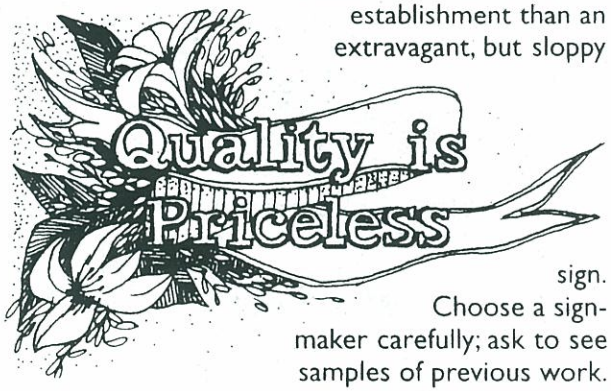
Sans Serif
This is a more contemporary letter style, with cleaner, bolder lines.

ABCDEF
ABCDabc
ABCDabcd

Script
A more personal and decorative style, script is often used for signs painted or gold-leafed on glass. (Both upper- and lower-case letters should be used in script-style signs.)

Ask local sign makers to show you a selection of type styles and consult with your local and state Main Street offices.

11. Quality of workmanship and construction is also a vital consideration. A simple, well-made sign speaks more highly of your establishment than an extravagant, but sloppy sign. Choose a sign-maker carefully; ask to see samples of previous work.

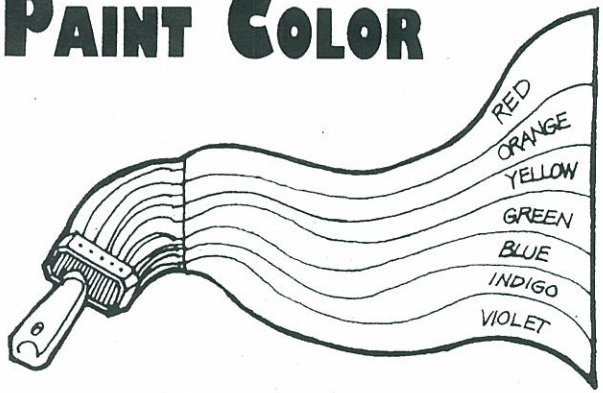


12. Signs provided by national distributors are not appropriate. They don't reflect the individuality of your business and usually appear as add-ons to your storefront advertising. The signs you display should advertise your *personal* business message.

Your best advertising

13. Now consider this idea. Your entire building conveys an image that acts as a sign. Your building's appearance is more subtle than a word, symbol, or number sign, but it can be more effective.

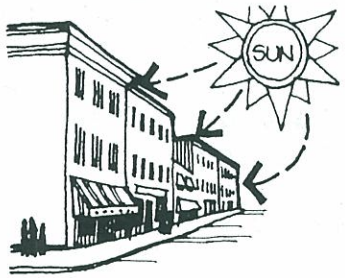
Paint Color



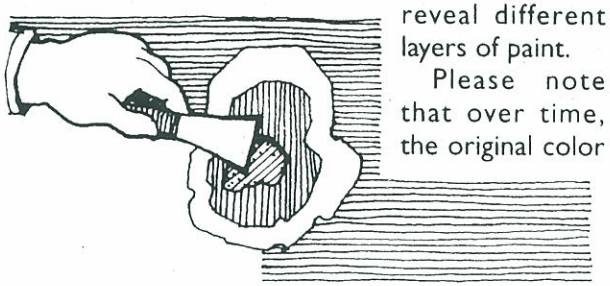
The color you paint your building, window trim, or door is, to some extent, a personal decision. It is an expression of yourself and your commercial establishment. However, there are other people and things to think about. The following procedures can help you decide what colors to use on your building.

1. Be a good neighbor and look at your building in the context of the entire block or downtown. The color of your building can affect the overall character of Main Street.

2. Think about how the sun strikes your building. The amount of sunlight can change the hue of paint color. Hold a paint chip to your building on cloudy and sunny days. To be certain about your color choice, invest in a quart of paint and apply it. There is a great difference between a small color chip and an entire wall.



3. Decide whether you'd like to return your building to its original paint colors. If you are seeking historical accuracy, carefully scrape a small area to reveal different layers of paint.



Please note that over time, the original color may have faded. To get a better idea of the true color, wet the original surface. The base color will appear more accurately when moist.

4. Color schemes for commercial buildings differ by region of the country. They also differ according to the period when the building was constructed. In addition to scraping a small area of the building to determine its historic color, consult the state historic preservation office for information on popular paint colors during the decade when your building was put up.

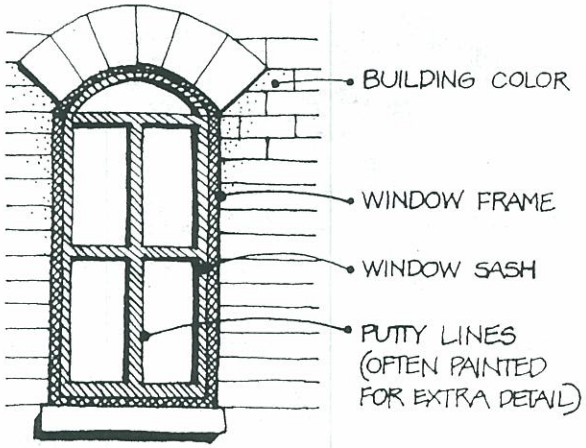
MID 1800'S SOFT, NEUTRAL TINTS

LATE 1800'S DARKER, RICHER SHADES

EARLY 1900'S LIGHTER, CALMER COLORS

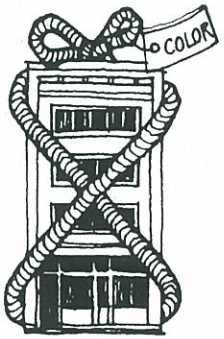
5. It is important to remember that white paint was not used as widely during the Victorian period as it is today. White is a glaring color that does not blend in readily with most downtown environments.

6. Traditionally, building trim was painted as decoration, often in a contrasting shade lighter or darker than the primary building color. This paint treatment defined the trim, but it was not so overpowering that the trim colors dominated the building.



7. Today, aluminum frames have frequently replaced traditional wood doors and windows. The shine and metallic color of the aluminum do not complement historic buildings. Paint them a more neutral color or choose darker, anodized frames.

8. Paint color should be used to tie together all building elements, including the cornice, upper facade, windows, storefront, and doors. To do this, you must limit the number of colors you use; in most cases, choose no more than three and be sure to select complementary colors.



9. With these procedures in mind, express the identity of your business through paint color. It adds to the richness and variety of Main Street.

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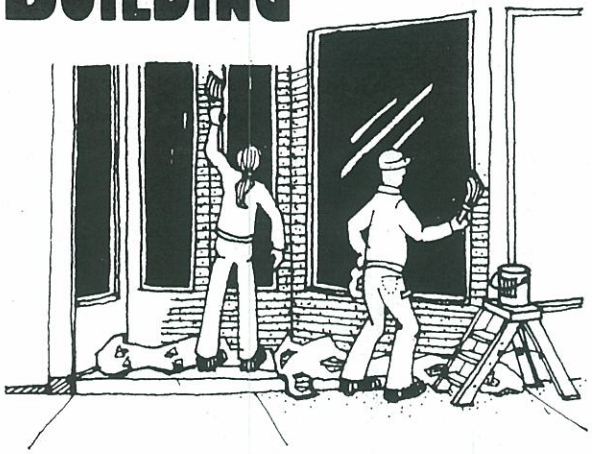
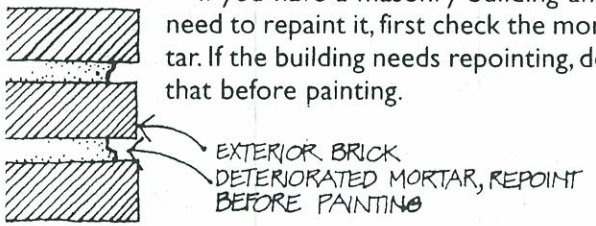
Painting Your Building



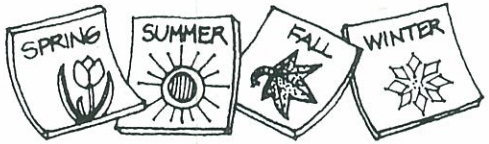
Painting can be one of the most dramatic improvements you make to your building. But you must know what steps to take. The following procedures will help smooth the way for a successful paint job:

1. Determine what you need to prepare for painting. Check all the wood. Is it sound or rotting? Does it have insect damage? Repair or replace any damaged areas that you find.

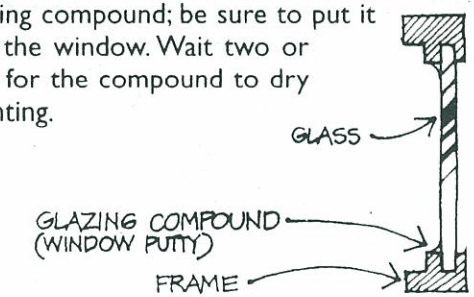
If you have a masonry building and need to repaint it, first check the mortar. If the building needs repointing, do that before painting.



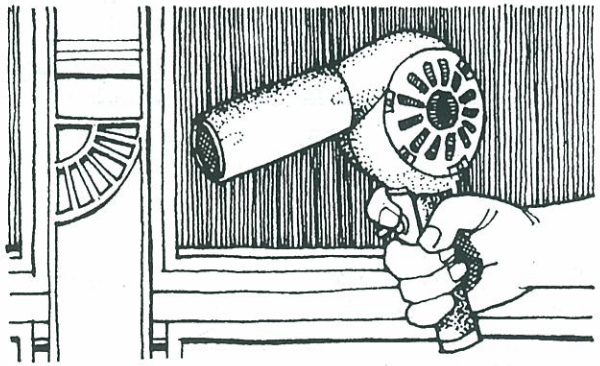
2. Plan a painting schedule. Some times of the year are better than others for painting. Good weather usually ensures a better paint job. Ask your local paint dealer for assistance.



3. Check the condition of your windows. Install new glass as necessary. Replace any deteriorated putty with a glazing compound; be sure to put it all around the window. Wait two or three days for the compound to dry before painting.

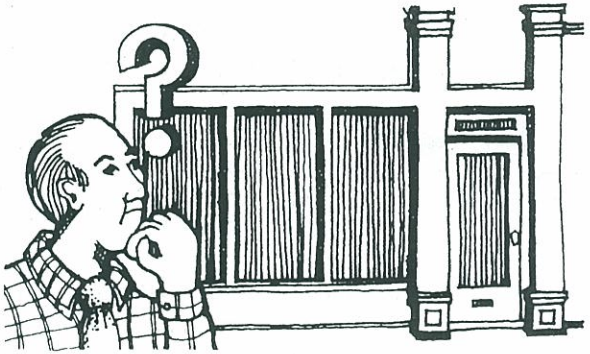


4. Prepare the surface adequately. Be sure to remove all peeling and loose paint. A variety of tools can be used: a wire brush, a scraper, a blow torch, or an electric heat gun. Use these last two devices carefully; employ only enough heat to soften the paint so that it can be easily removed.



5. A primer should be used for all bare wood surfaces as it helps the final coat adhere. Mix a little of the finish coat paint with the primer to achieve a richer color.

6. Determine the type of paint best suited for your building. Stone, brick, wood, concrete block, and metal all require different paints and primers.



7. Which kind of paint should you use, *oil* or *latex?* There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

- More durable
- Some feel it preserves wood and adheres better
- More difficult to clean up

- Less durable
- Easier to apply
- Easier to clean up

An important reminder: Once you use latex, you must continue to use it. It is difficult to switch back to oil. If you have been using an oil-based paint, it is best to continue with oil.

8. Be aware that there are three degrees of shine for paint: gloss, semigloss, and flat or matte.

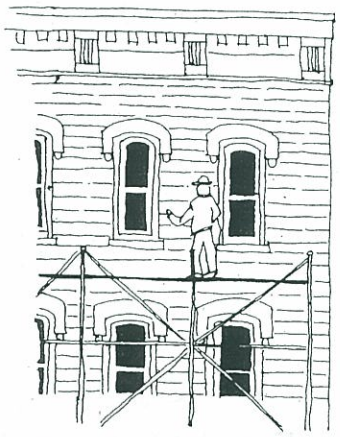
9. Remember that quality paint will last longer than a cheap brand. It will not fade or peel as quickly and usually gives better coverage.

A Note on Lead Paint

If your building is more than 50 years old, it may contain lead-based paint. If you are removing the existing paint as part of the repainting process, have a sample tested. It is *imperative* that the testing be done by a reputable company or by a state testing lab. If there is a problem, contact your state environmental department for information on options for removing or encasing the lead-based paint.

Upper Facade and Building Cornice

The visual importance of the upper facade and building cornice is evident in their steady march down Main Street. Of particular importance are the windows in the upper facade. They create a repeated pattern that helps tie together the facades.



Often, however, the upper facades have been neglected or replaced with inappropriate materials, and the windows have been boarded up. Deterioration or inappropriate changes not only alter the character of the building but change the image of the street- scape as well. Proper treatment and maintenance of the upper facade and cornice can prevent this problem.

Make a checklist of upper facade and cornice maintenance problems. Many can be solved and others prevented through regular care.

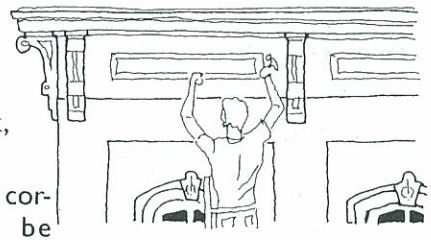
Upper Facade Maintenance

Maintaining the upper facades on Main Street is usually a simple task. The facade may only need to be cleaned and painted; or, if constructed of masonry, it may have mortar joints that need to be repointed. In some cases, holes left by the removal of signs or other objects may need to be filled. (See "Masonry Cleaning" and Painting Your Building.")

Repairing and maintaining the upper facade may be more complicated. If details and decorations are damaged or missing, they should be repaired or replaced. (See "Historic Architectural Decoration.") On some commercial buildings, the upper facade has been completely covered with aluminum or some other material to make it look "modern." This type of change is inappropriate for buildings in traditional commercial districts. Coverings over front facades not only destroy their visual appeal but also give pigeons a place to roost. Removing the covering will allow the architecture of the upper facade to contribute to your business's image.

Cornice Maintenance

Building cornices are often constructed of sheet metal applied over a wood frame, decorative wood molding, brick, or stone.



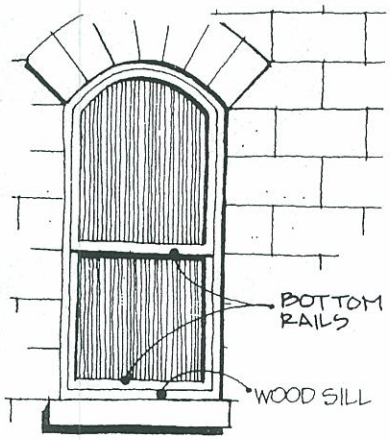
1. Sheet metal cornices should be painted regularly to prevent rust. Replacements for missing pieces can be fabricated. Be sure to check the wood support structure for rot or insect damage; if found, replace the deteriorated portions.

2. Decorative molded wood cornices should also be regularly painted. Missing or damaged pieces can be duplicated by a local wood worker.

3. If a projecting masonry (brick or stone) cornice has been destroyed during a previous remodeling, consider duplicating the original cornice design in another material, such as fiberglass or glass-fiber-reinforced concrete.

Window Maintenance

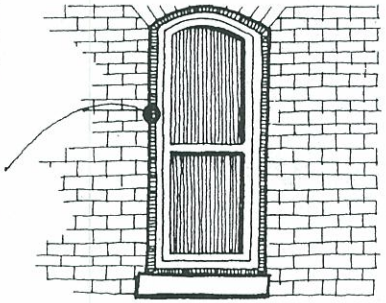
Before discussing specific window problems, a note of caution is in order. Various maintenance and repair materials (putty, caulk, primer, paint, etc.) are mentioned in the following paragraphs. Be aware that there are many specific types of these products. Consult a local expert to determine which will best solve your problems.



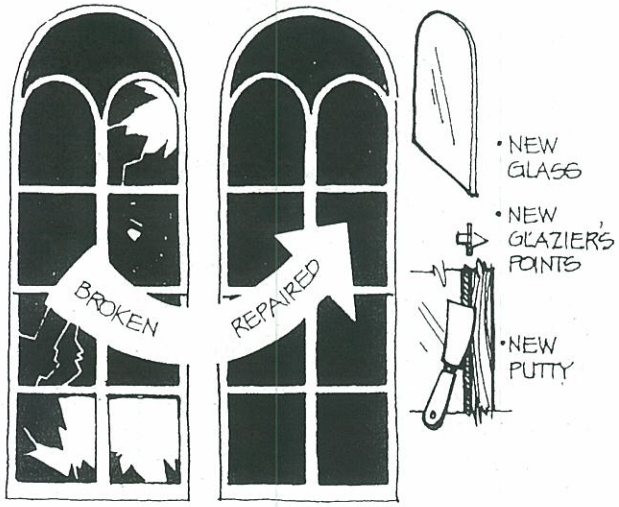
1. Check the wood parts of the window. Are some portions of the wood soft, cracked, or split? Pay particular attention to the window sills and the bottom of the window sashes (the bottom rails) where water has collected over the years.

Minor problems can be easily solved. Proper treatment and a fresh coat of paint can repair wood and prevent further deterioration. Proper treatment may simply require scraping off old paint from the wood. Fill the cracks with caulk or wood putty; then sand, prime, and repaint. (See "Painting Your Building.") To repair more extensive damage, it may be necessary to apply a wood consolidate or replace the damaged sections.

2. Check the joints between the window and the opening. If the joints are loose or open, they should be caulked to prevent air and water infiltration. Be sure to use the proper caulking material.



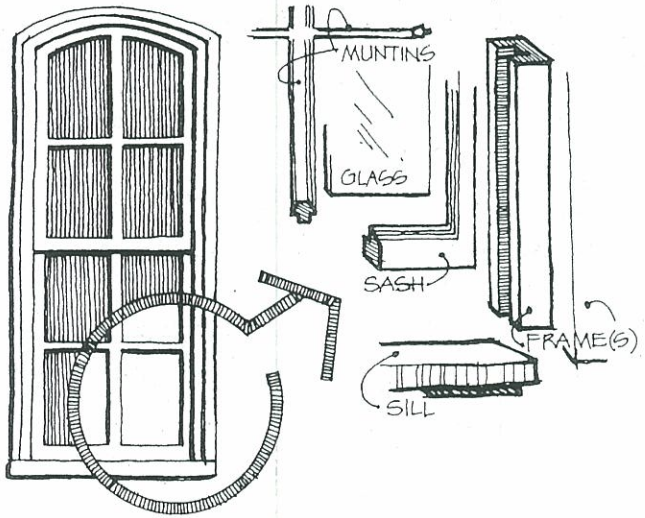
3. Loose or broken window panes are easily fixed. First, remove all broken glass and old glazing putty. Find new glass to match the size, color, and reflectivity of existing panes. Install the glass using the appropriate glazier's points and putty.



Window Repair

If simple maintenance does not solve your window problems, more extensive repair may be required.

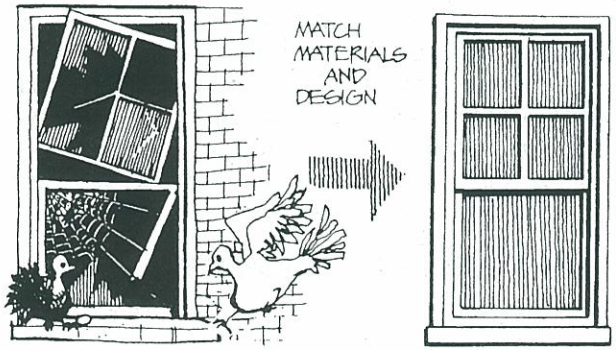
1. Wood may be badly deteriorated. Most likely, it is the sill or bottom rail of the sash. These parts can be replaced without installing a whole new window.



Check with your local lumber supply store or mill shop for pieces that match the original window.

2. If your window doesn't operate the way it used to, it may be painted shut. Tapping the sash with a hammer wrapped in cloth and carefully cutting the paint between the sash and the frame with a sharp knife should solve the problem. "Soaping" the window tracks will help the window slide better.

3. Another common malfunction is a broken window mechanism. If the sash locks, cords, or weights are broken, consult a window dealer or builder. He or she can show you the simplest way to fix the mechanism without replacing the entire window.



Window Replacement

If all other efforts to maintain or repair a window have failed, consider replacing the entire window unit. In the long run, this may be the best, most economical alternative.

1. Find replacements that match the existing units. Standard wood windows are relatively easy to buy or have made. More unusual styles are usually custom-made, but not as expensive as you might think.

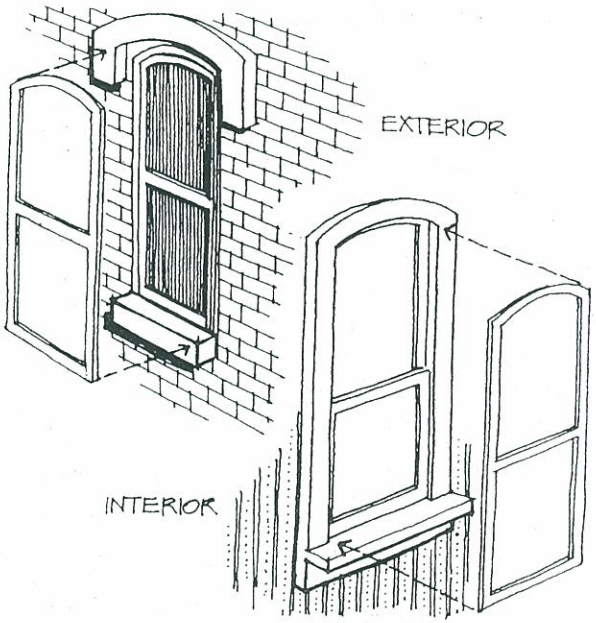
2. Consider the window opening. Do not alter the existing openings to fit the new windows; instead, make sure windows fill the openings.

3. Consider material and color as well. If you must use aluminum or metal-clad replacement windows, a dark anodized finish is preferable to a light metallic color.

4. The number of glass panes and the profiles of the sash rails and muntins should match the original as closely as possible. Avoid fake "historic" or very modern-looking windows that do not fit the style of your building. Do not add shutters to your upper-floor windows either; they are appropriate for residential, but not commercial, buildings.

Storm Windows

Insulating storm windows can help conserve heat and energy, but they often look wrong on an older facade. For this reason, consider installing them on the inside of the window where they won't be seen. Make sure that interior storm windows are properly vented so that moisture does not build up between the windows.



If storm windows are installed on the outside, their design should match the existing window in shape, number, and size of panes and color. If metal storm windows are used, an anodized or baked-on finish is less obtrusive than plain aluminum and will be more compatible with the building's appearance.

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Masonry Cleaning

CLEAN BRICK

DIRTY BRICK

PAINTED BRICK

The decision to clean the surface of your building is partly a matter of appearance and partly a maintenance issue. Cleaning can give it new life, restoring the natural qualities of the brick or stone.

There are, however, functional reasons for cleaning masonry. Dirty areas on brick or stone remain wet for a longer period of time. This dampness can promote chemical reactions that lead to deterioration. Harmful microorganisms also thrive in dirt, in time damaging the building surface.

Masonry cleaning can lighten the load of building maintenance as well. An owner who cleans the paint from his or her building, opting for the natural color of the brick or stone, eliminates the periodic chore of repainting.

But a word of caution—improper cleaning can cause masonry deterioration to accelerate. After several years, this deterioration can affect the structural stability of your building. In addition, before deciding to remove paint from a building, particularly one made of brick, try to determine if the building has always been painted. Some of Main Street's masonry buildings were built of soft brick that was meant to be painted as protection from the weather.

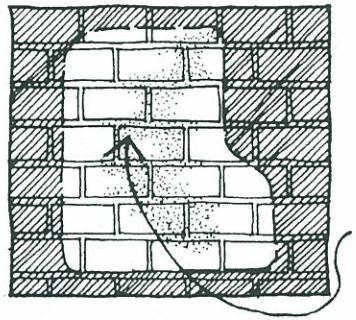
Masonry cleaning is a technical subject about which the National Trust's Main Street Center, the National Park Service's Division of Technical Assistance, and your state historic preservation office have accumulated much material. Don't hesitate to ask for advice.

The following is a list of steps to consider when deciding whether to clean your building:

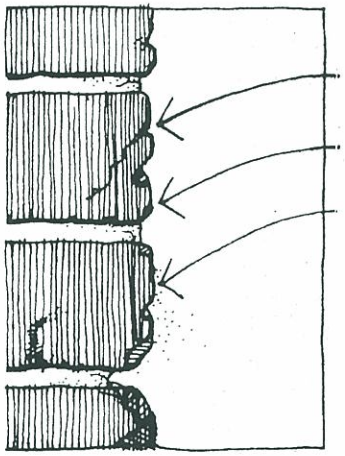
1. Consult an expert who can help you inspect the surface and determine the safest, most efficient method of cleaning.

2. To be on the safe side, pay for a test patch. Evaluate the effectiveness of the cleaning method. Some forms of dirt and paint are difficult to remove.

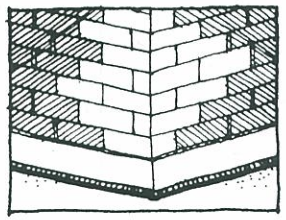
3. Let the test patch weather for several months. Any problems with the cleaning method will show up during this period. Residue from the cleaning should not be left on the brick or stone.



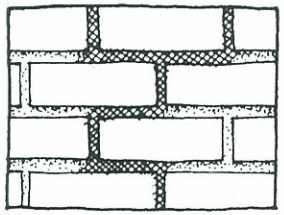
4. After the test patch has been completed, examine the masonry. Note whether there are too many pock marks. Are the edges too rounded? Does the face of the masonry rub off when you touch it? Some masonry may be too soft to clean.



5. Check any alterations to the original building. Brick or stone used to fill in old, unused doors or windows or to construct additions may be unsightly or a different color than the original. Perhaps the building was first painted to conceal these differences and thus should be repainted.

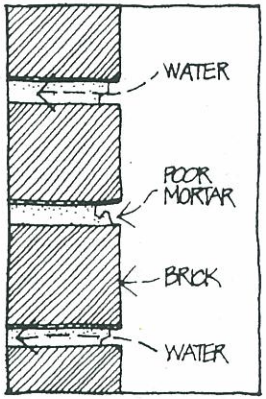


A PATCHED AREA MAY NOT MATCH THE ORIGINAL BRICK.



REPOINTING MORTAR MAY NOT MATCH OLD MORTAR COLOR OR TEXTURE.

6. Inspect the mortar between the masonry units. Poor pointing could allow water to seep into the building and cause damage. An expert can help you decide whether to repoint before or after cleaning. (Be sure to use the appropriate mortar type; the wrong choice can lead to visual and/or structural problems.)

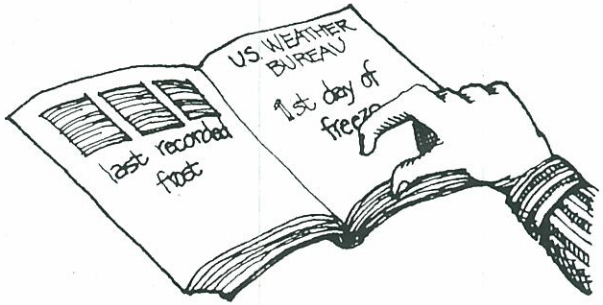


7. After the test, look at the original color of the masonry. Do you like it?

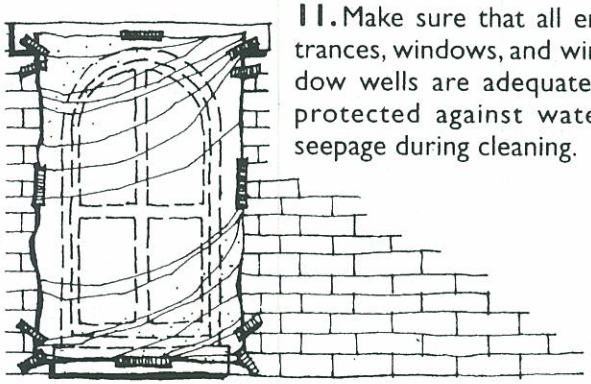
8. Be sure the company you choose to clean your building has a good reputation. If possible, take the time to investigate examples of its previous work yourself.

9. Look at the area surrounding your building. Shrubs, trees, or ground cover will need protection. Whoever does the cleaning should agree to cover the plant material and soil around the plants. Use a water-resistant material.

10. Think about the weather when you decide to clean your building. Avoid wet cleaning operations when a danger of frost may exist. Verify freeze dates with the U.S. Weather Bureau.



If you are doing more than one maintenance task on the exterior of your building, plan a work schedule. Some work should be done before cleaning; other work is best done afterward. For example, it is usually best to caulk around windows before the cleaning process (to keep water out of the joints), but to paint them after (to ensure that the paint is not disturbed during cleaning).



11. Make sure that all entrances, windows, and window wells are adequately protected against water seepage during cleaning.

Processes

Several methods are used to clean masonry buildings. Choosing one method over another should be based on:

- the amount and type of soil to be removed
- the amount and type of paint to be removed
- the type and condition of the masonry

It is *most important* to understand how your building material will interact, physically and chemically, with the cleaner. If you don't know, *ask for help*. Be sure to take your time and learn about the various processes.

Water Cleaning

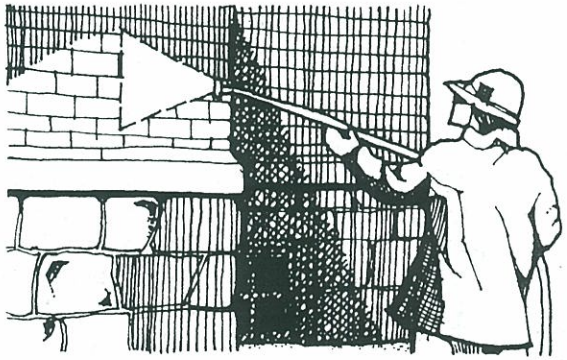
Cleaning with water sounds easy, and it can be the most economical way to clean a dirty building. But do watch for potential problems. For instance, ask about the mineral composition of your city's water supply. Some minerals could leave stains on your building; check with the cleaning company.

Areas of the building that are especially dirty may require a good deal of manual scrubbing and strong detergent. The increased work hours can raise the total cost of the job.

Be sure to use only bristle brushes, not metal. Metal can disturb the mortar and damage masonry.

Chemical Cleaning

Finding the right chemical for the job is the biggest challenge. Every company seems to have a secret formula. Remember that chemical cleaners can either be alkaline or acidic.



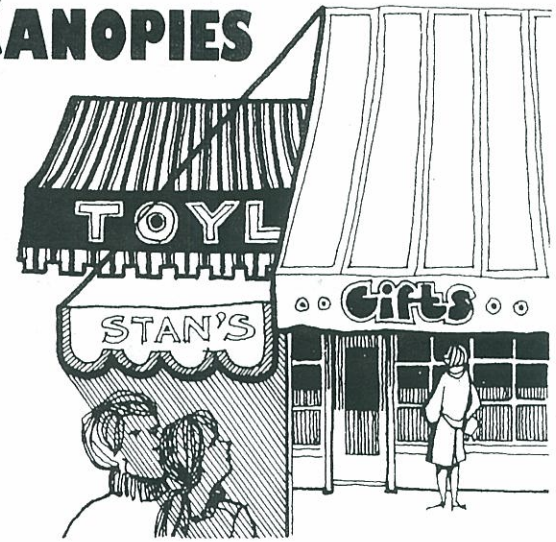
Be sure to choose the right kind of chemical for your building. Acidic products, for example, should never be used on limestone or marble buildings.

The masonry is usually pre-wet to soften any dirt. The chemical is then applied and left on the building surface. Finally, the cleaner is rinsed off, usually with water. When the building is rinsed, make certain that *all* of the chemical is washed off. Be sure the runoff is collected before it can enter the storm drainage system or soak into the ground.

Abrasive Blasting

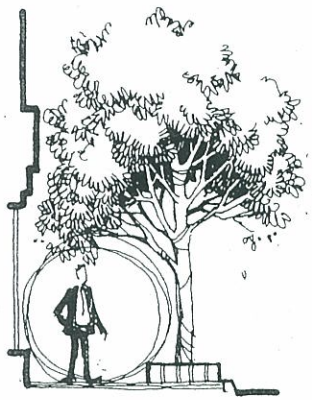
Sounds tough? It is! Fine particles, such as sand, are forced with air or, sometimes, water through a nozzle. Blasting is *never* recommended because it can damage or erode masonry surfaces.

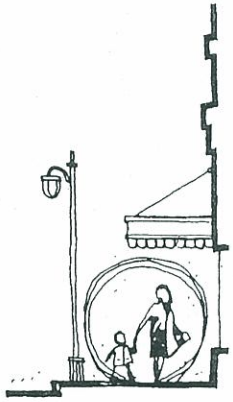
Awnings and Canopies



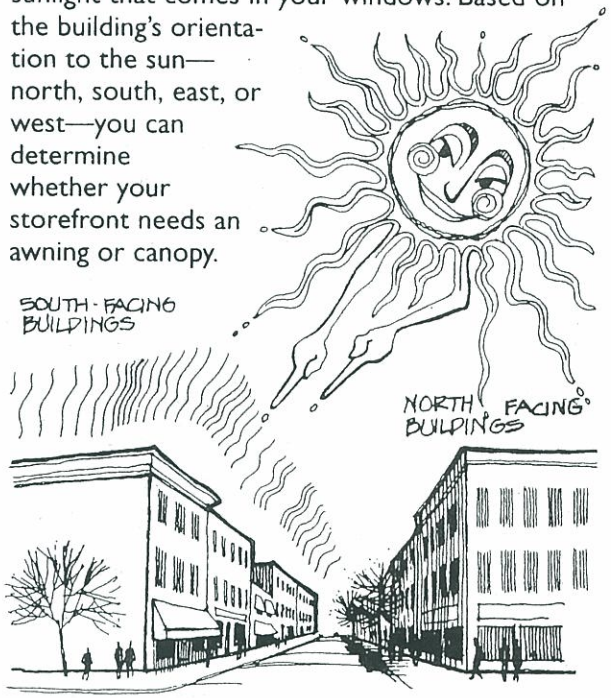
An awning or canopy can be both a decorative and functional addition to your storefront. It serves as an energy saver by regulating the amount of sunlight that enters your window. Shaded by an awning or canopy, shoppers are enticed to stop, look, and step inside.

1. An awning or canopy creates a pleasant space in front of your building, in the same manner as trees. It provides shade and shelter for busy shoppers, a resting place where pedestrians can pause and get out of the flow of traffic.

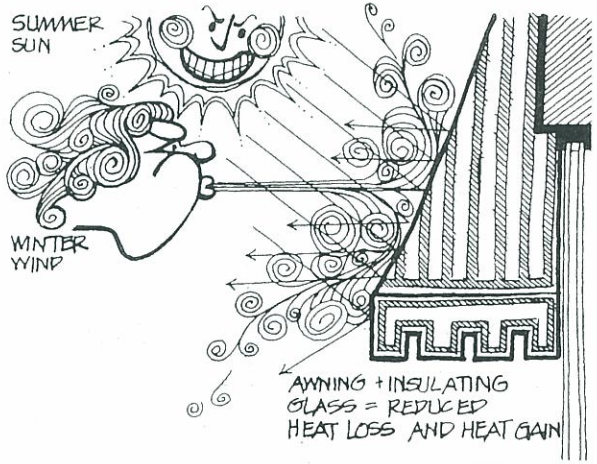




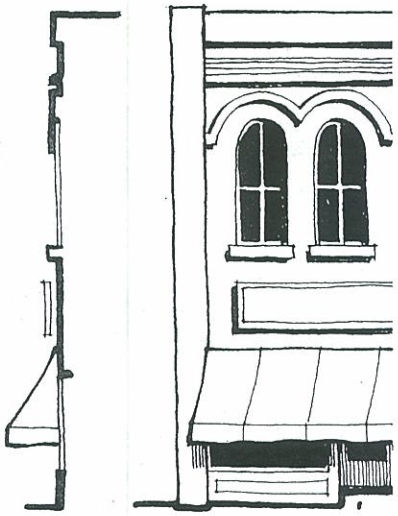
2. Awnings and canopies regulate the amount of sunlight that comes in your windows. Based on the building's orientation to the sun—north, south, east, or west—you can determine whether your storefront needs an awning or canopy.



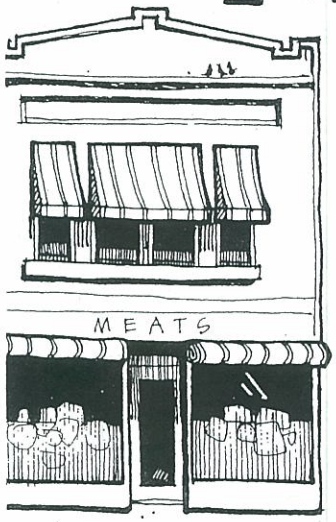
If your building faces north, it probably won't need an awning or canopy. For a building with a southern exposure, however, awnings and canopies can be excellent climate control devices. A combination of insulating glass (see "Energy Conservation) and an awning or canopy can significantly reduce your energy costs.

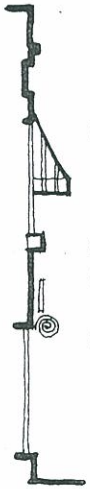


3. The installation design will determine in large part how energy effective the fixture will be. Do you want an awning that can be opened and closed? Or do you want a fixed awning or canopy that remains permanently extended?



Awnings Open or Permanent





Open

Operable awnings

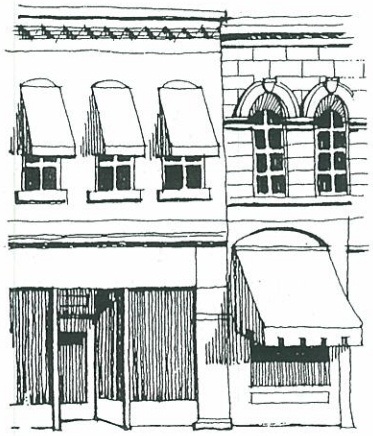
Closed

An operable awning lets sunlight into your building on cold days, helping to heat the interior. It shades your window when it is sunny outside. Although it is more expensive to install an operable awning than a fixed one, you will probably recoup the extra cost through reduced energy consumption.

4. As a visual element, an awning or canopy can add character and interest to your storefront. You should think about how it will appear in relation to the scale of your building. How will it affect existing architec-

tural features? Will it overpower the proportions of your windows and facade? Look at neighboring buildings and imagine what impact the addition of an awning or canopy will have on the character of the streetscape.

5. Awnings can be constructed from a variety of materials. Canvas is traditionally popular. It is flexible, but must be weather-treated before installation. Although initial installation costs are lower than for other awning materials, canvas may require greater maintenance.



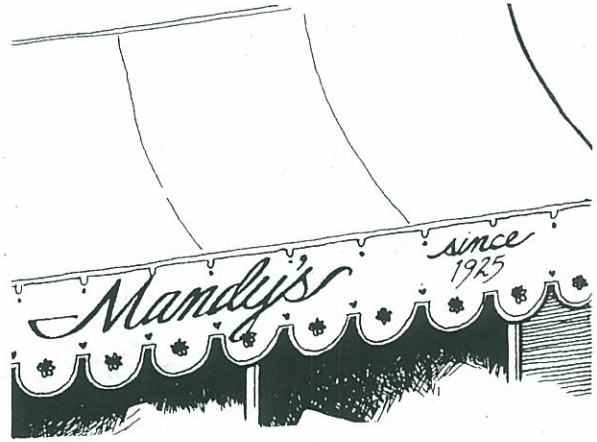
A vinyl awning can be very handsome, if designed with consideration for the rest of the building. Vinyl is flexible and generally requires less maintenance than canvas. On the other hand, vinyl is often very shiny and thus inappropriate for many storefronts on Main Street.

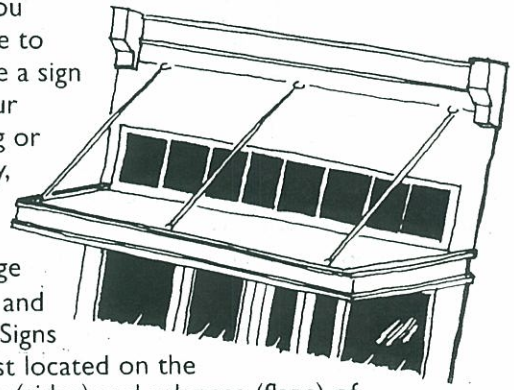
6. Canopies are usually constructed of metal and wood. They should be securely fastened to the facade; steel rods are often used to anchor canopies. Positioning the rods so that they blend into the design of the upper facade is important.

7. Before choosing a color for your awning or canopy, look at the entire building. If it has minimal architectural detailing, it can be "jazzed up" with a bright accent color. A more decorated facade should be complemented with a subtle shade. Select an awning or canopy color that enhances the existing building features. (See "Paint Color.")

8. Awning patterns are important too. Plain and simple, striped, or bold solid—what image do you want to convey? Again, the choice of a pattern (or no pattern at all) should depend on the character of the facade.

9. Awnings and canopies have long been used to display the names of businesses.



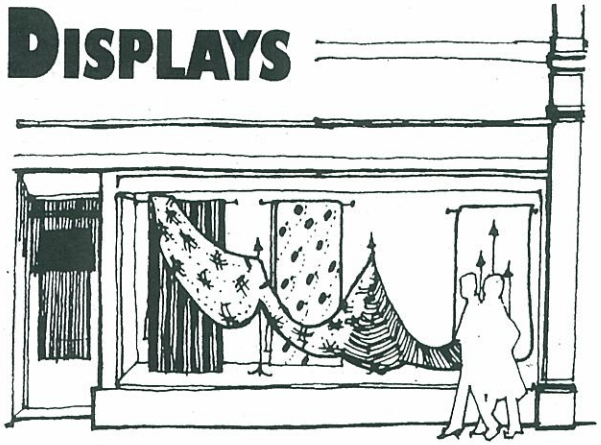


If you choose to include a sign on your awning or canopy, keep the message simple and direct. Signs are best located on the returns (sides) and valances (flaps) of awnings and should be attached to the facia of canopies.

10. Make sure the material you choose is guaranteed to be weather resistant. Most awning fabric is chemically treated to retard deterioration by rain or snow. With the exception of aluminum, most of the woods and metals used in canopies should be painted to resist weathering. Sun bleaching is another problem to consider, particularly when choosing a color for the awning.

11. Awnings or canopies are not appropriate solutions for every storefront design. However, when well-designed and properly placed, they can save you money, spruce up your storefront, and create a pleasant sidewalk space for shoppers.

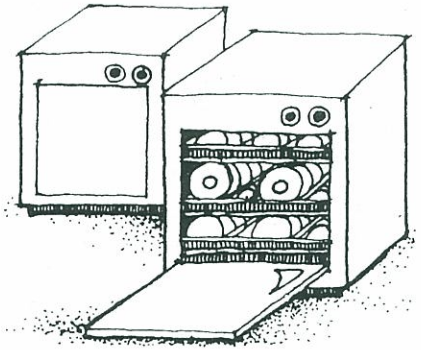
Window Displays



Window displays should be an attractive part of your storefront—a pedestrian-level sign. Well-designed displays help draw customers into your store. However, to create a window display that really works for your business, you must expend a little thought and effort.

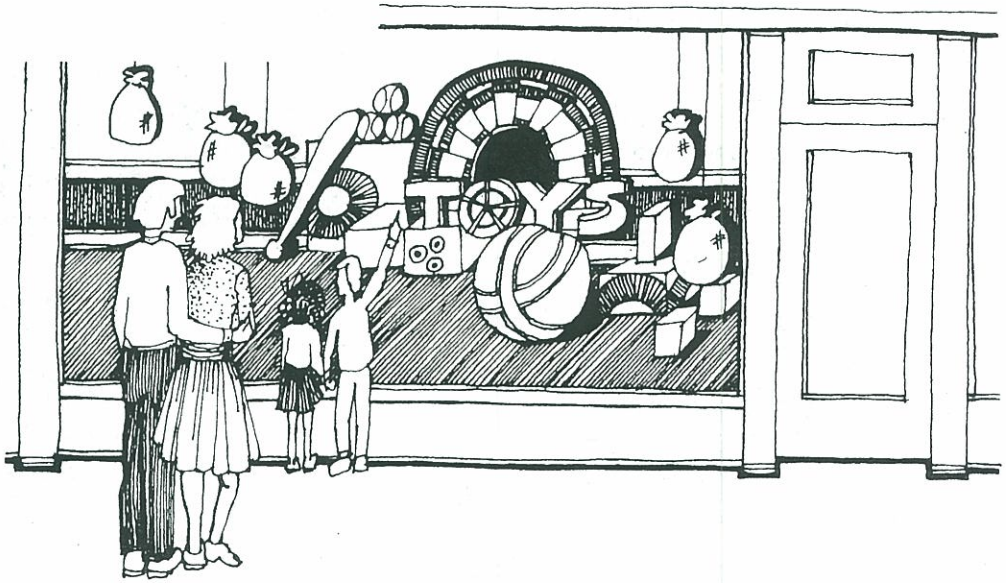
1. First, define your buying audience. Find out who your customers are: businesspeople? homeowners? gardeners? Your display should attract the attention of those important people on the other side of your window.

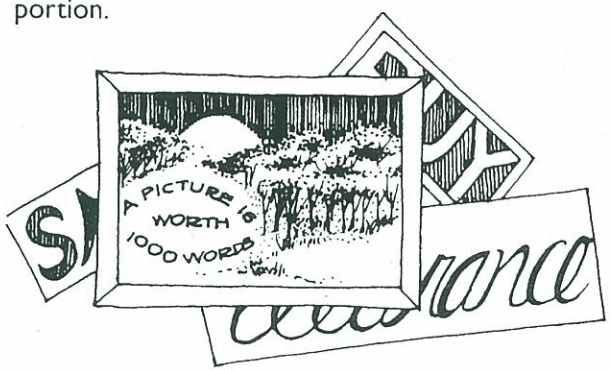
2. Now consider the merchandise you sell. Is it colorful or bland? Intricate or simple? Large or small? Does your product have "eye appeal"? Use your imagination to give your merchandise some life. For example, try opening the door of a dishwasher to show what it looks like inside.



Looking at your product in different ways can give you new ideas.

3. Think of the display window as a large picture framed by your storefront. Step back and observe how they relate. The building and window should create a single unit that is complimented by the display in color and proportion.

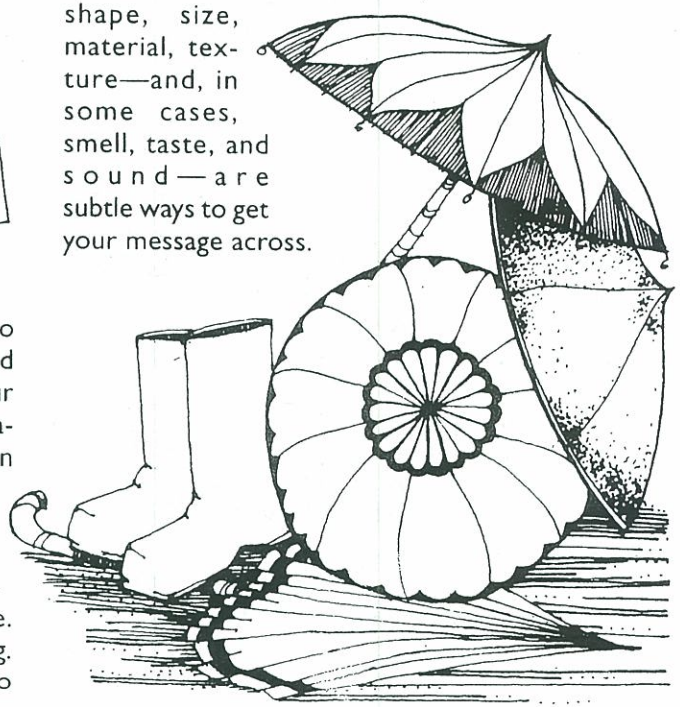




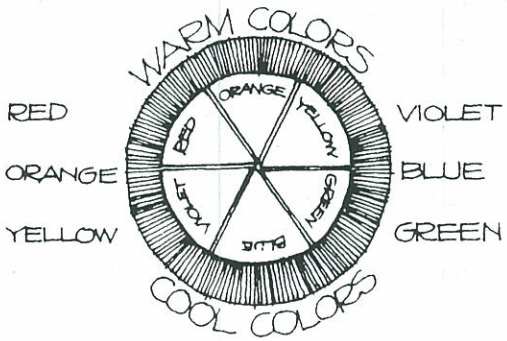
4. Give some thought to the message you want to communicate. How much do you want to say and what is the most effective way of saying it in your "picture window"? Remember, your window primarily invites people to come in and shop, but it can present more specific information about your products and services as well.

Develop a clear idea of what you want to show your consumer audience. Decide on the most important concept and limit yourself to a single theme. Don't confuse people with too much of a good thing. The idea is to entice people into your shop, not to display every product you sell.

5. Let your product speak for itself. Displays that exhibit actual products provide immediate communication without words. Color, shape, size, material, texture—and, in some cases, smell, taste, and sound—are subtle ways to get your message across.

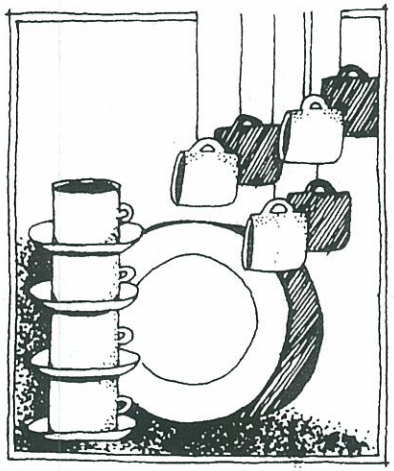


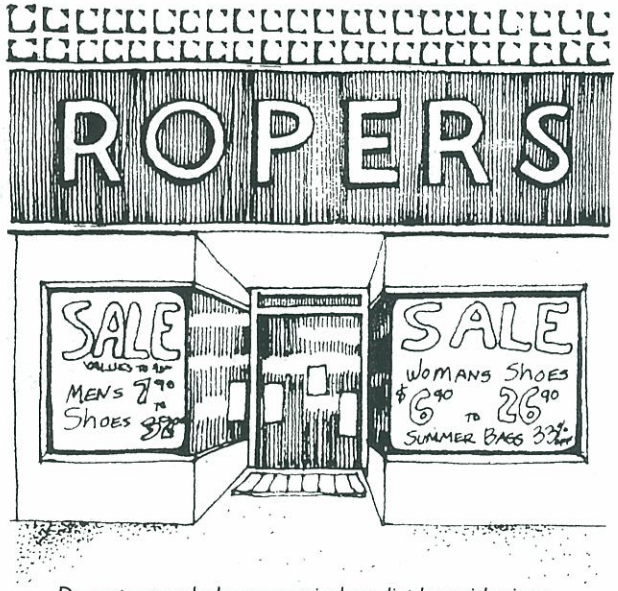
6. Color can help pull your display together. Look at the color of your building, particularly the storefront; now look at your merchandise. Think about colors that go together with the building and your product, then decide on a color scheme.



Remember, however, that too many colors can be confusing, while too few will make a dull display. Accents like red or yellow can brighten up your window, but don't overdo it.

7. Look at your window display as a composition—as if it were a sculpture or an oil painting. Compliment or emphasize the shape of your window by using vertical or horizontal elements. Think in terms of a group—how do your products work together? Group similar elements to convey a message that's easy to "read." Think of size as well. A large object can balance several smaller items. Experiment with different arrangements before you finally decide what looks best in your window.





Do not overwhelm your window display with signs.

8. If words or prices are part of your display, signs should also contribute to your overall theme. Select an appropriate typeface (see "Signs") and a color that does not overwhelm your products. For professional quality, hire an experienced signmaker.

9. An attractive, well-lit display can entice nighttime window shoppers to return during business hours. Incandescent spot lighting, mounted on ceiling tracks or recessed into the ceiling, can effectively highlight products as well as provide adequate overall lighting. Consider using halogen bulbs which, although more expensive than incandescent bulbs, last longer and use smaller fixtures. A well-lit window display also improves public safety by lighting the sidewalk and allowing police to see inside your shop at night.

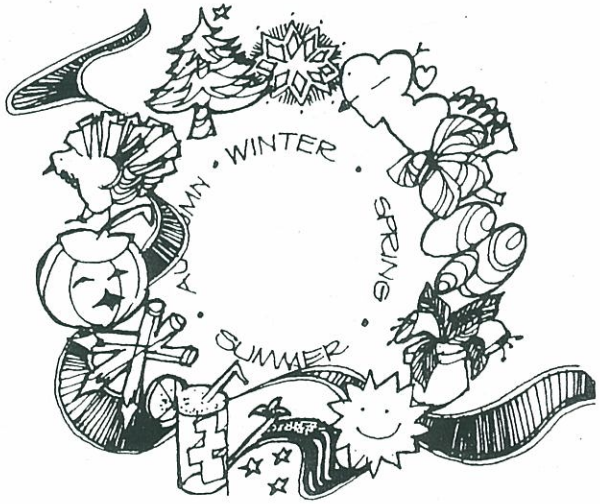
Daylight

Night Lighting

10. To keep customers interested, change displays often. Your windows can change with the seasons, as well as reflect holidays and special events throughout the year.

11. Consider investing in reusable seasonal displays. Properly stored and protected, a sturdy display can be used for three or four years, and its cost can be prorated. A memorable display for Easter, Christmas, or Halloween will be anticipated by shoppers each year as a traditional part of the holiday.

12. If your store has display windows next to rear entries (see "Rear Entrances"), displays should be simpler than those in the front, but should be of similar quality.



13. Remember, your window display is an integral part of your business. It contributes to:

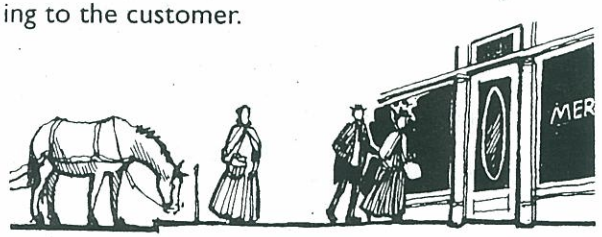
- the character and success of your store;
- the character of your street; and
- the character of the business district as a whole.

Your display is an invitation to come inside and shop. Make it a good one.

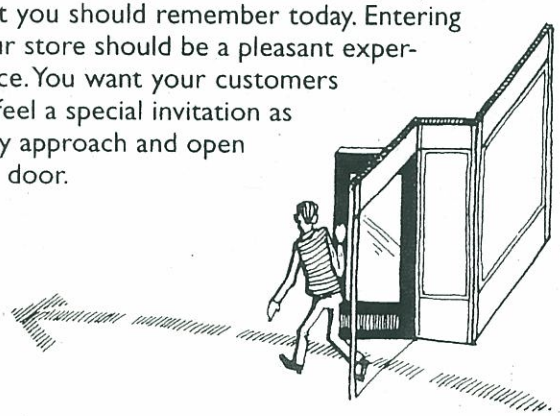
Doors

The Front Door

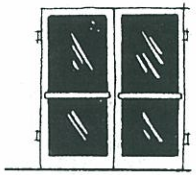
Historically, the storefront entry was more than just a door. Its design and appearance reflected its commercial importance. Tall and stately in proportion, and built of wood with a large glass panel, the traditional storefront door looked substantial yet inviting to the customer.



The idea of making the front door special is one that you should remember today. Entering your store should be a pleasant experience. You want your customers to feel a special invitation as they approach and open the door.



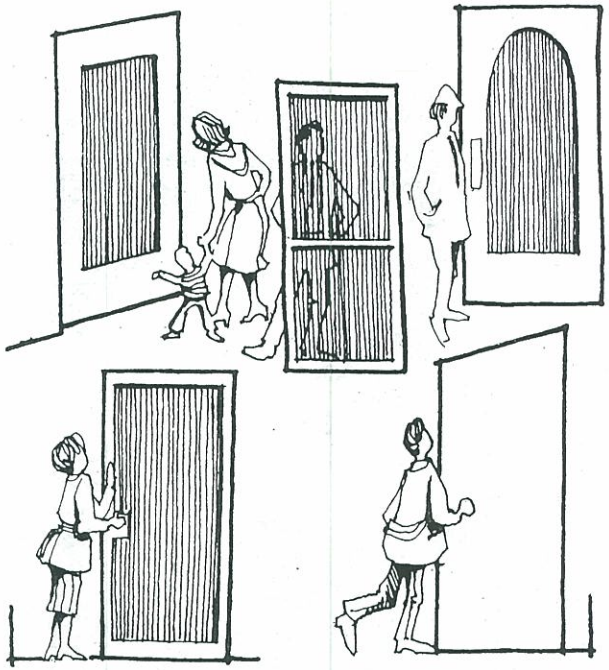
Original storefront doors along Main Street have become scarce. They have been replaced by the standard aluminum and glass commercial doors, or by doors more appropriate to residential buildings. Although modern aluminum doors lack historic character, this type of door cannot always be considered inappropriate. Its simple appearance makes it unobtrusive. However, if you want to enhance the personality of your store, you should consider other options.



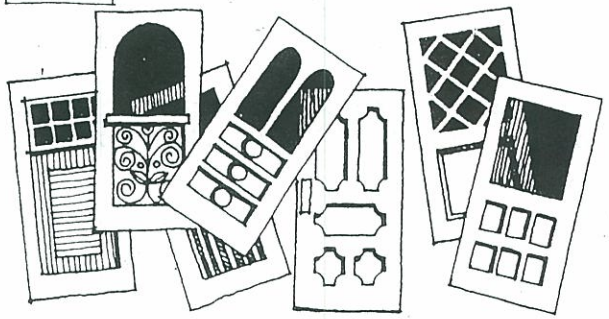
1. Your front door should be compatible with the rest of your storefront. It should be significant but not outspoken.

2. If your storefront retains its original character, a traditional wood door with a glass panel (as tall as possible) will reinforce the building's design. Try to find a salvaged older door to fix up or purchase a new door that fits the storefront's appearance.

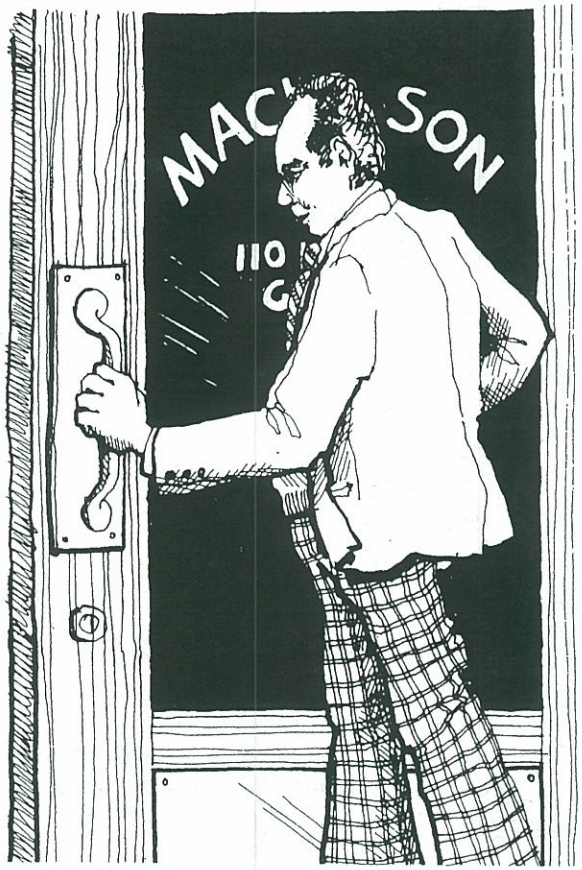
3. If traditional appearance is not a concern, choose a door based on the total design of your storefront. Many door sizes and designs are available in both wood and metal. If you choose the standard aluminum and glass door, consider a dark, anodized finish rather than a light, metallic color. The following illustration shows some new door designs that may be appropriate.



4. Avoid overdecorating the entry door. Most fake "historic" doors are decorated with designs, moldings, and window grilles that look residential, and thus out of place on Main Street. The same holds true for many contemporary door designs. The door should reinforce the character of your building as well as beckon customers inside.



Consider the use of subtle decorations on the door. A handsome door knob or pull, a brass kickplate, or an attractive painted sign on the glass is enough to turn your door into something special.



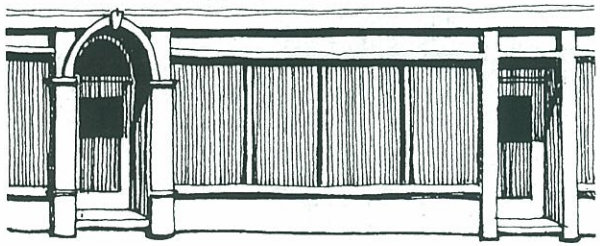
The Secondary Doors

The typical Main Street building often had an additional door on the front to permit access to the upper floors.

Compared to the storefront entrance, this second door was slightly more modest in design and usually not recessed as deeply. If you are selecting a new door for this location, you may find the following ideas helpful:

1. If you choose to maintain a traditional storefront design, an old solid or glass-paneled wood door is most appropriate.

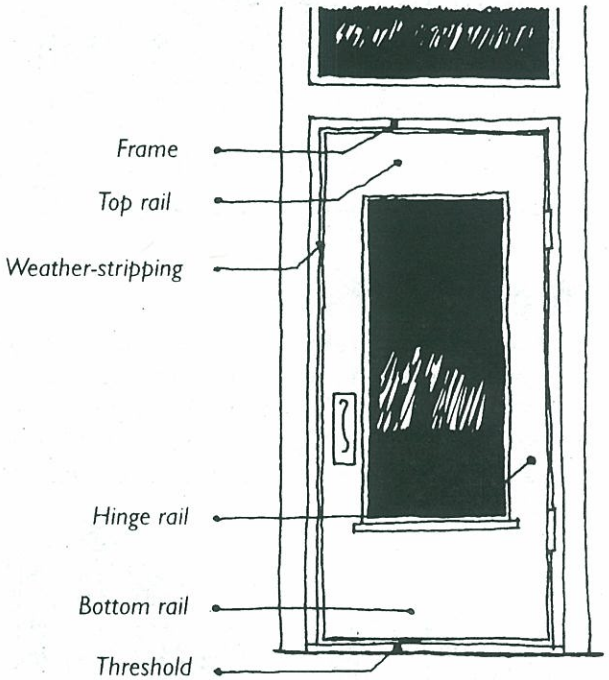
2. Whatever your choice, this door should be less prominent than the storefront door. The second front door should fit into the overall facade without drawing undo attention to itself. A door that is too fancy would look out of place in these surroundings.



Main Front Entrance *Secondary Entrance*

A Note on Maintenance

If any of the doors in your building are old but workable, you should certainly consider keeping them. If the doors are made of wood, maintenance is very important. Keep them clean and in good working order.



Check the wood for problems. Are portions of the wood soft, cracked, or split? Does the door have insect damage? Pay particular attention to the threshold, bottom rail, and hinge rail.

Is the weather-stripping in good repair? Does the door fit snugly in the frame, or is it too tight? Check the hardware. Are the locks, hinges, and closer in working order? Remember, it is often less expensive to repair a door than replace it.