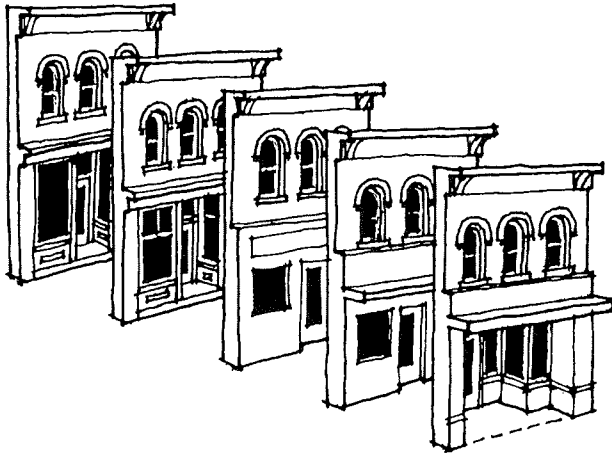


STOREFRONT DESIGN



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.

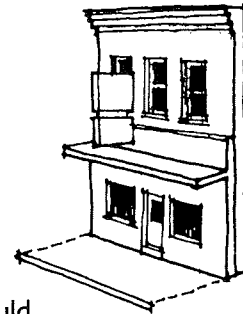
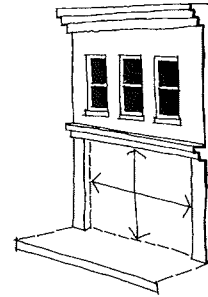
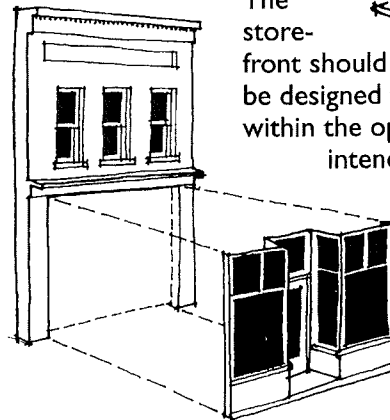
Keeping the Storefront in Its Place

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.

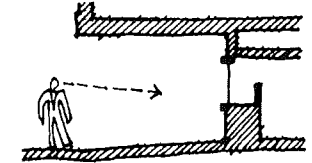
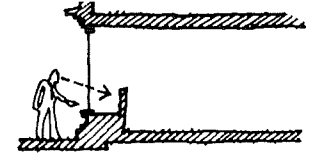
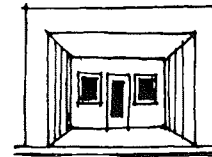
A general rule for future renovations can be stated as follows:

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.

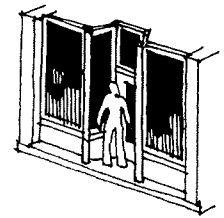


It is common to see a remodeled storefront recessed as a whole or punched far back (3 to 15 feet) into the facade. Except for buildings constructed in the 1920s and '30s, this treatment is almost never historically accurate. Unless specifically designed to lure customers to the entry, deep recesses tend 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

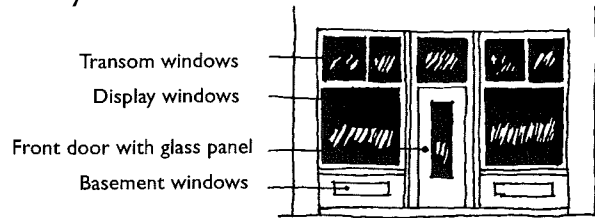
The traditional storefront had a recessed entry at the front door. This configuration accomplished two important things. First, it kept the display windows right next to the sidewalk, in full view of passersby. And, because the entry was recessed, this design emphasized the door. The intimacy of the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

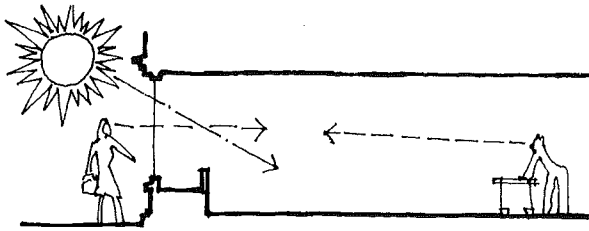


The Storefront Windows

The traditional storefront was composed almost entirely of windows.

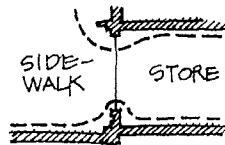


For very functional reasons, the storefront was designed to be as transparent as possible; this allowed a maximum of natural light into the typically narrow, otherwise windowless store space and relieved the closed-in feeling. It also gave the potential customer a good view into the store.



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.

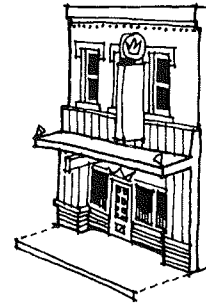
Many original storefronts also contain transoms above the display windows. When used in conjunc-

tion 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.

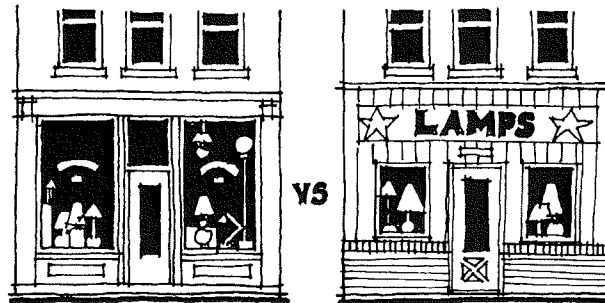
Storefront Decoration

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.