

Building  
Exterior

*Storefronts*



# Building Exterior

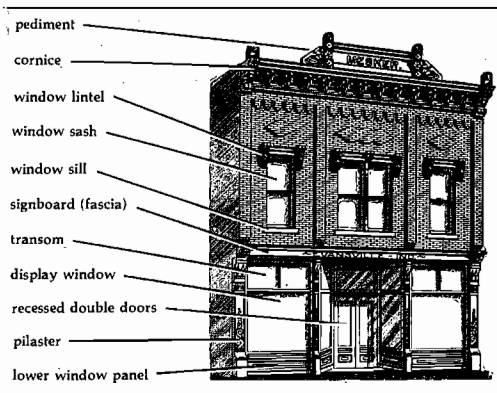
## *Storefronts*

The storefront is usually the most prominent feature of a historic commercial building, playing a crucial role in a store's advertising and merchandising strategy. Although a storefront normally does not extend beyond the first story, the rest of the building is often related to it visually through a unity of form and detail. Planning should always consider the entire building; window patterns on the upper floors, cornice elements, and other decorative features should be carefully retained, in addition to the storefront itself.

The earliest extant storefronts in the U.S., dating from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, had bay or oriel windows and provided limited display space. The 19th century witnessed the progressive enlargement of display windows

as plate glass became available in increasingly larger units. The use of cast iron columns and lintels at ground floor level permitted structural members to be reduced in size. Recessed entrances provided shelter for sidewalk patrons and further enlarged display areas. In the 1920s and 1930s, aluminum, colored structural glass, stainless steel, glass block, neon, and other new materials were introduced to create Art Deco storefronts.





*These architectural details are typical of historic commercial buildings (this particular one is No. 4016 in the George L. Mesker and Company catalog of 1905). The design utilized both cast and galvanized iron.*

## Recommended

### *Identify, retain, and preserve*

Identifying, retaining, and preserving storefronts—and their functional and decorative features—that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building such as display windows, signs, doors, transoms, kick plates, corner posts, and entablatures. The removal of inappropriate, nonhistoric cladding, false mansard roofs, and other later alterations can help reveal the historic character of a storefront.

### *Protect*

Protecting and maintaining masonry, wood, and architectural metals which comprise storefronts through appropriate treatments such as cleaning, rust removal, limited paint removal, and reapplication of protective coating systems.

Protecting storefronts against arson and vandalism before work begins by boarding up windows and installing alarm systems that are keyed into local protection agencies.

## Not Recommended

Removing or radically changing storefronts—and their features—which are important in defining the overall historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

Changing the storefront so that it appears residential rather than commercial in character.

Removing historic material from the storefront to create a recessed arcade.

Introducing coach lanterns, mansard designs, wood shakes, nonoperable shutters, and small-paned windows if they cannot be documented historically.

Changing the location of a storefront's main entrance.

Failing to provide adequate protection of materials on a cyclical basis so that deterioration of storefront features results.

Permitting entry into the building through unsecured or broken windows and doors so that interior features and finishes are damaged through exposure to weather or through vandalism.

Stripping storefronts of historic material such as wood, cast iron, terra cotta, carrara glass, and brick.

### Recommended

Evaluating the overall condition of storefront materials to determine whether more than protection and maintenance are required, that is, if repairs to features will be necessary.

### Not Recommended

Failing to undertake adequate measures to assure the preservation of the historic storefront.

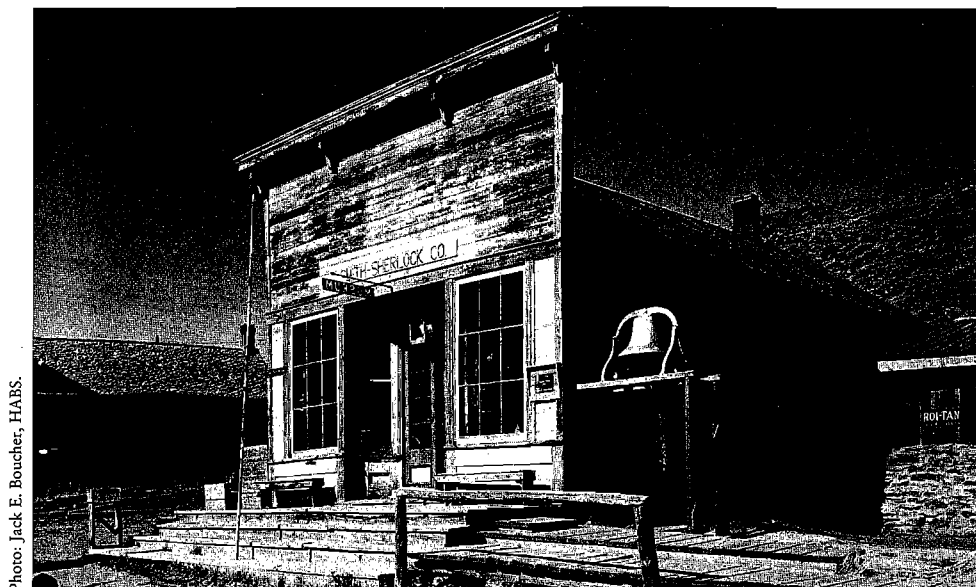


Photo: Jack E. Boucher, HAAS.

*A false-fronted wood store is now used as a museum. Although the weathered wood is part of its charm, repainting is recommended as a good maintenance practice to protect the wood.*

### *Repair*

Repairing storefronts by reinforcing the historic materials. Repairs will also generally include the limited replacement in kind—or with compatible substitute materials—of those extensively deteriorated or missing parts of storefronts where there are surviving prototypes such as transoms, kick plates, pilasters, or signs.

Replacing an entire storefront when repair of materials and limited replacement of its parts are appropriate.

Using substitute material for the replacement parts that does not convey the same visual appearance as the surviving parts of the storefront or that is physically or chemically incompatible.

*This sleek red and black Moderne storefront was added to a more staid late-19th century commercial building in the 1930s—both are now in need of repair. According to the Standards, later storefronts that have acquired significance over time should generally be retained in rehabilitation.*



Recommended

Not Recommended

### *Replace*

Replacing in kind an entire storefront that is too deteriorated to repair—if the overall form and detailing are still evident—using the physical evidence as a model. If using the same material is not technically or economically feasible, then compatible substitute materials may be considered.

Removing a storefront that is unrepairable and not replacing it; or replacing it with a new storefront that does not convey the same visual appearance.



*This appropriate new storefront replaces an old one that was too deteriorated to save. It features a recessed doorway based on the historic design and respects the scale and proportion of the existing building.*



*The following work is highlighted to indicate that it represents the particularly complex technical or design aspects of rehabilitation projects and should only be considered after the preservation concerns listed above have been addressed.*

#### Recommended

##### *Design for Missing Historic Features*

Designing and constructing a new storefront when the historic storefront is completely missing. It may be an accurate restoration using historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the size, scale, material, and color of the historic building.

#### Not Recommended

Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced storefront is based on insufficient historical, pictorial, and physical documentation.

Introducing a new design that is incompatible in size, scale, material, and color.

Using inappropriately scaled signs and logos or other types of signs that obscure, damage, or destroy remaining character-defining features of the historic building.