

Building Interior

*Spaces,
Features
and Finishes*



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Spaces, Features and Finishes

An interior floor plan, the arrangement and sequence of spaces, and built-in features and applied finishes are individually and collectively important in defining the historic character of the building. Their identification, retention, protection, and repair should be given prime consideration in every rehabilitation project. In evaluating historic interiors prior to rehabilitation, it should be kept in mind that interiors are comprised of a series of primary and secondary spaces. This is applicable to all buildings, from courthouses to cathedrals, to cottages and office buildings. Primary spaces, including entrance halls, parlors, or living rooms, assembly rooms and lobbies, are defined not only by their features and finishes, but by the size and proportion of the rooms themselves—purposely

created to be the visual attraction or functioning “core” of the building. Care should be taken to retain the essential proportions of primary interior spaces and not to damage, obscure, or destroy distinctive features and finishes.

Secondary spaces include areas and rooms that “service” the primary spaces and may include kitchens, bathrooms, mail rooms, utility spaces, hallways, firestairs and work spaces in a commercial or office building. Extensive changes can often be made in these less important areas without having a detrimental effect on the overall historic character.



Photo: Jack E. Boucher, HABES.



Recommended

Interior Spaces

Identify, retain and preserve

Identifying, retaining, and preserving a floor plan or interior spaces that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building. This includes the size, configuration, proportion, and relationship of rooms and corridors; the relationship of features to spaces; and the spaces themselves such as lobbies, reception halls, entrance halls, double parlors, theaters, auditoriums, and important industrial or commercial use spaces.

Not Recommended

Radically changing a floor plan or interior spaces—including individual rooms—which are important in defining the overall historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

Altering the floor plan by demolishing principal walls and partitions to create a new appearance.

Altering or destroying interior spaces by inserting floors, cutting through floors, lowering ceilings, or adding or removing walls.

Relocating an interior feature such as a staircase so that the historic relationship between features and space is altered.

Photo: Jack E. Boucher, HABES.



Interior Features and Finishes

Identify, retain and preserve

Identifying, retaining, and preserving interior features and finishes that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building, including columns, cornices, baseboards, fireplaces and mantels, panelling, light fixtures, hardware, and flooring; and wallpaper, plaster, paint, and finishes such as stenciling, marbling, and graining; and other decorative materials that accent interior features and provide color, texture, and patterning to walls, floors, and ceilings.

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

Installing new decorative material that obscures or damages character-defining interior features or finishes.

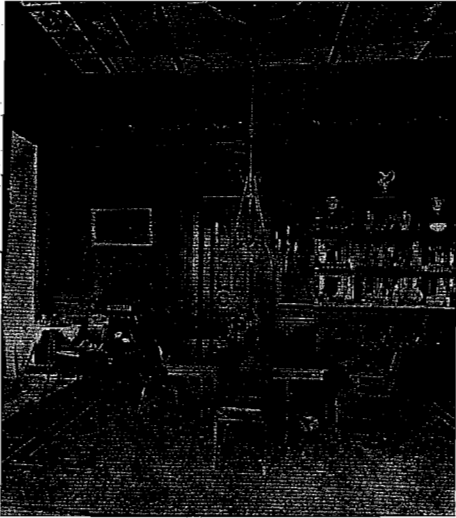
Removing paint, plaster, or other finishes from historically finished surfaces to create a new appearance (e.g., removing plaster to expose masonry surfaces such as brick walls or a chimney piece).

Applying paint, plaster, or other finishes to surfaces that have been historically unfinished to create a new appearance.

Stripping paint to bare wood rather than repairing or reapplying grained or marbled finishes to features such as doors and panelling.

Radically changing the type of finish or its color, such as painting a previously varnished wood feature.

These photographs suggest the richness and diversity of public building spaces, features, and finishes.



Recommended

Protect and maintain

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

Protecting interior features and finishes against arson and vandalism before project work begins, erecting protective fencing, boarding-up windows, and installing fire alarm systems that are keyed to local protection agencies.

Protecting interior features such as a staircase, mantel, or decorative finishes and wall coverings against damage during project work by covering them with heavy canvas or plastic sheets.

Installing protective coverings in areas of heavy pedestrian traffic to protect historic features such as wall coverings, parquet flooring and panelling.

Removing damaged or deteriorated paints and finishes to the next sound layer using the gentlest method possible, then repainting or refinishing using compatible paint or other coating systems.

Repainting with colors that are appropriate to the historic building.

Not Recommended

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

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

Stripping interiors of features such as woodwork, doors, windows, light fixtures, copper piping, radiators; or of decorative materials.

Failing to provide proper protection of interior features and finishes during work so that they are gouged, scratched, dented, or otherwise damaged.

Failing to take new use patterns into consideration so that interior features and finishes are damaged.

Using destructive methods such as propane or butane torches or sandblasting to remove paint or other coatings. These methods can irreversibly damage the historic materials that comprise interior features.

Using new paint colors that are inappropriate to the historic building.



Photo: Jack E. Boucher, HABS.

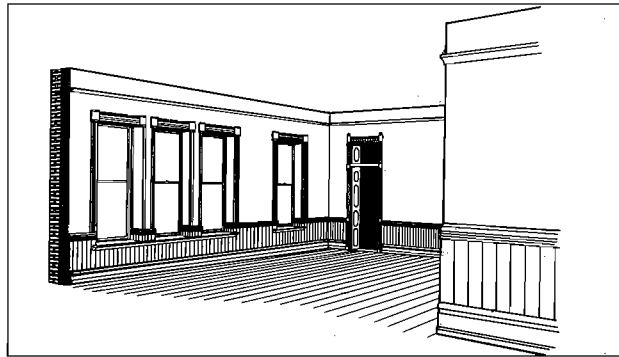
This historic character of these 19th century residential interiors was protected and maintained during rehabilitation.

Recommended

Limiting abrasive cleaning methods to certain industrial or warehouse buildings where the interior masonry or plaster features do not have distinguishing design, detailing, tooling, or finishes; and where wood features are not finished, molded, beaded, or worked by hand. Abrasive cleaning should *only* be considered after other, gentler methods have been proven ineffective.

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

Furring out exterior walls to add insulation and suspending new ceilings to hide ductwork and wiring can change a room's proportions and can also destroy or obscure significant decorative detailing.



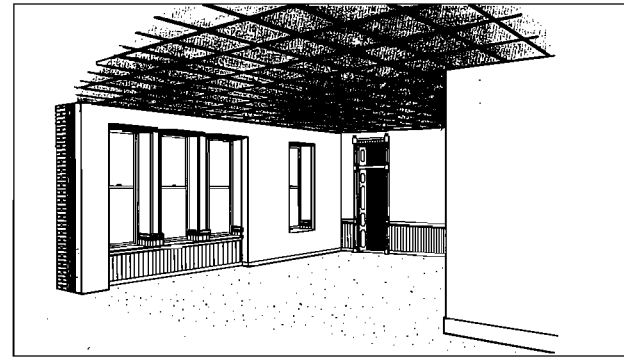
Repair

Repairing interior features and finishes by reinforcing the historic materials. Repair will also generally include the limited replacement in kind—or with compatible substitute material—of those extensively deteriorated or missing parts of repeated features when there are surviving prototypes such as stairs, balustrades, wood panelling, columns; or decorative wall coverings or ornamental tin or plaster ceilings.

Not Recommended

Changing the texture and patina of character-defining features through sandblasting or use of abrasive methods to remove paint, discoloration or plaster. This includes both exposed wood (including structural members) and masonry.

Failing to undertake adequate measures to assure the protection of interior features and finishes.



Replacing an entire interior feature such as a staircase, panelled wall, parquet floor, or cornice; or finish such as a decorative wall covering or ceiling when repair of materials and limited replacement of such parts are appropriate.

Using a substitute material for the replacement part that does not convey the visual appearance of the surviving parts or portions of the interior feature or finish or that is physically or chemically incompatible.



Recommended

Replace

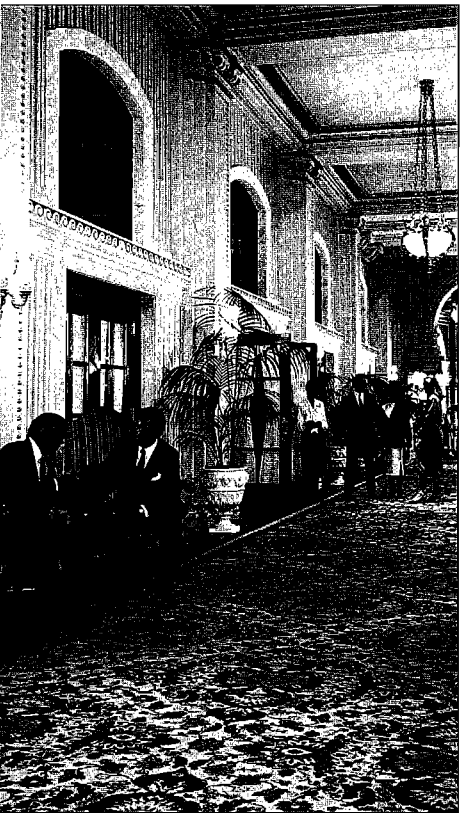
Replacing in kind an entire interior feature or finish that is too deteriorated to repair—if the overall form and detailing are still evident—using the physical evidence as a model for reproduction. Examples could include wainscoting, a tin ceiling, or interior stairs. If using the same kind of material is not technically or economically feasible, then a compatible substitute material may be considered.

Before and after: Prior to rehabilitation of this hotel, water intrusion and freeze-thaw cycles had caused extensive efflorescence and plaster failure. The ornamental plaster was almost fully re-manufactured, then gilded. Light fixtures and other detailing were also carefully replicated.

Not Recommended

Removing a character-defining feature or finish that is unreparable and not replacing it; or replacing it with a new feature or finish that does not convey the same visual appearance.

During rehabilitation, the historic plaster was removed from perimeter walls, leaving the brick exposed; in addition historically painted wood trim was stripped. Removing finishes not only destroys historic materials that should be retained and preserved, but it also gives the interior an appearance it never had historically.



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 installing a new interior feature or finish if the historic feature or finish is completely missing. This could include missing partitions, stairs, elevators, lighting fixtures, and wall coverings; or even entire rooms if all historic spaces, features, and finishes are missing or have been destroyed by inappropriate “renovations.” The design may be a restoration based on historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the building, district, or neighborhood.

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

Accommodating service functions such as bathrooms, mechanical equipment, and office machines required by the building’s new use in secondary spaces such as first floor service areas or on upper floors.

Reusing decorative material or features that have had to be removed during the rehabilitation work including wall and baseboard trim, door molding, panelled doors, and simple wainscoting; and relocating such material or features in areas appropriate to their historic placement.

Installing permanent partitions in secondary spaces; removable partitions that do not destroy the sense of space should be installed when the new use requires the subdivision of character-defining interior space.

Not Recommended

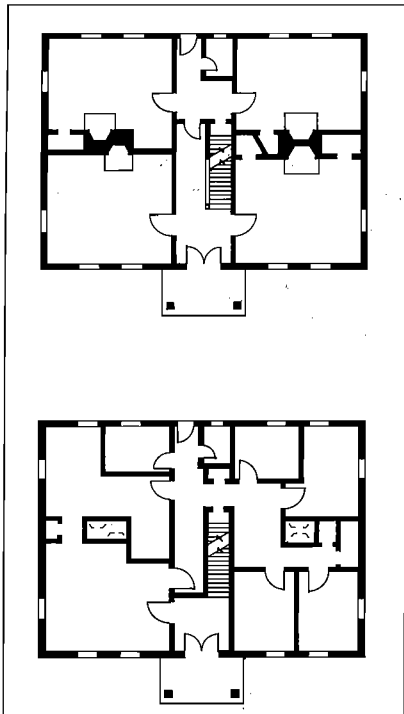
Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced feature is based on insufficient physical, historical, and pictorial documentation or on information derived from another building.

Introducing a new interior feature or finish that is incompatible with the scale, design, materials, color, and texture of the surviving interior features and finishes.

Dividing rooms, lowering ceilings, and damaging or obscuring character-defining features such as fireplaces, niches, stairways or alcoves, so that a new use can be accommodated in the building.

Discarding historic material when it can be reused within the rehabilitation project or relocating it in historically inappropriate areas.

Installing permanent partitions that damage or obscure character-defining spaces, features, or finishes.



Adding several new rooms to a distinctive interior space may radically change its historic character. Before (top): The original plan was a central hall with four large, equally-sized rooms around it. Each room had a fireplace with a mantel and decorative trim. After (bottom): During rehabilitation, numerous small rooms were added; the open stair was also replaced with a boxed-in stair and the original trim and fireplaces were removed.

Recommended

Alterations/Additions for the New Use

Enclosing an interior stairway where required by code so that its character is retained. In many cases, glazed fire-rated walls may be used.

Placing new code-required stairways or elevators in secondary and service areas of the historic building.

Creating an atrium or a light well to provide natural light when required for the new use in a manner that preserves character-defining interior spaces, features, and finishes as well as the structural system.

Adding a new floor if required for the new use in a manner that preserves character-defining structural features, and interior spaces, features, and finishes.

Not Recommended

Enclosing an interior stairway with fire-rated construction so that the stairwell space or any character-defining features are destroyed.

Radically changing, damaging, or destroying character-defining spaces, features, or finishes when adding new code-required stairways and elevators.

Destroying character-defining interior, spaces, features, or finishes; or damaging the structural system in order to create an atrium or light well.

Inserting a new floor within a building that alters or destroys the fenestration; radically changes a character-defining interior space; or obscures, damages, or destroys decorative detailing.