

Treatments Resource Guide: Historic Storefronts



The storefront is typically the first interaction an individual has with a building. Generally, a storefront is considered a character-defining feature for any building, and every effort should be made to retain and rehabilitate a storefront. Storefronts have changed over time as design tastes have changed. Just because a feature has been changed does not mean it isn't significant. *Standard #2* states, "changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved." Careful consideration of a storefront in a rehabilitation project is vital.

Justify changes to storefronts and provide comprehensive photographs of the areas to be altered. Document the date of construction of the existing storefront and its condition. If a historical treatment is planned, provide the evidence on which the proposed new storefront designs are based. Owners are strongly discouraged from introducing a new storefront or new design element that alters the character of the structure and its relationship with the street or that causes destruction of significant historic material.

General Guidance:

- ◆ Retain and preserve storefronts that contribute to the overall historic character of a building, including such functional and decorative features as transoms, display windows, doors, entablatures, pilasters, recessed entries, and signs. Do not remove historic materials from storefronts.
- ◆ Maintain the original scale, proportion, and organization of architectural elements of the storefront.
- ◆ Retain all historic storefront elements, including later alterations that have gained historic significance in their own right.
- ◆ If replacement of a deteriorated detail or feature of a storefront is necessary, replace only the deteriorated element in kind rather than the entire feature. Match the original detail or element in design, dimension, color, and material.
- ◆ If replacement of an entire storefront is necessary, replace it in kind, matching the original feature in design, dimension, detail, texture, color, and material.
- ◆ If replacement of a missing storefront feature is necessary, replace it with a new feature or storefront based on accurate documentation. If accurate documentation is not available, then use a new design that is appropriately compatible with the building in scale, size, material, and color.
- ◆ Do not create a false sense of historical development or historic character through conjectural features or elements from other historic properties where there is no documentation or evidence to show that such features existed as part of the storefront. Do not add elements to a storefront that have no historic precedent.
- ◆ Only introduce new signage that is compatible with the storefront in material, scale, and color. It is not appropriate to install signage that damages, obscures, or diminishes the character-defining features of a storefront.
- ◆ It is not appropriate to replace or cover wooden storefront and entry elements with contemporary substitute materials such as aluminum or vinyl.
- ◆ It is not appropriate to paint brick or masonry that is not painted.
- ◆ Do not change or reorient the location of the main entrance of the storefront. Do not infill or alter window or door openings.

Resources:

Preservation Briefs:

[Preservation Brief #11: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts](#)

[Preservation Brief #12: The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Glass \(Vitrolite and Carrara Glass\)](#)

[Preservation Brief #25: The Preservation of Historic Signs](#)

[Preservation Brief #27: The Maintenance and Repair of Architectural Cast Iron](#)

[Preservation Brief #44: The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings: Repair, Replacement, and New Design](#)

Interpreting the Standards Bulletins:

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #13: Repair/Replacement of Missing or Altered Storefronts](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #27: Adding Awnings to Historic Storefronts and Entrances](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #48: Replacement of Missing or Altered Storefronts](#)

[Interpreting the Standards Bulletin #49: Designing Compatible Replacement Storefronts](#)

Preservation Tech Notes:

[Preservation Tech Notes—Historic Glass #1: Repair and Reproduction of Prismatic Glass Transoms](#)

[Preservation Tech Notes—Historic Glass #2: Repair and Rehabilitation of Historic Sidewalk Vault Lights](#)

Additional Reference:

[How to Work with Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century: A Mid-Twentieth Century Storefront Components Guide](#) (National Main Streets Conference, Philadelphia, April 2, 2008 by Carol J. Dyson, AIA)

[Illinois Preservation Series, Number 19: Storefronts on Main Street: An Architectural History](#)

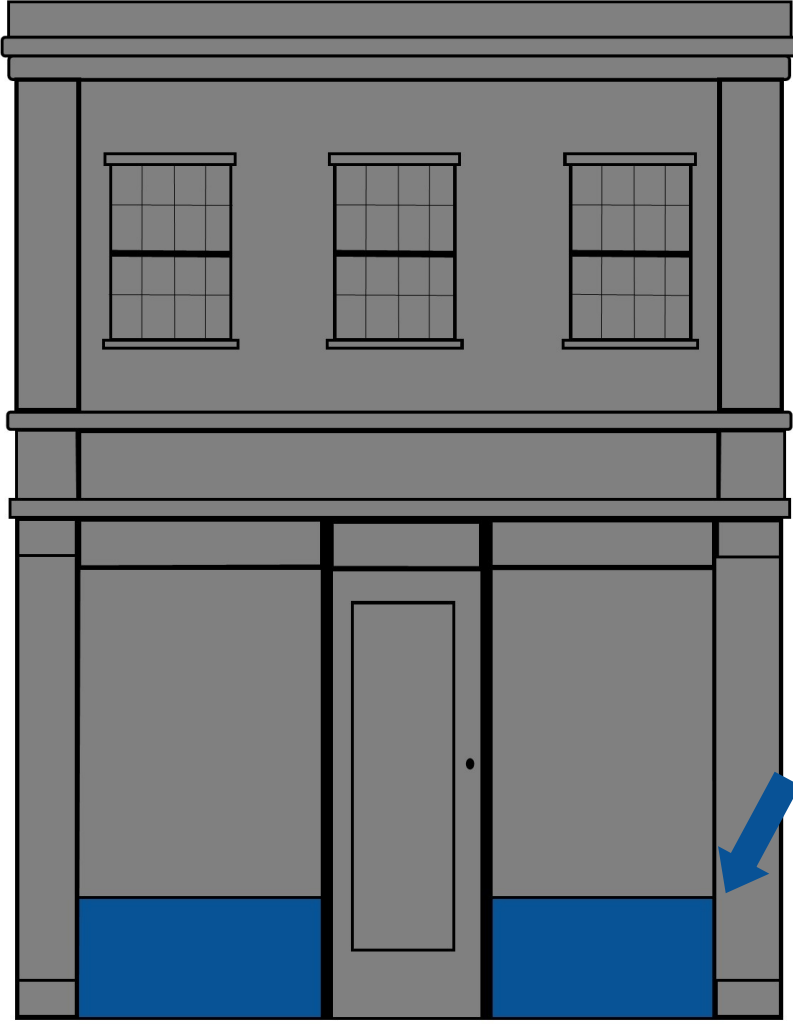
[Incentives: A Guide to the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program for Income-Producing Properties: Storefronts](#)

[Introduction to Federal Tax Credits for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings: Main Street Commercial Buildings](#)

Identifying Storefront Components:



Please note: Areas highlighted in blue shades indicate the storefront component being described.

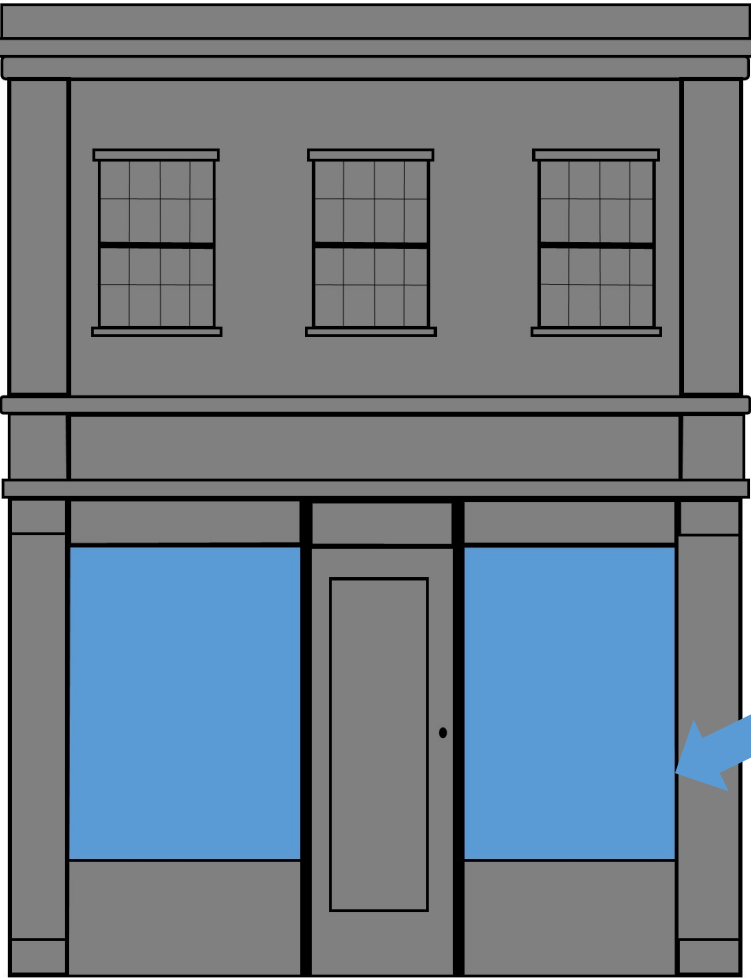


Bulkhead/Window Base/Kickplate/Apron/Knee Wall: the short wall that forms a base for one or more windows, separating the window(s) from the sidewalk



Transom/Transom Window: horizontal window above the display window or door that is separated by a horizontal framing member and can be fixed or operable

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Display Windows: most prominent feature of storefronts and establish visual continuity and character

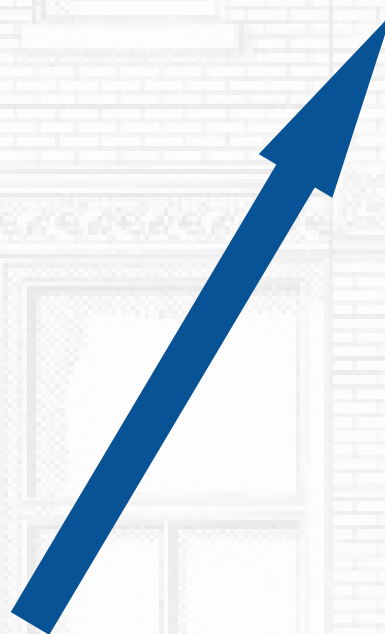


Cornice: horizontal projection that crowns an architectural element with a profile that can be functional and ornamental; Can separate the storefront from upper floors; Can include brackets, dentils, and panels

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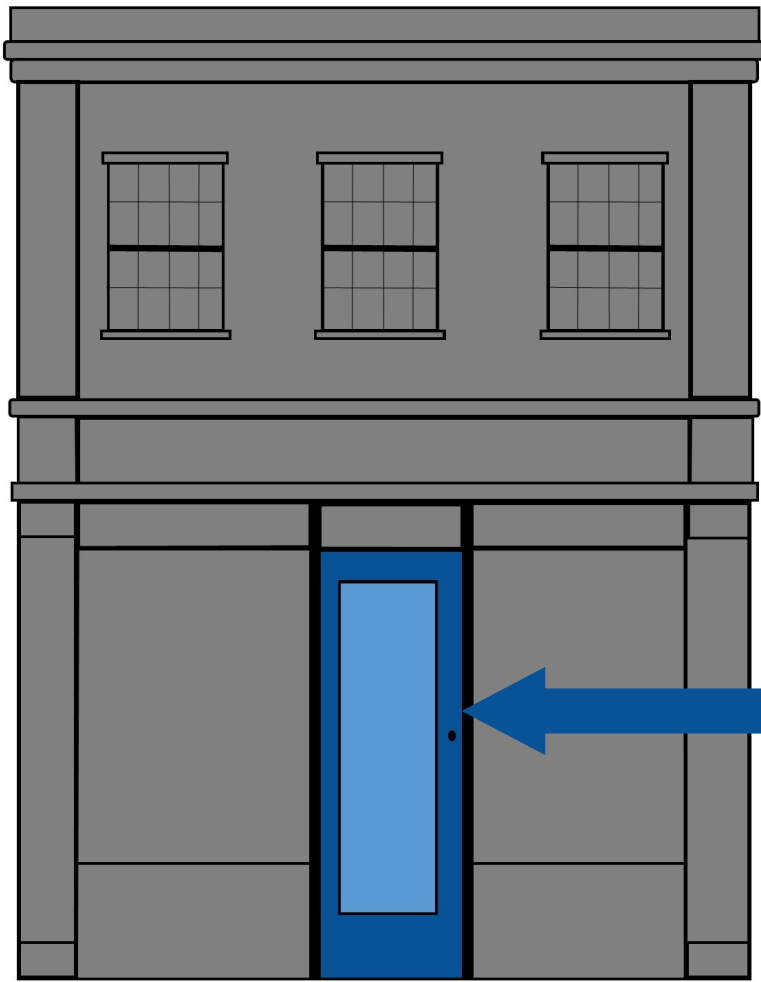
Pier: exterior vertical element that is typically placed at intervals along a wall that can separate a storefront opening within a building or define a single storefront opening; Can be composed of brick, stone, or metal



Parapet: a low protective wall along the edge of a roof, that extends above the roof line.



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Entry: Entries can be recessed in straight or splayed returns or flush with the street wall. Entry doors can have transoms and typically feature clear glazing. A recessed entry is an entry that is not in line with the street wall (the portion of the building that maintains the plane of the façade). Entries in storefront can be either centrally configured or offset.

Lintel: the horizontal member or element above a door or window opening



Sill: the horizontal member or element below a door or window opening

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Sign band: the flat horizontal on the façade usually located above the storefront and below the second story window sill where signs were historically attached. A sign band may also occur within a decorative bandcourse above a storefront



Spandrel area: the portion of the façade below the sill of an upper story window and above the lintel of the window or display window directly below it or above the lintel of a window or display window and the building cornice or top of the building

Additional Storefront Terminology

Frieze: A decorative band in a stringcourse, or near the top of a wall below the cornice. Typically located above a storefront's transom and windows. Can be the location of a sign band or can be located in the spandrel area.

Ornamentation: distinctive architectural details that can include cornices, moldings, brackets, decorative stamped panels, decorative ceilings or soffits, or tile entryways among others

Proportion: the relationship of one part or component of a storefront to another or to the whole

Scale: the relative size of individual parts or components compared to each other and to a reference measurement

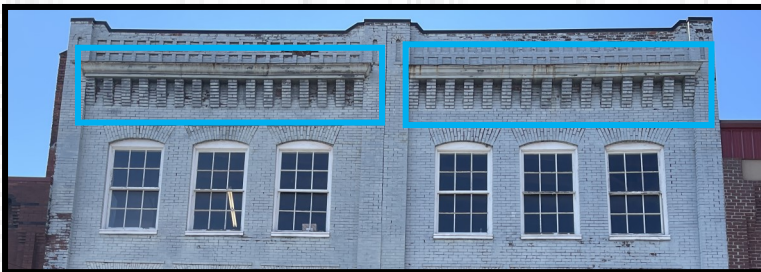
Soffit: the underside of a structural component such as a beam, arch, or recessed area

Canopy: a metal frame clad with fabric that projects from a building entrance over the sidewalk to the curb, where it is supported on vertical posts

Awning: a metal frame clad with fabric attached over a storefront, door or window, to provide protection from the sun or rain

Signage: any lettering or logos in general, used to advertise a store, goods, or services

Examples of Ornamentation



Corbelled brick and metal cornice



Tiled entryway



Pressed metal decorative soffit



Keystones