



STOREFRONTS

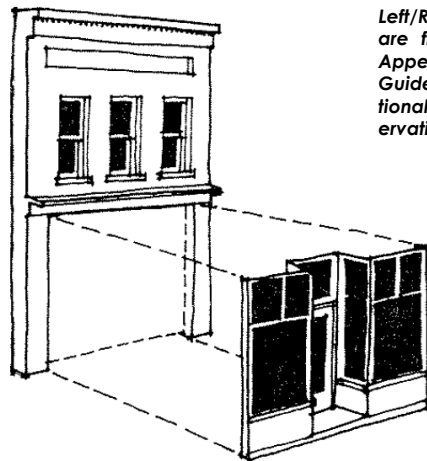
OVERVIEW

Storefronts are an important architectural and economic element promoting activity and exchange along Main Street. As one component of the building façade, the traditional storefront was composed almost entirely of windows and designed to fit within a large opening along the sidewalk. For very functional reasons, storefronts were designed to be as transparent as possible, allowing the maximum amount of natural light into a typically narrow, windowless store. It allowed the potential customer a full view of the retail interior, both for merchandise displays and the space itself with all its engaged occupants. As an intentionally minimized barrier between store and sidewalk, the two realms seemed to melt into one. The commercial space became part of the public street, readily accessible to patrons. Designed to be attractive, inviting, and functional, storefronts play an important role in defining individual businesses and even entire commercial districts.

As a major character-defining feature, the storefront should retain as many original architectural elements as possible. However, it is important to understand that downtowns were

never static. Numerous changes came to Main Street, often the storefronts were frequently altered to keep up with current trends. This, in combination with technological innovations fueled the significant alterations in the appearance of storefronts, while also meeting the critical merchandising demands of Main Street. Depending on the type of use, the business owner typically made decisions about the kind of storefront that best served their business. While these modifications are not original and many times considered "modern", they may now be historically significant in their own right.

In most cases, the storefronts should be evaluated separately from the building facade when determining significance. Each building differs and these modernized storefronts were just one more step in the continuum of change exhibited in our dynamic downtowns. If we attempt to envision our downtowns to uniformly fit a picturesque nineteenth century aesthetic, then we create a "historicized" appearance that never existed and completely remove the evidence of an authentic time period.



Left/Right: Illustrations shown are from the Keeping Up Appearances for Storefronts Guide, created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



Above: Longview, Texas. Modernized historic storefront with recessed entry, aluminum display windows, and clad in structural glass. The tile entry also remains in place.

TYPICAL STOREFRONTS

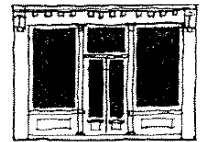
Early to mid-1800s

- Post + Beam Frame
- Divided Display Windows
- Simple Decoration



Mid to late 1800s

- Boldly Decorated
- Cornice
- Cast Iron Columns



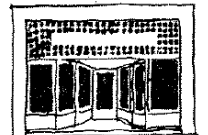
Late 1800s to Early 1900s

- Simple Cornice
- Transom Windows
- Some Recessed Entries



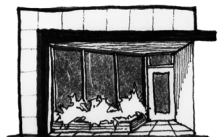
Early 1900s to 1930s

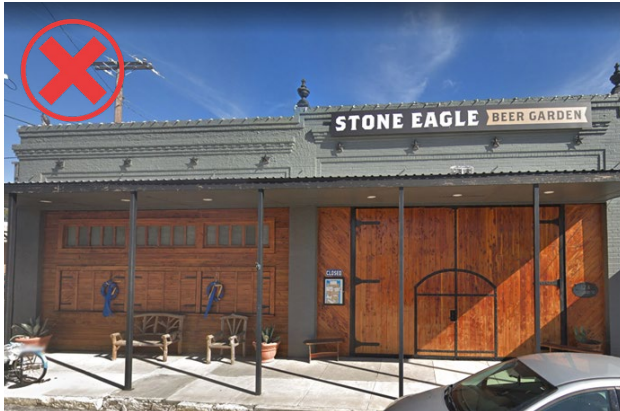
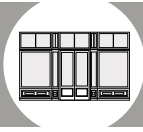
- Metal Window Frames
- Structural Glass
- Recessed Entrance



1940s to Late 1960s

- Asymmetrical and Angled Storefronts
- Exaggerated- Modern Massing and Structure
- Stylized Signage





In contrast, many poorly remodeled storefronts appear out of place on Main Street, because of the distinct colors, materials, configurations, and proportions that are chosen, such as the example that is shown above. The entry is not defined. The amount of wood paneling applied reduces any visibility to the interior and creates an appearance of a closed business. Storefronts should be based on the traditional storefront design, historic documentation available existing conditions, and/or local building practices of the era. Before replacement is considered, it is important to evaluate the existing components of a storefront and whether they are in need of repair or replacement, but this should not be a justification for replacement of an entire storefront. Refer to the Storefront Replacements section of this guide for additional information.

MATERIAL HISTORY

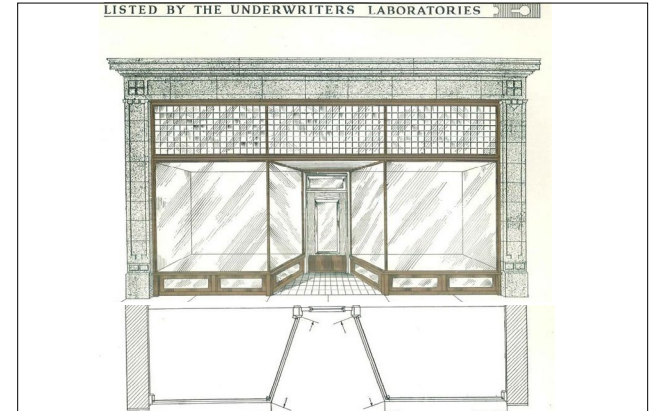
In the mid to late 1800s, storefronts were constructed mainly of wood with some also incorporating cast iron detailing and columns. In the early 1900s, wood remained in use while metal window frames were introduced for the main display windows and transom windows, including copper and leaded glass. However, near the turn of the 20th century, innovations in building materials completely transformed storefronts. Steel beams made it possible to span the entire façade of a building eliminating the need for structural columns every eight feet. This allowed for larger windows and thinner window frames. Advancements in American



Above: La Grange, Texas. Copper storefront example (1900-1930s).

American glass making and shipping also made it possible for larger plate-glass panels to be incorporated. Metal window frames, specifically copper and copper alloys like bronze and brass, were thinner, lighter, and more durable than their wood predecessors. Metal storefronts not only created a more modern appearance, but also allowed more light to enter the building and provided a larger viewing area for merchandise. The first metal storefronts were made to look like wood; however, it soon became the norm to have sleek metal entrances. By 1910, metal and other non-wood providers were offering storefronts in copper and copper alloys. By 1920, the wooden storefront was uncommon.

Metal was used for the frame and even in some cases, to hold in the sash. The wood bulkhead panels were replaced with stone, brick, metal, and marble, similar to the example shown above. The use of copper and bronze in storefront design was short lived due to the introduction of an inexpensive alternative, aluminum. This transformation began in the 1930s, but it was interrupted by World War II. Notably, copper and bronze storefronts did not disappear completely. High-end department stores and construction projects with a more flexible budget, incorporated these storefronts. While both types of metals were more modern in appearance than wood storefronts, the copper and bronze frames maintained a certain level of traditional detail. The early metal frames had curves and rounded profiles that added shadow and depth to the overall appearance. By the Mid-Century, technological advancements in materials



Above: Sample of [Desco Copper Storefront Catalogue](#) c.1925 from [APT Building Technology Heritage Library](#).

in combination with the national marketing of architectural designs and product availability made it possible for the same storefront design to be found in many locations around the country. Aluminum frames, however, presented a sharp contrast to older metal storefronts due to their rectilinear profiles, which created a true modern aesthetic. These early aluminum frames lead the way for the types of contemporary storefronts on new buildings today. Another major innovation in storefront design was the incorporation of mostly glass or "open front" storefronts. Some of the first examples appeared throughout the 1940s but the style became more prevalent after WWII. In this form, the open front was combined with the interior so that the store became the complete "display" window.

In contemporary construction, aluminum storefronts continue to be the most commonly used on Texas Main Streets, yet they come with many challenges. The shape and size of most contemporary aluminum storefront is bulkier than historic metal storefronts and generally not appropriate for Main Street buildings. Even in the 1960s with the advent of newer aluminum storefront assemblies, it began to be more challenging to create a recessed entry and this remains the case with contemporary material suppliers. This is illustrated by the [Kawneer catalog](#). The choice of materials can be critical to the overall success of your storefront design. Subtle dimensions and details can be the difference between a successful and undesired outcome.



REPLACEMENT

STOREFRONT REPLACEMENT

Recalling the [Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation](#) for guidance, if the historic storefront remains in place, proper maintenance, and repair should be prioritized to preserve this significant feature. If the historic storefront is no longer intact, the new design should “be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features” as stated in Department of the Interior Standard #9. The design should also use simple and unobtrusive materials to emphasize display windows and the entry door.

When designing and constructing a new storefront of aluminum or another material, it's important to select a manufacturer with a minimum profile and one that allows the spatial configuration and intent of the historic storefront to be maintained. In all cases, off-the-shelf windows and doors designed for residential applications are not appropriate for Main Street buildings. Refer to the example below.

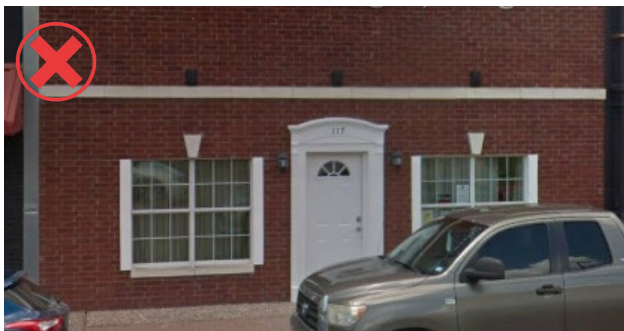
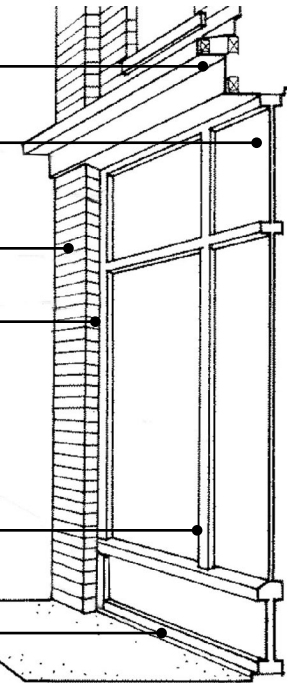
Additionally, the storefront design should carefully consider the spatial relationship to the sidewalk and interior. Traditionally, storefront windows were slightly recessed within the facade opening, typically 6 to 12 inches, and the main entry door(s) was recessed several feet. Many contemporary storefronts and entry doors have been improperly aligned, this alignment gives the appearance of the storefront being pasted onto, rather than being held within the frame of the facade.

The design should use simple and unobtrusive materials to emphasize display windows and the entry door, both with clear glass. These subtle details truly define the character of Main Street and the promotion of activity and exchange. To achieve this, the new storefront design should:

- Fit the existing opening within the facade. Avoid recessing the entire storefront, this creates a dark void that contrasts the adjacent buildings and does not maintain the historic planar relationship of the storefront to the facade of the building and the streetscape.
- Take vertical and horizontal alignments, including proportions from historic photographs and/or adjacent facades. Utilize the architectural features of the whole building to provide a guiding principle for the design of the storefront.
- The glazing should be clear. Avoid heavily tinted or reflective glass and films.
- Learn from historic elements but do not copy or replicate the original, as this would create a “false sense of history” per Standard #3.
- Utilize modern materials and storefront construction methods that compliment the historic structure.

STOREFRONT WITH CONTEMPORARY MATERIALS

- A cornice is made with metal over a wooden frame.
- Optional transoms can be clear or frosted glass.
- Masonry piers coordinate with the upper facade.
- Storefront is recessed 6 inches into the opening.
- Storefront is framed with anodized or treated wood with a finish that coordinates with the overall color scheme or existing materials of the building.
- The storefront framing rests on masonry or concrete base.



Above: Illustration shown is from the *Keeping Up Appearances for Storefronts Guide*, created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Left: Over time, the building has been significantly altered from its original design. The new design, shown on the right of the historic photograph, is a trend that does not take into consideration any historic documentation, proportions to adjacent structures, scale, nor does it maintain the historic planar relationship of the upper facade. Instead of recessing an entire storefront to create a hollowed-out space for outdoor seating, consider other alternatives, such as concentrating seating areas to the sidewalk if there is a sufficient amount of space, or consider parklets. Always consult with your Authority Having Jurisdiction, before proceeding with these alternatives.



STOREFRONT WITH CONTEMPORARY MATERIALS



Above: Before rehabilitation. Tyler, Texas in 1981.

This rehabilitation project to a Kress Department Store in Tyler, Texas is an example of a new storefront design that takes inspiration from the historic storefront. Constructed of modern materials, the new storefront aligns with the proportions seen in the original design, and recessed door layout using a contemporary anodized aluminum storefront system with a thin profile. The new design incorporates the historic



configuration, while also substituting the material with a compatible solution that conveys the same transparency and opacity in the original design. This historic photo provides a clear view of the modernized storefront proportions with the large display windows. In this case, the replacement was appropriate, since the storefront was severely deteriorated and beyond repair.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Content in this document was drawn from the resources listed below. Each of these resources provides additional detailed information about rehabilitating historic storefronts.

- N.P.S. Preservation Brief #11 ["Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts"](#)
- Interpreting The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:
 - # 13: [Repair/Replacement of Missing or Altered Storefronts](#)
 - # 48: [Replacement of Missing or Altered Storefronts](#)
 - # 49: [Designing Compatible Replacement Storefronts](#)
- N.P.S. : [Metals in America's Historic Buildings](#)
- [How to Work with Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century.](#)
- Additional Information on the cleaning and maintenance of various metal types can be found on the U.S. [General Services Administration website.](#)