

# Storefront



The storefronts in the Ridgewood Village Center Historic District are important features contributing to the downtown's pedestrian scale and historic commercial character. Historic storefronts are focal areas of their buildings due to ornamental detailing and large windows displaying merchandise and providing light for the store. Businesses on corner locations frequently took advantage of the double exposure to have more display windows and a corner entrance.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century storefronts are typically located within an opening framed by corner piers and frieze (or signboard). The storefront often has a recessed entrance. Above low base panels or bulkhead are large plate glass display windows. Above the display windows and doorway are often transom windows, sometimes with small square textured glass panes (prismatic glass popular between the 1890s and 1930s for bringing light into stores) or an arch or combinations of these features. The storefront is terminated by the upper part of the frame which might consist of a frieze or a sign board and a storefront cornice or may be a part of the building's wall terminated by a cornice or beltcourse (a horizontal band). Usually there is a clear horizontal separation of the storefront section of the building and its upper stories. Some buildings in the District have pent roofs as their storefronts' terminating feature. If the building has only one-story, there is frequently a parapet above the storefront cornice. Later storefronts might have narrower piers and might not have a recessed entrance.

Frequently storefronts were renovated in response to various merchandising trends, technology, and changing tenants. Some revisions to the storefront areas are superficial, leaving the structural integrity of the original storefront design intact. In some of these cases the original storefronts may still be in place but covered over or in need of maintenance and repair. With historically sensitive rehabilitation, the original proportions of the storefront can be recaptured. Later storefronts need to be evaluated to determine if they have architectural significance in their own right. Some of the renovations in the District represent fine examples of 1920s and 1930s commercial architecture employing pigmented structural glass and streamline design features, while some reflect the influence of the International Style at mid century.

# Storefront

## Guidelines

*If a building retains an original or historic storefront or parts on a storefront, preserve its historic features and remove non-historic alterations. Replace missing or too deteriorated original features with ones of similar design.*

*When designing a new storefront or renovating an existing storefront, keep the storefront materials simple and unobtrusive and predominately transparent. Continue the glass to wall ratio of other buildings of the streetscape.*

*Unless there is historic documentation of a different treatment, design a storefront to:*

- *Have the entrance recessed.*
- *Reflect the traditional three-part horizontal division of base panels, display windows, and transom area within an enframement of piers and storefront frieze.*

*Design new storefronts to relate to the overall design of the building's façade and to be compatible with its streetscape. They can replicate a documented original or be of contemporary design sensitive to the architecture of the building and the streetscape.*

*When planning the renovation of a storefront, consult old photographs in the Ridgewood Public Library to help determine original design, materials, and study the building for physical evidence of missing elements.*

*Maintain the distinction between individual storefronts, the entire building facade, and adjacent properties.*

## Recommended

### For Contributing Historic Buildings

- Identify, preserve, and repair existing historic storefronts.
- If historic features cannot be preserved, replace in kind, replicating the original in design, size, and materials.
- Design storefronts to fit inside the original opening.
- If the original or historic storefront does not exist but there is documentary and/or physical evidence of what once was there, replicate what was once there in design, size, and materials. If possible, expose elements of the original or historic storefront that may have been concealed by past modifications such as lintels, support walls, or piers.



An example of an old photograph at the Ridgewood Public Library which is a valuable resource when planning a storefront renovation for a building shown or for a visually related building.



Detail from the above photograph showing one of the storefronts. In 1908 local photographer Aljian took this photograph of the Hopper Building at 28-32 East Ridgewood Avenue.



**Recommended: Preserve and repair little altered storefronts, such as this one.**

# Storefront

## Recommended (Continued)

- If the original or historic storefront does not exist and a replication of the historic storefront is not applicable, replace non-historic incompatible alterations with a new storefront in a contemporary design. This new storefront should be compatible with the rest of the building and the streetscape in design, scale, color, and texture and should use visually compatible materials. Continue the strongest lines of the adjacent buildings, such as the roofline, parapet line, and lines of the storefront frieze. For design inspiration, use adjacent contributing historic storefronts in the streetscape or the documented historic appearance of visually related storefronts in the District.
- Retain original entrances even if no longer used. Do not block and relocate entrances.
- Retain original entrance doors and hardware. If a new door is necessary use a door that relates in scale to the rest of the façade and when documentation is available match the historic door in size, shape, panel pattern, and material.
- When possible, maintain and restore the entrance in its original location and configuration. If the original entrance is gone, design and place the new entrance considering traditional design themes and its relationship to the building's overall facade and the placement of entrances within the streetscape.
- If barrier-free access is required for original historic doors, try to make the doors compliant through the installation of an automatic opener. If new doors must be installed, replicate the original as much as possible.
- Design ramps for barrier-free access to be as unobtrusive as possible and constructed of materials compatible with the building and its streetscape.
- Remove non-original additions such as over large signs or later triangular pediments that cover or interrupt the horizontal features (frieze, cornice, beltcourse, etc.) between the storefront section and the upper level of the building. These changes alter the character of the building and of the entire streetscape by interpreting horizontal lines.
- Reopen and restore covered or blocked transom windows.



**Recommended: Preserve and repair little altered storefronts, such as these.**



**Recommended: When the original storefront is gone, consider a compatible contemporary treatment.**



**Recommended: Storefront that fits the enframing and has a central recessed entrance.**

# Storefront

## Recommended (Continued)

### For Non-contributing Commercial Buildings

- For most non-historic buildings and new construction, design storefronts inspired by traditional storefront design with enframements, low bulkheads at the base to protect the windows and act as platforms, large display windows with thin framing members, recessed entrances with overhead transoms, and storefront cornices, exposed structural elements, or horizontal sign panels or other capping features to separate the storefronts from the upper facades. The basic storefront can be constructed from traditional materials or compatible contemporary materials of appropriate color and texture.



This new storefront has a sense of enframement and the 3-part division with bulkhead, large display window, and frieze. The division of the window into multiple panes would not be appropriate in most District locations.

## Not Recommended

- Altering the shape and size of the original or historic storefront enframement, display windows, doors, transoms, storefront cornice, or base panels.
- Removing prismatic glass transom and above-door panels with small square glass panes.
- Removing a later storefront that may have acquired significance of its own to recreate an earlier storefront.
- Adding elaborate decorative features that create a false historical appearance. This diminishes the historical integrity of the building.
- Darken or tinted windows. Most clear low-e coatings may be used.
- Blocking windows. If street-level glass windows are not appropriate for the business, consider the use of window treatments.
- Using windows with multiple small panes, except for prismatic glass transoms, unless the multi-pane windows are historically appropriate to the building's style or integrate well into the building's overall design.
- Installing "theme" storefronts such as one reflecting a franchise's or a "Ye Old" New England Colonial design.



**Not Recommended: Use of double-hung windows instead of display windows.**



**Not Recommended: Blocking storefront windows.**

# Storefront

## Resources

National Park Service, *Preservation Brief 1: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts*, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief11.htm>

NPS, *Preservation Brief 12: The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Glass (Vitrolite and Carrara Glass)*, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief12.htm>

NPS, *PreservationTech Notes: Repair and Reproduction of Prismatic Glass Transoms*, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/technotes/PTN44/intro.htm>

New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, *FYI Publication: Storefronts*, <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/4sustain/storefronts.pdf>



A detail from Aljian's photograph of the south side of East Ridgewood Avenue west of Van Neste Square clearly documents storefronts about 1927.