

MATERIALS AND CONTEXT

The appearance of a historic storefront often reflects the materials and technology that were prevalent at the time of its construction. In Gretna, early storefronts were generally of wood frame construction, housing perhaps one or two commercial tenants with living quarters above. Wood was used not only for the structure of the building, but also the detailing and ornament—from wood cornices, to wood window and door frames, to wood-paneled bulkheads.

While wood framing remained a popular and economical choice for modestly scaled commercial buildings through the 1920s, other commercial buildings—particularly those occupying prominent sites in Gretna’s downtown—were sometimes constructed of brick. Masonry buildings conveyed a sense of permanence and durability and reflected prevailing trends and preferences for storefront design: wide repetitive structural bays for storefronts to fit within and large plate-glass surfaces for merchandising and display. Masonry buildings also employed a variety of materials to express both structure and ornament. It was not uncommon to incorporate cast-iron columns and lintels on the ground floor. Glazing units could be framed in wood or a variety of metals such as cast iron, bronze, or copper. Ornamentation might incorporate decorative brick patterns, limestone, cast stone or terracotta. Bulkheads could be brick, stucco, wood, stone, or tile.

Storefronts were frequently altered. It was not uncommon for a new owner or occupant to give a building a facelift, swapping out dated or deteriorated components with more fashionable and trendy materials. In the 1930s and 40s, that might mean introducing new modern materials made available through advances in technology: aluminum and stainless steel window frames, pigmented structural glass (such as Vitrolite), glass block, mirrored glass, and neon. Some of these retrofits have gained historic significance in their own right.

Later alterations from the 1960s onward, however, often compromised the historic integrity of older storefronts. Original character-defining features were often removed or covered with metal cladding. Other common alterations included covering transoms (often in tandem with dropped interior ceilings), filling in window and door openings, cutting out new openings for air-conditioning units and vents, and cluttering the facade with oversized or inappropriate awnings and signage.

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in restoring and preserving historic storefronts, often in conjunction with efforts to revitalize downtown “Main Streets.” This reflects the growing recognition that storefronts with intact historic character significantly contribute to a community’s sense of place.



A variety of ornament adorns this masonry commercial building.



This Art Moderne storefront features pigmented structural glass.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

DO

- Determine the character-defining elements of the storefront that should be retained. What materials are original to the building? What may have been changed over time? Keep in mind that some early alterations (such as a 1920s installation of Vitrolite glass) might be considered historic and worthy of preservation. The HDC can advise in such situations.
- When possible, materials used in a storefront's renovation should reflect the building's period of initial construction (e.g., match existing wood, brick, stucco, or metal). Contemporary materials such as modern extruded aluminum storefront units, vinyl siding, or concrete block may compromise the building's historic integrity.
- Multiple storefronts within a single building facade should be considered as a whole. Elements such as matching doors and windows establish a rhythm along the street and convey a unified image. Tenants should convey their individuality through distinctive signage and creative window displays.
- Try to maintain a storefront's original door and window openings, and well as original mullion patterns.



This storefront retains a majority of its character-defining features, including transoms, a suspended canopy, and display windows.

DON'T

- If a commercial building has been converted to a non-retail use (e.g., a restaurant or bar, offices, or living quarters), do not board up existing storefront display windows for privacy. Consider instead installing interior shutters, curtains, or blinds.
- Retain window transparency when possible. Dark or tinted glass tends to be alienating to pedestrians and should be replaced with clear glass.
- Do not infill or alter window and door openings, including transoms. If a ceiling must be lowered below the level of the window, allow an interior full-height space adjacent to the window before dropping the ceiling.
- Metal security bars or grilles are not recommended on historic storefronts. When possible, use alternate methods to secure the property such as tempered glass, electronic security systems, and motion detectors. Roll-down open-weave security shutters installed on the interior of the window are an appropriate option.
- Components related to building systems (e.g., HVAC equipment, air conditioners, electrical equipment, etc.) should be concealed from the street view and preferably located on side or rear elevations. Any rooftop mechanical equipment should not be visible from the street.



Many of the original character-defining features of these storefronts have been altered or removed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintenance, Repair, and Replacement

Small improvements can make a dramatic difference in the appearance of a streetscape. It is generally recommended that existing and original materials on a storefront be maintained and repaired as needed to extend their useful life. Typical maintenance items include:

- Regular cleaning to remove dirt and corrosive pollutants
- Repointing of brick and masonry
- Periodic repainting of exterior woodwork
- Minor carpentry repairs at doors and windows
- Repair of damaged or missing glass panes
- Repair of sagging gutters and rusted downspouts
- Replacement of faded or damaged awnings and canopies.

When only part of a storefront such as a door or window must be replaced, the new component should match the original to the extent possible. In instances where an entire storefront unit must be replaced, the new design should complement the existing building in terms of materials, patterns, and scale. Be mindful that some contemporary off-the-shelf storefront units may not be compatible with a building's architectural type or style. For example, a modern anodized aluminum storefront system would likely look out of place on a nineteenth-century wood-frame building.

SUSTAINABILITY

Most historic commercial buildings possess a number of inherent “green” qualities. Because air conditioning was not commonplace until after World War II, buildings were typically designed to promote natural ventilation. Artificial lighting was expensive and not always effective, so it was important to maximize the amount of daylight a building could receive. Also, many early buildings were constructed using local materials, which required less energy to transport and were representative of local culture and building traditions. The following building strategies were often employed in the design of early storefronts, and still represent a smart and sustainable response to Louisiana's hot and humid climate.

- Operable transoms to promote cross-ventilation.
- Awnings and canopies to provide shade and control solar heat gain.
- Tall ceilings and ceiling fans to moderate indoor temperature.
- Large panes of glass and transoms for daylighting.
- Use of local materials (brick, stucco, lime-based plaster, cypress and pine).



This historic storefront's character-defining features are in place but require repair and maintenance.



The original storefront windows of this two-story commercial building have been replaced with inappropriately sized window units and concrete-block fill.

AWNINGS AND CANOPIES

Storefront awnings and canopies over sidewalks have long been a familiar feature of commercial streetscapes, as evidenced by photographs of 19th- and early-20th-century downtowns. As shading devices, awnings and canopies shield storefront windows from direct sun, reduce interior glare, and prevent merchandise displays from fading. They add visual interest to a facade in the form of color, pattern, rhythm and texture. They also provide a secondary location for signage, most often along the valence or skirt.

The simplest awnings are generally composed of lightweight fabric stretched over a rigid triangulated frame that is attached to the building exterior at one end and sloped at an angle towards the sidewalk. Historically, cotton duck was the fabric of choice, but its tendency to stretch, fade, and mildew over time led shopkeepers to favor more modern materials such as vinyl, acrylic, and polyester, and later aluminum and fiberglass. In the nineteenth century, plumbing pipe was a popular option for awning frames. Now most are constructed of aluminum or light-gauge steel. Awnings may be fixed or retractable.

Canopies, like awnings, project from the face of the building and provide similar protection from sun and rain. However they tend to be constructed of more rigid and permanent materials and may be either flat or shed-like in form. They are generally supported with cables from above, brackets below, or with slender posts along the sidewalk edge.

Awnings may be located directly above the building entrance or between structural bays, which allows the architectural framework and organization of the building to still be clearly expressed. It would be rare in a historic context to find a single awning spanning multiple bays. Canopies, by contrast, occasionally do run continuously along the length of the facade. It is most common for awnings and canopies to be attached to the building between the display window and transom or just below the lintel.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

DO

- Canopies and awnings that protrude into the public way are regulated by the local building department. Rules regarding size, placement, and the vertical distance to the sidewalk should be consulted when planning an awning installation.
- If awnings are already present on a historic building, they should be evaluated to determine if they are appropriate to the style, age, and character of the building.
- When a building has multiple tenants, awnings should be coordinated to present a unified appearance (although they need not necessarily be identical).

DON'T

- Barrel and balloon-shaped awnings are discouraged. Traditional, sloped shed awnings tend to be more appropriate for historic buildings.
- Vinyl and glossy plastic fabrics are discouraged. Canvas, canvas blends, or durable, weather-resistant acrylic fabrics that resemble canvas are more appropriate for historic buildings.
- Do not alter, obscure or remove historic components of a building in order to install an awning or canopy.



A traditional, sloped shed awning in downtown Gretna



Balloon-shaped awnings are generally inappropriate in historic contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintenance, Repair, and Replacement

Due to repeated exposure to sun, rain and pollution, awning fabric tends to fade and wear over time and may need to be periodically replaced. Frames are generally more durable than fabric, but are subject to frequent wind loads and may weaken, bend, or break. Their condition should be regularly checked and any broken components repaired or replaced.

When a new awning is to be installed on an existing building, care should be taken with the design so as not to overwhelm or detract from the building's historic character. Sometimes it is possible through photographs or remnant hardware to determine what type or style of awning might have historically complemented the storefront.

If possible, existing hardware or brackets should be reused so as to minimize the number of holes that must be drilled into an existing facade. Or, choose mounting methods that can easily be patched if/when an awning is removed (e.g., locate anchors in mortar joints or stucco rather than in stone surfaces).



This corner building incorporates a well-maintained suspended canopy.



A suspended canopy with applied scalloped detailing



A canvas awning in its rolled-up position

SIGNAGE

Signage is the primary way that commercial tenants communicate their business brand and identity, establish a presence on the street, and attract potential customers to their location. While a well-designed sign can complement and add visual interest to a facade, a poorly designed or installed sign can overwhelm a storefront, detract from the streetscape, and even harm historic elements of a building.

Signs that are mounted to a building facade generally fall into the following categories:

- **Wall signs** are one-sided and fastened to the face of a building.
- **Projecting signs** are two-sided and mounted perpendicular to the face of a building.
- **Suspended signs** are hung from an architectural element such as a canopy or balcony.
- **Window signs** are attached directly to glazing. They may be hand painted or applique vinyl.
- **Awning signs** incorporate lettering on the awning fabric, typically along the skirt or valance.

Signs may be made of a variety of materials including wood, cast iron, bronze, stainless steel, or glass. Selected materials should be durable and weather resistant so that they do not corrode, rust, crack, peel, or flake when exposed to the elements. “Box” signs that incorporate built-in lighting are generally inappropriate for historic buildings and are better suited to freestanding locations in landscaped beds or parking lots. Neon signs, which gained popularity in the 1920s and 30s, are rare in Gretna’s historic districts. Neon is generally only recommended if it was historically part of a storefront design.

Because new signs are required each time a tenant moves in, they are frequently subject to replacement. Any new signage should comply with the City of Gretna’s sign ordinance, which regulates the sizes and types of signage allowed on a building.

HISTORIC SIGNAGE

Historic signage reveals information about the former use of the building and the original owner or tenant. It is often an inherent part of the building’s architecture, with lettering cast in stone along a building frieze or embedded in an ornamental medallion. Embedded street tiles at a storefront entrance are also valuable remnants of a building’s history.

These types of historic signage are an important part of the building fabric and should be retained. Doing so does not reduce the amount of allowable signage that a new tenant is permitted to display.



Historic street tiles add character and texture to a district’s streetscape.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

DO

- Consult the City of Gretna's sign ordinance to determine what size and type of sign is allowed for your location.
- When designing a new sign for a historic building, research what types of signs might historically have been used. Allow that information to guide decision making.
- Pay attention to scale. Small-scale signs are generally appropriate to small-scale buildings and pedestrian traffic. Larger signs are more appropriate to vehicular traffic where it is necessary to catch the eye of someone traveling at a higher speed.
- Flat wall signs should be well integrated into the overall facade design.
- When a building has multiple tenants, sign locations and styles should be coordinated to present a unified appearance.
- Remnant signs from recent tenants should be removed before new signs are installed. In some cases, it may be possible to reuse existing anchors or hardware.



This corner florist shop features an example of a classic projecting sign.



This bank incorporates raised lettering along a sign band as well as signage above the entrance door.

DON'T

- Do not alter, obscure, or remove historic components of a building in order to install a sign.
- Do not run conduit across the face of a building in order to electrify a sign. When illumination is allowed, any conduit should be well concealed.



This building has an overabundance of signs that obscure the historic storefronts and balconies.

LIGHTING

While streetlights provide a base level of illumination on a block, many buildings incorporate additional decorative or ornamental lighting along their facades. Well-designed lighting highlights building elements, signs, and distinctive features, and it also provides a sense of security for pedestrians.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

DO

- Lighting should be appropriate to the building's style and scale.
- Historic fixtures should be retained, and may be outfitted with new bulbs or fittings to increase light levels.
- Warm tones, similar to the light cast by incandescent bulbs, are preferred in historic contexts.
- Any conduit, wiring, or junction boxes on the facade should be well concealed.



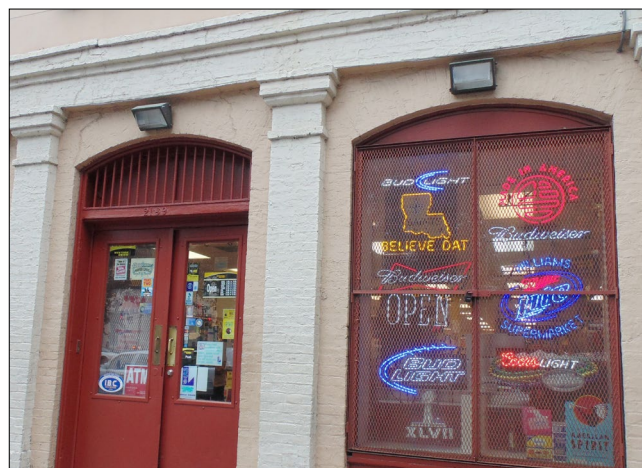
Gooseneck lighting is an appropriate way to illuminate a building's features.



Traditional gaslamp-style fixtures are a subtle and effective addition to this storefront.

DON'T

- Light illumination should not spill over to neighboring properties (light pollution).
- Excessive lighting (e.g., too many fixtures) should be avoided.
- Avoid flashing, pulsating, or similarly dynamic lighting. Aim for an even illumination level.
- Fluorescent tube lighting is generally not appropriate along street elevations.



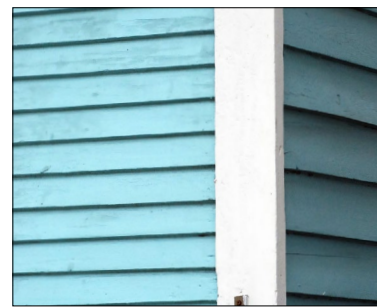
These modern light fixtures do not match the building's historic style.



These flood lights with exposed wiring detract from the historic building's storefront.

GUIDELINES: REPAIR & RENOVATION

5



INTRODUCTION

Caring for Historic Buildings

The following guidelines are designed to assist owners, residents, and contractors interested in repairing or renovating a historic property within Gretna's two historic districts. The information and examples provided here can benefit both small- and large-scale projects. The section begins with an introduction to various preservation approaches, from simple repairs to large-scale alterations. Major building components—foundations, porches, exterior woodwork, windows and doors, walls, and roofs—are then addressed in detail, with specific information about function, historic context, design, maintenance, repair, and replacement.

Maintenance

While all buildings need regular upkeep, older structures in particular require systematic preventive maintenance. Exterior materials exposed to rain, wind, intense sun, temperature fluctuations, and pollution, not to mention wear and tear from regular use, can be expected to weather over time. However, a material's useful life can be extended through regular maintenance. Many installed building materials, from foundations to framing materials to column capitals, may already be a century old. With care, they can be expected to last many years more.

The aim of maintenance is to keep building components from deteriorating beyond repair. It is best to find and resolve issues before they become serious problems, perhaps even impacting a building's structural system. For example, overflowing gutters can allow water to enter exterior walls, potentially damaging framing members. This type of damage may not be visible when located within the walls. However, regular cleaning of gutters and downspouts can prevent such issues from arising. Other examples of regular maintenance include painting weatherboards, treating for termites, and caulking around windows and doors.

Repair

Sometimes it is difficult to see the value in an aging building when the paint is peeling, floorboards are loose, masonry is cracking, and door frames are sagging. It may be tempting to simply replace old materials with new. However, that irreversible act can actually destroy the historic integrity of a building, de-

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crease its value, possibly render it ineligible for historic preservation tax incentive programs, and compromise the integrity of its associated historic district.

When it comes to building materials, age and authenticity are often assets. Some materials such as old-growth cypress are no longer readily available. In other cases the mill shop that produced a particularly intricate and unique baseboard profile may no longer exist. A hallmark of many older homes—even modest shotguns—is their fine expression of craftsmanship. It is difficult today to find skilled craftsmen who can match that same level of quality at labor rates affordable to the average homeowner. Because original materials are often character-defining components of a building, which may be costly or even impossible to replace in-kind, it is important to repair and preserve them whenever feasible.

Replacement

When a historic building component simply can't be repaired, then it should be replaced in-kind (i.e., with an exact match of the same material). If replacement in-kind is not an option, then it is recommended that a substitute component matching the proportion, detail, and finish of the original as closely as possible be used. For example, if replacing an original front door that has deteriorated beyond repair, and an exact match cannot be found, consider the type of wood, the thickness of the door, the dimensions of the rails and stiles, the number and configuration of glass panes, any special molding or trim, and whether it will be painted or stained. Searching out appropriate materials may require a little extra time and effort (for example, finding a specialty millwork shop or placing a custom order). The Glossary & Additional Resources section of this document (Part 8) lists organizations that can help direct building owners and contractors to local resources.

What should be done with discarded original materials such as doors, windows, flooring, hardware, or lighting fixtures? Rather than relegating them to a dumpster, consider donating or selling them through local architectural salvage stores or classified ads. Besides keeping valuable materials out of the landfill, this also provides another homeowner the opportunity to source vintage components that may be appropriate for their project.

Renovation

Renovation is generally considered to be a major alteration that has the potential to greatly impact the character of a building. It often involves changing the exterior configuration, for example adding new dormers or window openings to an existing facade. Renovation is often done in conjunction with a change in use (see adaptive reuse below). Care should be taken to ensure that

character-defining historic features of the building are not compromised in the renovation process.

Additions and New Construction

Additions and new construction can greatly impact a historic district, as they may introduce new materials, scale, form, and details into a context largely defined by nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century structures. Specific guidelines for additions and new construction are detailed in Part 6 of this document.

Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse is a specific type of renovation that converts a building from one use to another. Examples include converting a single shotgun into office space or transforming a former warehouse loft into housing. Adaptive reuse is especially beneficial when a building's former use is obsolete, or no longer suited to a particular location. This allows the structure, which may be historically significant, to remain occupied, stable, and contributing to the local economy.

THE HDC RECOMMENDS:

- Consult the relevant sections of these guidelines to understand your building's type and style. Type and style dictate what features define a building's special character and indicate what should be preserved (e.g., full-length double-hung wood windows, multi-light doors, decorative parapets, drop siding, carved brackets, or turned columns).
- Develop a preventive maintenance plan to protect a building's important features.
- Promptly repair any damaged elements of the building.
- If repair is not possible, then replacement in-kind is preferred (i.e., an exact physical and visual match).
- If replacement in-kind is not possible, then a substitute component should be selected that matches the finish, design, and detail of the original to the extent possible.
- If a major renovation is undertaken, make sure that any new elements are compatible with the existing building in terms of scale, design, and material.



Example of maintenance: This porch column needs to be sanded, primed, and repainted.



Example of repair: A piece of trim on this column base has fallen off and needs to be reattached.



Example of replacement: The missing ornamental trim on the gable's left side should be replaced to match the trim on the right.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S Four Treatment Approaches to Historic Properties

The Secretary of the Interior has established standards and guidelines for four specific treatment approaches for historic buildings. Additional information is available on their website: <http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments.htm>.

Preservation involves applying measures to sustain, protect, and stabilize a property in its existing state. This approach assumes that much of the building's historic fabric is intact, and so the focus is generally limited to ongoing maintenance and repair.

Rehabilitation is a treatment that allows a property's use to be updated through repair, alterations, or additions while still preserving features that convey its historic significance. It is an inherently flexible approach that recognizes the need to adapt buildings to meet contemporary expectations in order to keep them occupied and functioning.

Restoration is a specific preservation treatment that returns a building's appearance, form, features, and character to a particular period in time. Photographic, physical, and documentary evidence is used to determine which features are to be retained, removed, or reconstructed. The selected period of restoration may not necessarily be the date of initial construction. For example, if a 19th century building's significance stems mainly from its association with a Depression-era political figure, it may be restored to its 1930 appearance. Restoration involves meticulous research and analysis and is most often employed when a building is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or is to be used for historical interpretation, such as in a museum setting.

Reconstruction involves reproducing through new construction the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving structure in order to replicate its appearance at a specific point in time. It is the least common treatment, and it is generally only advisable in situations where the new structure is to be used for historical interpretation and sufficient documentation exists to ensure an accurate reproduction.

FOUNDATIONS AND MASONRY

A building's foundation is intended to both support the frame or masonry construction above it and transfer the structural load to the ground. On historic wood-frame buildings in the Gulf South, it is common to find simple pier-type foundations that raise the main living area just a few feet off the ground. This practice is appropriate to the local climate because a raised first floor promotes air circulation and minimizes flooding risk. Early foundations in Gretna were typically constructed of soft local red brick, which needed to be protected with a layer of stucco plaster to prevent deterioration. By the late nineteenth century preferences shifted to pressed brick, which were made from drier clay, fired longer, and were generally harder and more uniform. Extruded brick, which was even more durable, stable, and could be mass produced in large factories, gained popularity in the twentieth century. The 1910s and 20s also saw the increased use of alternative foundation materials including pressed concrete block, which was a precursor to the modern concrete block (also known as a cinder block or concrete masonry unit [CMU].)

While the sides and rear of a structure might have regularly spaced visible piers, it was common on the front elevation to construct a solid and continuous foundation wall, sometimes called a *chain wall*. Often covered with a layer of stucco, chain walls were a more formal and elegant option for a building's street elevation. Decorative cast iron grilles and vents set within the chain wall allowed for cross ventilation beneath the building.

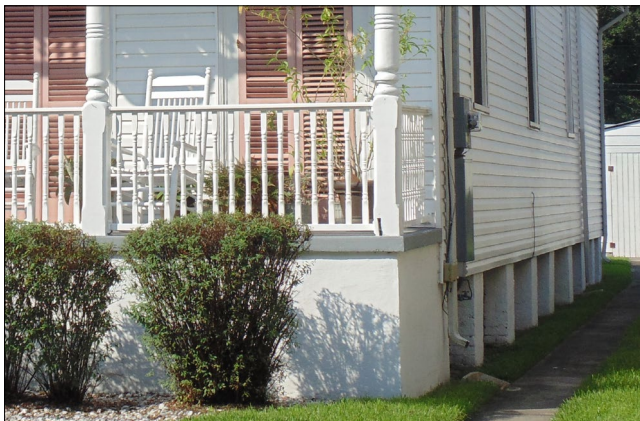
DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

DO

- Retain original materials whenever possible (brick piers, stucco chain wall, cast-iron vents)
- Place chain wall foundation vents in locations that make structural and visual sense (e.g., beneath windows and doors or between porch columns.)



Do retain original cast iron foundation vents, as they are important character-defining features both functionally and aesthetically.



Original brick piers are visible on the side elevation, while the front facade has a stucco-covered chain wall.

DON'T

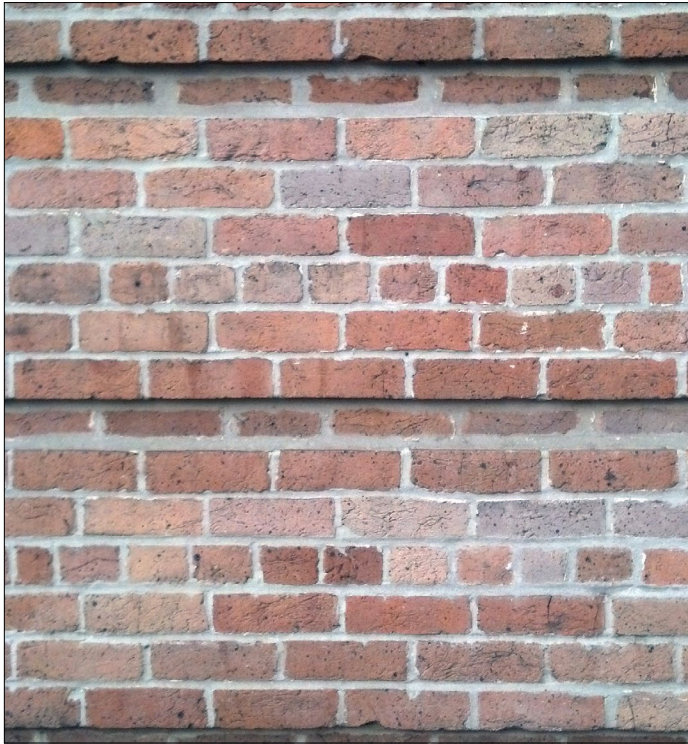
- Do not use modern exposed concrete masonry units on chain walls on the front facade.
- Any screening or latticework between piers should be kept simple and visually subordinate.
- Do not paint brick that was originally intended to be unpainted.



This chain wall is unvented and the concrete masonry units have been left exposed.



Inappropriate galvanized metal was placed over the side wall piers and is now in a deteriorated state. A better choice would have been to install simple screens or latticework between the masonry piers.



This masonry wall features decorative coursing.



The foundation has been reinforced with new concrete piers placed between the original brick piers. Note that the piers have metal caps to prevent water and termite damage to the wood sills.



This chain wall has a rough stucco finish.

DEFINITIONS

Rising Damp: the migration of moisture from the soil into the masonry through capillary action.

Efflorescence: the migration of water-soluble salts via capillary action to the face of the brick resulting in a white and powdery surface.

Spalling: a condition in which the outer layer of a masonry brick or block begins to break off unevenly. Spalling can be caused by overly abrasive cleaning or by the inappropriate use of hard mortars which do not allow the masonry to expand and contract.

Repointing: the process of removing deteriorated mortar from the joints of a masonry wall and replacing it with new mortar. May sometimes be referred to as *tuck pointing*.

Stucco: a smooth plaster exterior finish traditionally composed of sand, lime, water, varying amounts of Portland cement, and possible pigments or other additives. When applied directly to masonry surfaces, stucco becomes an integral part of the wall when set.

HISTORIC CONCRETE BLOCK

The production of pressed concrete blocks, also called “artificial stone,” began with the 1900 patent of H. S. Palmer’s portable block machine, which allowed builders to produce the material on site in a variety of patterns. Some mimicked stone or brick, while others took on more fanciful designs such as wreaths and cobblestones. The economical new technology caught on rapidly across the United States, and by 1910 it was being used to construct fences, foundations, columns, and entire buildings. As the technology became more standardized, local manufacturers began using Palmer’s machine for mass production. Gretna’s leading purveyor was Melling Bros. Concrete Block Manufacturing Company, which operated on Dolhonde Street between Fourth and Fifth. The historic block types found in Gretna—including rusticated or “rock face,” ornamental rope, and smooth face with inset panel—add an important textural and decorative dimension to many of the districts’ early-20th-century buildings. Modern concrete blocks, however, are generally not produced with the same level of craftsmanship or variety in design and are not sufficient replacements for their historic counterparts.



Stamped concrete blocks with an ornamental rope pattern



Stamped concrete blocks with inset panel combined with rusticated concrete blocks



The stucco layer has been allowed to deteriorate, exposing the brick foundation beneath.



The mortar on this foundation wall is cracking and falling out in places. The brick is in need of repointing.



This is an extreme example of what happens when an inappropriately hard cement-based mortar is used on historic local soft brick. The brick wears away while the mortar, which should be “sacrificial” and fail first, remains intact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Common problems for foundation walls include uneven settling, weathering (particularly when protective stucco layers have fallen away), deteriorated mortar joints, spalling and chipping, and efflorescence. Water infiltration and moisture—whether through faulty downspouts and gutters, rising damp, or standing water—can significantly worsen any existing signs of deterioration.

General Maintenance

It is important to regularly inspect masonry foundations so that potential areas of concern can be addressed before they turn into larger, costlier problems. Specifically, it is advised to:

- Inspect for cracks, missing mortar, and bulging or leaning walls as these can all be signs of uneven settling or other serious structural issues.
- Inspect for areas of potential water infiltration such as deteriorated joints or places where a protective stucco surface has been damaged.
- Inspect sills regularly for water and termite damage. If damage is severe, the sills may need to be replaced.
- Treat efflorescence when it appears. This is best done by gently cleaning the brick surface with low-pressure water, a mild non-ionic detergent, and a natural bristle brush.
- If a coating is used (e.g., paint or stucco), make sure that it is compatible with the historic brick and allows the masonry to breathe. Water-repellent coatings that keep water from penetrating the surface of the brick but allow water vapor to escape may be appropriate in some situations. Avoid water-proof coatings and inappropriate paints, which can seal and trap moisture.
- Make sure that under-floor areas are properly vented, as this can minimize moisture buildup.
- Direct downspouts and splash blocks away from the foundation.
- Vegetation can trap moisture and should be kept away from foundation walls.

Repair

Because historic bricks and mortar have different material properties than their contemporary counterparts, it is important to select appropriate products and techniques for any repairs.

One issue that frequently arises involves the use of inappropriate mortar mixes during repointing. Repointing is the process of repairing mortar joints by carefully removing and replacing damaged or missing mortar. Historically, mortar was composed of sand, lime, water, and the occasional additive (such as animal hair.) Starting in the nineteenth century, small amounts of Portland cement were included to improve workability and setting time, with the proportion of Portland cement gradually increasing over the last century. Whereas older high-lime mortars were

soft, porous, pliable, and designed to work well with soft brick, the newer, harder mortars with a high Portland cement content were designed to be compatible with newer, harder brick. Problems arise when people inappropriately use hard, modern mortars on older, softer brick, which can cause substantial damage over time.

Mortar should be slightly softer and weaker than brick, so that over time it will fail first. In that sense it is considered “sacrificial,” as it is far preferable to repoint a brick wall or pier than to replace it entirely.

In addition to selecting the right chemical composition of mortar, it is important to match the appearance, size, and profile of existing joints during any repointing job. The color and texture of the new mortar should match the unweathered interior portions of the historic mortar. Similarly, any new brick or stucco used to repair a masonry wall should match the physical characteristics of the existing material.

Replacement

If a chain wall or piers must be completely replaced, it is preferable to select materials that match the appearance of the original foundation (e.g., replace brick with brick.) In instances where a brick foundation was previously covered with stucco, it may be acceptable to use poured-in-place concrete or concrete block as an alternative, providing that the concrete receives a similar stucco finish.

PORCHES AND EXTERIOR MILLWORK

Porches are important character-defining features of historic buildings and streetscapes. Located on the more formal front elevation, they tend to be the foremost expression of a building's style through the design of their columns, railings, and ornamentation. In addition, a porch's width and depth are key factors in determining a building's type.

Functionally, porches form an important part of the entry sequence into a house. They provide a transition between the public exterior of the street and the private interior of the living quarters. Additionally, they may serve as an outdoor "room" or social space where one can interact with neighbors.

In terms of design, porches typically abut the front of the building, are open on three sides, raised off the ground, and covered with a roof. Porches on shotgun residences tend to span the full length of the building facade, while porches on bungalows may be partial-width and asymmetrically placed off to one side. Most porch elements, such as columns, railings, ceilings, and floorboards, are painted wood. Cypress was a common choice for historic houses in Gretna and the greater New Orleans area because it is naturally resistant to rot and insects. Other materials may also be present, including partial brick or stucco column bases, which were common on 20th-century Craftsman and Neoclassical Revival-style homes.

It should be noted that the term *gallery*, derived from the French *galerie*, is used regionally to refer to a porch that typically spans the length of a facade, is under the main roof of a house, and extends the living area or provides passage. Front porches are often called front galleries. The term *veranda* or *verandah* refers to a freestanding roofed structure supported by columns that typically abuts a building, is open on three sides, and is most often constructed of light and airy cast iron. Verandas were common in New Orleans, especially during the Italianate period, but are rare in Gretna. A *balcony*, by contrast, projects from the face of building and has railings but no roof.

PARTS OF A PORCH

Flooring: Most residential porches were historically wood tongue and groove. Later styles, such as Craftsman and Mediterranean Revival, sometimes had concrete porch floors. Some houses updated in the 1920s and 30s had concrete porch floors installed at that time.

Columns/posts or brackets: An overhanging roof is typically supported by columns (round), posts (square/rectangular) or brackets. Scrolled metal posts, which became popular starting in the 1950s as replacements for wood columns, are not historic or considered appropriate to any of the districts' contributing styles.

Lintels/beams: Horizontal elements that span between columns or posts and support the porch roof above.

Ceilings: Porch ceilings are typically made of thin tongue-and-groove boards, and sometimes incorporate ornamental molding, trim, and vents. As a regional custom, they are often painted a pale blue.

Railings: Where present, railings most often comprise a handrail, bottom rail, and regularly spaced balusters. Together, this assembly may be referred to as a balustrade. Balusters may be simple 1-inch wood posts, or may be hefty and dense with intricately turned details. Historically, handrail heights on porches ranged from 28 to 32 inches above the floor, which is lower than today's standards.

Wood ornament: Decorative elements such as friezes and cornices add visual interest to a porch and help to convey a building's style.

Steps: Most steps were initially constructed of wood or brick. Later styles, and houses renovated after the 1920s, might have concrete steps. Some steps are flanked by partial-height plinths that might incorporate decorative elements and curves. Steps that lead directly to an entrance without a landing or a porch are known as stoops.



This Eastlake porch retains many of its original features, including brick steps, tongue-and-groove porch floor, turned posts, and decorative spindle frieze.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

DO

- Original porch materials should be maintained and repaired whenever possible, as they are often the primary way that a building's style is expressed. If porch components have deteriorated beyond repair, then replacement in-kind is recommended.
- If searching for salvaged replacement materials, be certain that selected items are appropriate to the house's style. For example, ornamental brackets from an 1890s Italianate shotgun would look out of place on a Craftsman bungalow.
- Historic stoops or steps should be retained, even when a double residence (such as a double shotgun) is converted to a single-family home.



This porch features several character-defining elements, including paired brick columns, weatherboards, louvered shutters, and door/transom assembly.



Exterior original millwork should be retained.

DON'T

- Do not remove porches that would have been historically present on a building.
- Do not enclose or screen a porch that would historically have been open.
- Do not remove original decorative porch details including brackets, railings, and columns. Similarly, do not add faux historic details that would not have been appropriate to the house's type and style.
- Do not cover porch beams with vinyl siding (either vertical or horizontal vinyl siding.)
- Do not replace porch components with modern scrolled metal columns and railings.



Several character-defining features have been removed. The porch beam has been covered with inappropriate vertical vinyl siding and the porch columns have been replaced with metal posts.



Do not combine architectural styles that are not original to the building. This shotgun has been modified to have both Italianate brackets and Eastlake columns.