

# Preservation Guidelines: Storefronts

## Storefronts

Storefronts are the most prominent features in commercial buildings, and they are the ones most commonly changed in downtown Bennington. Older historic storefronts normally have windows and doors between vertical columns, topped by a horizontal cornice band which unifies all of the openings. Doors and wood surfaces are often paneled. Basic materials are usually wood, glass and metal, often with brackets, moldings and similar ornament. Storefronts which are later but still historically important may include larger plate glass materials in metal frames, with panels or transoms of leaded glass, onyx-like black "Carrara glass", bronze, marble or other materials. These basic storefront designs relate harmoniously to the wall plane and the rhythm of openings on the upper floors, and they create the scale and street-level feeling characteristic of most historic downtowns. While many downtown Bennington buildings retain their original or later historic storefront character, a large number have been changed significantly, with columns removed, large windows inserted, cornices removed, and flat aluminum or steel replacing the original materials. Recent storefronts which are out of character often include brick, rough-sawn wood, stucco, artificial stone and other inappropriate materials.

For additional background, see National Park Service Preservation Briefs 11 ("Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts") and 12 ("The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Glass"), and other publications listed in the Information Sources section of this handbook.

## Basic Guideline

Where existing storefronts are non-historic and new storefronts are planned, design should be based on historic photos or other specific evidence if possible. New storefronts need not duplicate all historical details, but they should maintain the basic configurations and proportions typical of historic storefronts. Surviving storefronts in similar buildings can often help provide a basis for new design, but it is important not to create a false historical feeling by recreating a detailed storefront where it never existed. In such cases, it is better to design a storefront which is simple and modern but recalls historic materials, features and proportions in a general way.



Fig. 5-79: 497 Main St. Original storefront still exists.



Fig. 5-80: 475 Main St. Original storefront design has been preserved.



Fig. 5-81: 432 Main St. Compatible new storefront.



Fig. 5-82: 447 Main St. Historic storefront and sign have been preserved even though the business has changed.



Fig. 5-83: 449 Main St. Bare lumber framing for the storefront windows is not in keeping with historic designs.

**Appropriate**

- A** Retaining and repairing historic storefronts where they survive.
- B** Designing new storefronts to replace non-original ones using historical photographs and other documentary and physical evidence.
- C** Where specific evidence is not available or reproducing all historic detail is not feasible, designing storefronts which recall historic materials, features and proportions in a general way.
- D** Removing inappropriate later coverings to expose historic storefront features.

**Not Appropriate**

- 1** Removing historic storefront features.
- 2** Constructing storefronts whose materials and design is not in keeping with historic character.
- 3** Especially avoid such materials as brick, rough-sawn wood, stucco, artificial stone and flat sheet metal where they have no relationship to a building's historic design.



Fig. 5-84: 337 Main St. Original storefront has been replaced with bare aluminum framed picture windows and blank, unfinished panels.