


# thrive

A GUIDE TO STOREFRONT DESIGN  
IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

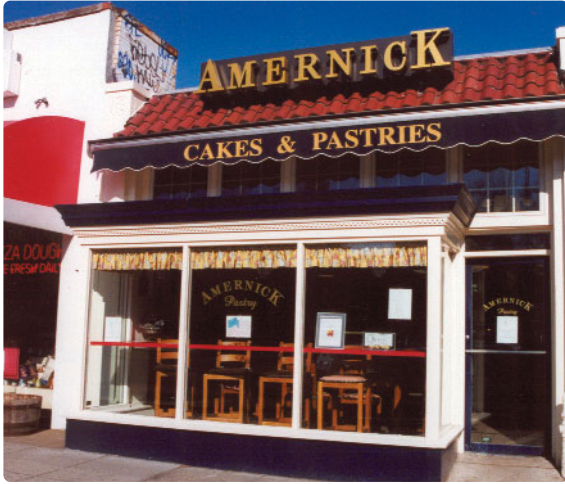


Anthony A. Williams, Mayor  
Government of the District of Columbia  
Office of Planning – September 2002



**“thrive - 1. to prosper or flourish; be successful, esp. as the result of economical management  
2. to grow vigorously or luxuriantly; improve physically - syn. SUCCEED” (Webster's New  
World Dictionary of the American Language)**

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# purpose

Your business has *value*. As a business owner you know that it is **very** important that all parts of your business contribute to your bottom line. From a business plan for how your business can grow, to orderly and well-lit aisles stocked with merchandise that attracts new customers, to an exciting storefront, your business makes a difference! As the first point of contact with your business, your storefront and those of your neighboring business owners define the character of your business district and as a group should attract new customers and sales.

## The District and residents see the potential for your neighborhood business to thrive.

Your storefront image is critical to advertising quality and diversity in both your business and neighborhood district.

Through Strategic Neighborhood Action Planning and “reSTORE DC”, the city’s commercial revitalization initiative, a majority of the city’s 39 neighborhood clusters and represented stakeholders stressed the need to enhance the District’s retail climate so that needed services and desirable retail / entertainment amenities are provided. Residents have generated increased value in the District’s neighborhoods, but are continually concerned about retail areas that appear blighted, undercapitalized and marginal. District consumers are increasingly tired of commuting to surrounding jurisdictions to purchase quality goods and for services and entertainment.

The District and residents see the potential for your neighborhood business to **thrive**. These guidelines were developed to assist asset managers like you in making smart design decisions about investing in the exterior image of your commercial or retail property. This document was constructed while working with other District-based small business owners and managers like you and is based on the best practices used in similar cities where the local government also values maintaining and encouraging the growth of businesses that compete to survive and win.

Guidelines are already in place for commercial storefront improvements, outdoor seating areas and commercial signs on historic buildings or in historic districts. The guidelines in this document are not to serve as a substitute or replacement for those guidelines, but rather are to be used by business owners, community development corporations, neighborhood associations, professional design consultants, contractors, government officials and others involved in making decisions about proposed storefront improvements on projects receiving funding from District Government. However, others may find these guidelines useful as well in helping to create vibrant commercial districts.



VACANT AND UNATTRACTIVE STOREFRONT



NEIGHBORHOODS ARE IMPROVING AS RESIDENTS CONTINUE TO ADD VALUE

# objectives of good storefront design

Storefronts are highly visible components of the city's historic streetscape, with a rich variety of architectural styles and treatments. Variety adds value and is the key to making your business more noticeable and exciting.

While some uniformity may be helpful in reducing overall construction costs, business owners are encouraged to imaginatively explore the relationship of their type of business (i.e. restaurant, bookstore, office, flower shop, etc.) and how that type translates into a unique storefront treatment within your business district. For example, an insurance office is clearly not a jazz bar, and is clearly not a laundromat. Their purposes and operations (peak periods, business hours, etc.) are different. They need not look the same.

The most successful storefronts are those that:

- Work with the architecture of the larger building,
- Simply and clearly market the name of the business and the type of services offered ,
- Allow potential customers visibility into the store's well-stocked and orderly aisles,
- Contribute to a distinctive pedestrian and customer experience, and
- Uniquely enhance the overall business district's integrity and identity.

"Places" derive their identity from storefronts.



A WELL DESIGNED STOREFRONT COMPLIMENTS THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE BUILDING

JANDARA RESTAURANT (WOODLEY PARK)



TRANSPARENCY IN A STOREFRONT IS IMPORTANT  
FLOWER SHOP (BARRACKS ROW)

# our city's business landscape and storefront design

Washington, DC's distinctive physical structure of avenues, streets, rotaries, squares, parks, open spaces, hills and valleys contribute to a myriad of neighborhoods served by convenient commercial areas that are often just blocks away, a few minutes walk. Each of the city's 39 neighborhood clusters has at least one local commercial area. Though many of these areas are perhaps worthy of historic designation, not all are and not all have been treated with the aesthetic sensitivity that comes with preservation review. As a result, many of the architectural treasures that make our commercial areas distinctive lay hidden beneath years of improper additions and poor maintenance.

As modes of transportation have changed so too have our neighborhood commercial areas and storefronts. Commercial districts once depended upon neighborhood customers who walked the two to three blocks to purchase basic goods and services. These original storefronts were designed with the experience of the pedestrian in mind.

In time, the introduction of trolley lines led to more and bigger signs and other advertising methods that left a number of buildings visually cluttered. Residents were then able to shop frequently in other parts of the city and were not necessarily dependent upon local commercial districts. The advent of cars, trucks, and buses meant that potential customers

were not only moving even faster, but also had local, citywide and regional shopping options. This shift led to local retailers having to compete against national retailers offering lower cost goods in surrounding suburbs.

Subway lines meant that some potential customers were moving with greater ease and speed and were not even above ground at all. However, there has been a renewed interest in central city living and the District's neighborhoods are experiencing new growth and vitality. Residents again want to walk to local businesses for quality goods and services.



REPRESENTATIVE STOREFRONTS THAT ARE IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT (PARKVIEW)

# our neighborhood commercial areas

Generally, Washington's neighborhood commercial areas can be categorized into three (3) broad categories: Corridors, Districts, and Retail Centers.

## Corridors

Corridors are linear business areas that provide some, though not all, local neighborhood services. Many of our corridors are located on highly traveled avenues and streets, and are immediately surrounded by well-established neighborhoods. Parking is typically limited to on-street spaces. Washington has three types of "corridor" business areas: Neighborhood, Corner nodes, and Regional Gateways.

### Neighborhood corridors

Neighborhood corridors are traditionally developed businesses that were established to provide basic goods and services to immediate residential areas

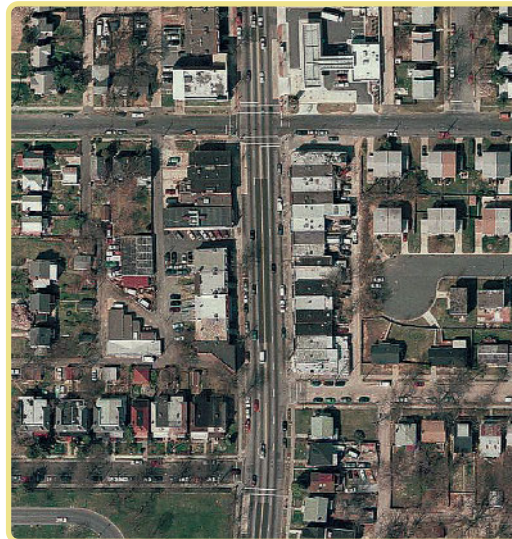
and were once highly dependent upon local foot traffic and the old trolley system. Historic Capitol Hill is an example of a "neighborhood corridor." With the continuing interest in central city living, the range of services and goods provided, as well as the health and vitality of business areas within this category, has become increasingly more important. There are approximately 40 neighborhood corridors around the city.

### Corner nodes

Corner nodes are the conveniently located "mom and pop" businesses that typically number one to four at neighborhood intersections. These businesses remain highly dependent upon local neighborhood patronage. At least 20 intersections in the District have corner stores.

### Regional gateways

Regional gateways are retail areas located on prominent avenues or streets and at key points of vehicular entry into the central city from the region. These areas can benefit from their high traffic volumes, significant visibility and neighborhood and commuter demographics. Both H Street NE and Georgia Avenue from Fern Street to Eastern Avenue in Shepherd Park/Takoma are examples of regional gateways that are primed for revitalization. There are at least eight (8) regional gateways in Washington.



GEORGIA AVENUE 7300 BLOCK, A NEIGHBORHOOD CORRIDOR  
AT A REGIONAL GATEWAY



FOOT TRAFFIC ON PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE (CAPITOL HILL)

\*\* NUMBERS AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH ROW INDICATE THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLUSTER IN WHICH THE NEIGHBORHOOD SHOPPING DISTRICT CAN BE FOUND. NEIGHBORHOOD NAMES ARE IN PARENTHESES.

NEIGHBORHOOD	NEIGHBORHOOD	NEIGHBORHOOD	NEIGHBORHOOD
1-COLUMBIA ROAD	12-CONNECTICUT AVENUE (FOREST HILLS/VAN NESS) – VAN NESS TO ALBEMARLE	22-12TH ST NE (BROOKLAND) – RHODE ISLAND TO MICHIGAN	31-NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS AVE. NE (LINCOLN HEIGHTS) – 46TH TO DIVISION AVE. NE
2-GEORGIA AVENUE (PLEASANT PLAINS & PARK VIEW)	13-MACARTHUR BLVD. (PALISADES) – DANA PL. TO ARIZONA AVE.	22-RHODE ISLAND AVE. (BROOKLAND/LANGDON) – 13TH TO SOUTH DAKOTA	34-PENNSYLVANIA AVE. AT MINNESOTA AVE. (FAIRLAWN)
2-UPPER 14TH STREET NW (COLUMBIA HEIGHTS) – PARK ROAD TO SHEPHERD	14-WISCONSIN AVE. (MCLEAN GARDENS) – IDAHO TO WOODLEY RD.	23-BLADENSBURG RD. (TRINIDAD/CARVER LANGSTON) – FLORIDA TO MT. OLIVET RD.	38-SAVANNAH AVE. SE (SHIPLEY TERRACE) – 22ND ST. TO 23RD ST. SE
2-14TH STREET NW (COLUMBIA HEIGHTS) – FLORIDA TO COLUMBIA RD.	14-WISCONSIN AVE. (GLOVER PARK) – CALVERT TO S ST. NW	25-8TH ST NE (STANTON PARK) – C TO E STS. NE	39-MLK AVE. (CONGRESS HEIGHTS) – ALABAMA AVE. TO MILWAUKEE PL. SE
2-MOUNT PLEASANT STREET NW (MOUNT PLEASANT) – 16TH STREET NW TO PARK ROAD	15-CONNECTICUT AVE. (CLEVELAND PARK) – MACOMB TO PORTER	25-MASSACHUSETTS AVE. NE (STANTON PARK) – 2ND TO 6TH STS NE	39-WHEELER ROAD AT BARNABY SE (WASHINGTON HIGHLAND)
5-PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE (M ST./FOGGY BOTTOM)	15-CONNECTICUT AVE. (WOODLEY PARK) – AT CALVERT AND NATIONAL ZOO	26-15TH ST. SE (LINCOLN PARK) – D ST. SE TO INDEPENDENCE	
6-17TH STREET NW (DUPONT CIRCLE) – P TO R STREETS NW	17-GEORGIA AVE. (BRIGHTWOOD) – MISSOURI TO VAN BUREN	26-8TH ST. SE BARRACKS ROW (CAPITOL HILL) – PENNSYLVANIA AVE. TO M ST. SE	
7-14TH STREET NW (SHAW) -M TO U STS.	18-GEORGIA AVE. (BRIGHTWOOD PARK) – DECATUR TO MISSOURI	26-PENNSYLVANIA AVE. SE (CAPITOL HILL) – 1ST ST. SE TO BARNEY CIRCLE	
7-11TH STREET NW (SHAW) -M TO S STS.	18-KENNEDY ST. (BRIGHTWOOD PARK) – GEORGIA TO NEW HAMPSHIRE	26-7TH ST SE EASTERN MARKET (CAPITOL HILL) – PENNSYLVANIA TO NORTH CAROLINA AVENUES	
7-7TH STREET NW	18-UPPER 14TH ST. NW (16TH STREET HEIGHTS) – ARKANSAS TO DECATUR	28-MLK/GOOD HOPE RD. (HISTORIC ANACOSTIA / SHERIDAN)	
7-9TH STREET NW (LOGAN CIRCLE / SHAW) – MASSACHUSETTS TO FLORIDA AVENUES NW	21-4TH ST NE AT S ST (ECKINGTON) – S ST NE TO SEATON	30-MINNESOTA AVE./BENNING RD. (MAYFAIR/HILLBROOK)	
10-CONNECTICUT AVE. (CHEVY CHASE) – 36TH ST. TO NEBRASKA			
11-WISCONSIN AVE. (TENLEYTOWN) – RODMAN TO ELLICOTT			

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### CORNER NODES

- 1-KALORAMA ROAD  
(ADAMS MORGAN)
- 13-MACARTHUR BLVD.  
(PALISADES) – SOUTH OF  
MACOMB BY ONE BLK.
- 17-3RD STREET NW  
(MANOR PARK) –  
RITTENHOUSE TO SHERIDAN
- 18-UPSHUR ST.  
(PETWORTH EAST) –  
3RD ST. NW TO ROCK  
CREEK CHURCH RD.
- 20-TAYLOR ST. AT HAWAII AVE.  
(PLEASANT HILL)
- 21-RHODE ISLAND AVE.  
(BLOOMINGDALE) – 1ST ST. NW
- 23-MONTELLO AVE. AT QUEEN ST.  
(TRINIDAD)
- 23-FLORIDA AVE.  
(TRINIDAD) – WEST VIRGINIA  
TO MONTELLO ST. NE
- 26-15TH ST. NE AT EAST CAPITOL  
(LINCOLN PARK)
- 33-CENTRAL AVE. AT SOUTHERN  
AVE. (CAPITOL VIEW)
- 33-EAST CAPITOL  
(CAPITOL VIEW) –  
53RD ST. TO 53RD PL.
- 33-BENNING ROAD  
(MARSHALL HEIGHTS) –  
48TH TO G STS. SE
- 33-BENNING ROAD AT H ST.  
(BENNING RIDGE)

### CORNER NODES

- 33-TEXAS AVE. AT E ST. SE  
(BENNING HEIGHTS)
- 35-NAYLOR RD. AT 30TH ST. SE  
(KNOX HILL/BUENA VISTA)
- 37-HOWARD RD. AT STANTON RD.  
(HILLSDALE)
- 38-ALABAMA AVE. AT 22ND ST.  
(DOUGLASS)
- 39-MLK AVE. AT TRENTON PL.  
(CONGRESS HEIGHTS)
- 39-CHESAPEAKE AT 6TH ST. SE  
(WASHINGTON HIGHLANDS)
- 39-SOUTH CAPITOL ST AT ELMIRA  
(BELLEVUE)
- 39-WHEELER AT MISSISSIPPI  
(CONGRESS HEIGHTS)

### REGIONAL GATEWAY

- 10-CONNECTICUT AVE.  
(HISTORIC CHEVY CHASE) –  
LIVINGSTON TO WESTERN
- 16-GEORGIA AVE.  
(SHEPHERD PARK/TAKOMA) –  
FERN TO EASTERN AVE.
- 18-GEORGIA AVE.  
(PETWORTH) –  
NEW HAMPSHIRE TO WEBSTER
- 24-RHODE ISLAND  
(WOODBIDGE) –  
28TH TO EASTERN
- 25-H STREET NE + HECHINGER  
MALL (NEAR NORTHEAST /  
STANTON PARK) –  
2ND TO 17TH STS. NE
- 31-EAST CAPITOL DWELLINGS AT  
SOUTHERN AVENUE
- 31-DIX ST. NE  
(FAIRMONT HEIGHTS) –  
55TH ST. NE TO EASTERN  
AVENUE

# districts

Districts provide a wide variety of neighborhood services, including local, boutique and some national retail, dining, office and/or entertainment opportunities that are distinctive and attractive to both a local and regional population. Districts are the city’s most dynamic commercial model. Two types exist in Washington: Neighborhood and Regional.

## Neighborhood Districts

Neighborhood Districts contain the uses indicated above but may be structurally similar to “neighborhood corridors” in that neighborhood districts also tend to be linear. Neighborhood districts are not always located on prominent avenues or streets that carry high traffic volumes, and though they suffer from limited parking, consumers still manage to “be” there. Both 18th Street NW and U Street NW meet these criteria.

## Regional Districts

Regional Districts include locations like Georgetown, Dupont Circle, and Wisconsin Avenue in Friendship Heights where access from the region via private vehicle or public transit is relatively easy. Though some garage parking is provide, parking may be a challenge. Regional districts include the above mix of uses yet offer substantially more office uses. Both of these models are desirable in an urban setting for their distinctive “place making” qualities, diversity, density, economic benefits and value generation.

NEIGHBORHOOD
2-18TH STREET NW (ADAMS MORGAN)
3-U STREET (SHAW)
17-TAKOMA

REGIONAL
2-14TH STREET (COLUMBIA HEIGHTS METRO)- (FUTURE)
3-SHAW LEDROIT CULTURAL DISTRICT(FUTURE)
4-GEORGETOWN (M ST & WISCONSIN)
6-GOLDEN TRIANGLE (CONNECTICUT AVENUE TO PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE)
6-DUPONT CIRCLE
8-DOWNTOWN / CHINATOWN / PENN QUARTERS
8-NOMA (FUTURE)
9-SOUTHWEST EMPLOYMENT AREA/WATERSIDE MALL
11-WISCONSIN AVE. (FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS) – ELLICOTT TO WESTERN
1-NOMA AT ECKINGTON - FLORIDA/NEW YORK AVE.
25-NOMA EMPLOYMENT / TECHNOLOGY CTR.
25-UNION STATION
27-NEAR SOUTHEAST CLUB ZONE
27-NAVY YARD(FUTURE)

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INDICATE THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLUSTER IN  
WHICH THE NEIGHBORHOOD SHOPPING  
DISTRICT CAN BE FOUND. NEIGHBORHOOD  
NAMES ARE IN PARENTHESES.



RESTAURANTS AND CLUBS ON 18TH STREET NW  
(ADAMS MORGAN)



STOREFRONTS THAT OPEN TO THE STREET  
THAIPHOON RESTAURANT (DUPONT CIRCLE)

Retail centers are areas where basic goods and services (clothing, banking, gasoline, fast food, grocery stores, etc.) can be conveniently provided by a limited number of retailers, often national chain stores, with a lot of parking on site. These centers are often called “big box” developments. They are usually located on the District’s avenues that have very high daily traffic counts, high retail visibility and easy access. Their design is typically driven by bottom line cost efficiency and by the fact that consumers drive rather than walk. The Rhode Island Avenue Home Depot and Giant Food site is an example of this type of retail. The District has about 25 similar locations. Though the guidelines in this document are not specifically intended for developers of this type of commercial area, proposed retail centers could be improved architecturally if a number of these guidelines were incorporated.

From the aforementioned neighborhood business area types, corridors and districts represent the bulk of community concern. Ideally, planning and revitalization of these areas should improve their attractiveness, diversity and level of retail activity.

## RETAIL CENTERS

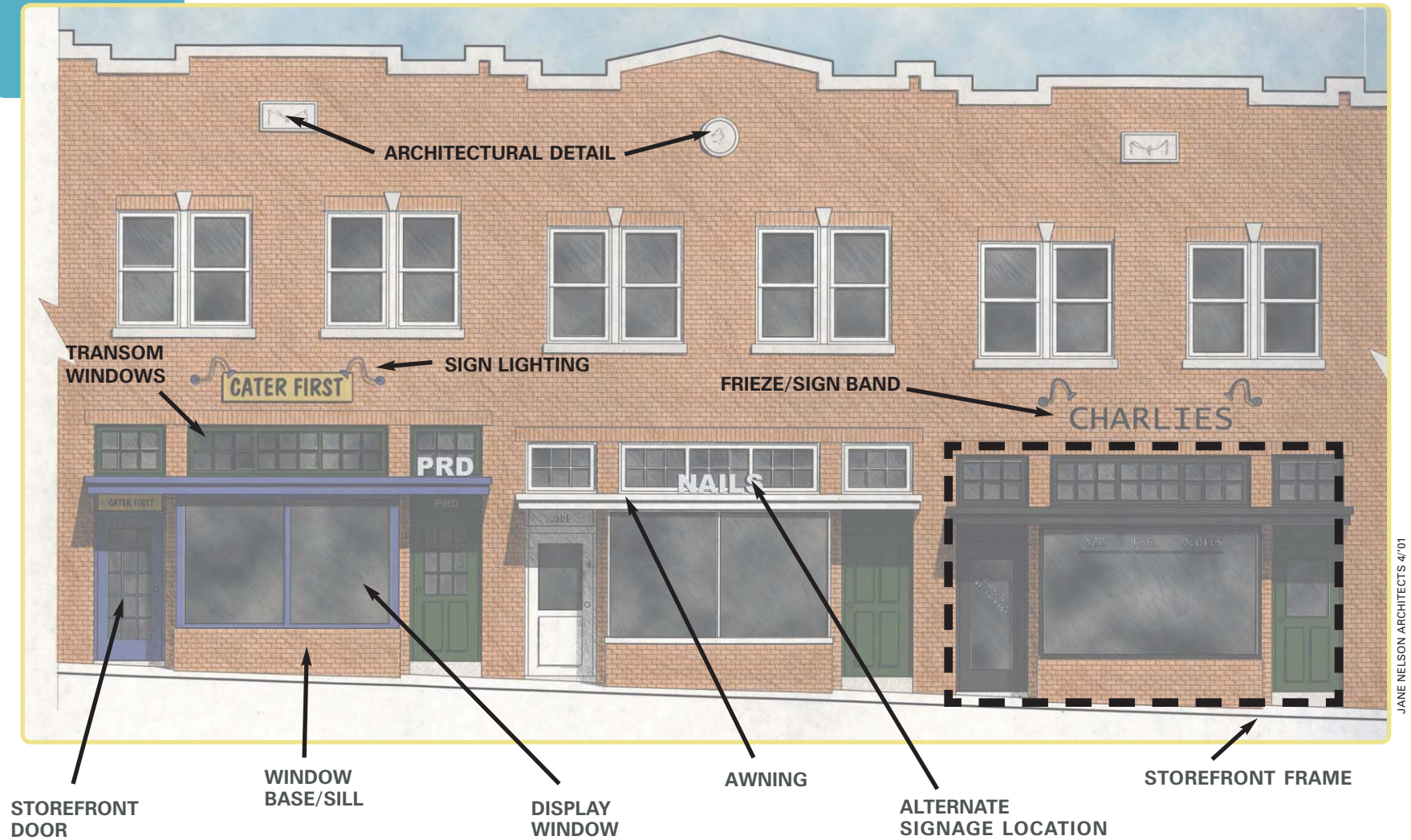
11-MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE / SPRING VALLEY SHOPPING CTR. (SPRING VALLEY) – FORDHAM TO YUMA
13-MACARTHUR BLVD. (FOXHALL) – U TO V STS. NW
19-SOUTH DAKOTA AVE. / RIGGS RD. NE (QUEENS CHAPEL)
19-KANSAS AVE. / CHILLUM PL. (LAMOND RIGGS)
19-NEW HAMPSHIRE AT RITTENHOUSE (LAMOND RIGGS) – 3RD ST. NE
20-10TH STREET (UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS) – MICHIGAN TO PERRY PLACE
20-MICHIGAN AVE. PIZZA HUT (UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS) – 7TH ST. NE
20-MICHIGAN AVE. (MICHIGAN PARK) – WEBSTER TO EASTERN AVE.
21-RHODE ISLAND AVE. (EDGEWOOD/ECKINGTON) – 3RD TO 4TH STS.
22-NEW YORK AVE. AT BLADENSBURG RD.
24-BLADENSBURG RD. AT BANNEKER RD. (FORT LINCOLN/WOODRIDGE)
24-FORT LINCOLN TOWN CTR. (FORT LINCOLN)
24-BLADENSBURG RD. (GATEWAY) – SOUTH DAKOTA TO CHANNING
25-BENNING ROAD (CARVER LANGSTON/KINGMAN PARK) – 18TH ST. TO OKLAHOMA NE
30-NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS AVE. NE (HILLBROOK) – MINNESOTA TO 46TH ST. SE
32-MINNESOTA AVE. / BENNING ROAD (RIVER TERRACE/BENNING)
33-EAST CAPITOL STREET AT BENNING ROAD (MARSHALL HEIGHTS/MANNING HEIGHTS)
34-PENNSYLVANIA AVE. AT BRANCH AVE. (PENN BRANCH/RANDLE HIGHLANDS)
34-PENNSYLVANIA AVE. AT BOWEN RD. SE (FORT DUPONT/FAIRFAX VILLAGE)
35-SKYLAND/GOOD HOPE MARKETPLACE (HILLCREST/WOODLAND)
38-ALABAMA AVE. AT 15TH ST. SE
39-SOUTH CAPITOL ST. AT MISSISSIPPI AVE. (BELLEVUE)
39-SOUTH CAPITOL ST. AT SOUTHERN AVE.

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FAST FOOD RESTAURANT WITH PARKING AS PART OF A RETAIL CENTER ON NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS AVENUE (DEANWOOD)

# anatomy of a façade



CONCEPTUAL DRAWING OF FAÇADES AT 7300 BLOCK OF GEORGIA AVENUE

Storefronts in Washington are typically one story in height on a building's first floor and are framed by the existing structure of a larger building. A storefront is composed of a series of components that work in unison. Those components are: Window Base, Doors, Windows (display and transom), Frieze or Sign Band, Commercial Signage, Awnings or Canopies, Colors, Lighting, and Security Systems.

Each of these components will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Improving the visual appeal of a storefront can often be accomplished with minor improvements and by removing elements that have been inappropriately added over the years. In some cases, however, renovation may require more extensive work due to lack of proper maintenance. In either case, an attractive visual presentation is desirable to draw customers to the establishment.



EXAMPLES OF GOOD STOREFRONT COMPOSITIONS: ELLINGTON'S ON EIGHTH (CAPITOL HILL) AND CHIPOTLE MEXICAN GRILL (WOODLEY PARK)

## ENCOURAGED

- Installing storefronts that complement the existing structural frame of the building.
- Repairing, restoring and upgrading storefront materials.
- Changing the pattern and/or texture of storefront materials.
- Repainting and repairing brick or other masonry units.
- Removing old paint from masonry facades using non-toxic, biodegradable processes.

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Installation of historically inaccurate or incompatible façade or material treatments such as imitation brick or stone.
- Removing existing materials that contribute to the original architectural character of the building.
- Painting unpainted masonry, especially in historic districts or on historic landmarks.
- Using restoration materials that do not closely match (color, size, texture, pattern, quality, etc.) materials of the existing building (i.e. caulk replacing cement mortar.)
- Reducing the size of pedestrian travel paths on sidewalks.
- Covering, altering or damaging architectural elements of the façade with signs, awnings, or other additive elements.
- Sandblasting or using harsh chemicals to clean brick or other masonry.

# storefront components

Understanding the components of a building façade will assist you in communicating with designers about storefront renovations. Creatively accentuating each part of a storefront can contribute to making a distinctive image for your business. It is possible to create a distinctive storefront while working with

renovations. Just as you have considered how to grow your business over a period of time, you should have a storefront design strategy that will add value to your business before making piecemeal alterations.

**Just as you have considered how to grow your business over a period of time, you should have a storefront design strategy that will add value to your business before making piecemeal alterations.**

some of the architectural elements of the building that are consistent (i.e. window base, trim/frieze, etc.) Being distinctive does not necessarily translate into using costly materials to enhance your storefront. In most cases, alternative materials that have the same function and visual effect as expensive components are available at lower cost. Basic maintenance and upkeep should be a priority for any

## Window Base

Most storefronts use a window base to lift display windows to a more visible level for passersby while protecting display windows from damage and weathering. Window bases are typically made of sturdy, easy-to-maintain materials to counter potential wear and tear. Typical materials include brick, concrete, hardwoods, metal panels, ceramic tiles, and other masonry materials.

## ENCOURAGED

- Restoring and/or repairing original, still-in-place window bases.
- Using sturdy, easy-to-maintain window base materials to provide a new and appropriate storefront window base(s). (Sturdy materials include brick, concrete, hardwoods, metal panels, ceramic tiles, and other masonry materials.)
- Maintaining or designing window bases for multiple storefronts in a building such that the height (not elevation) of the bases is consistent and the bases are of the same material.
- Installing window bases no higher than two (2) feet (24 inches) from the ground.

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Eliminating a window base that was a part of the original building or that was also used to conceal any portion of a business' mechanical systems.
- Varying window base heights within a storefront or building.
- Using non-durable materials, like low-grade plywood, which are not easy to maintain.

## MATERIALS FOR BASES



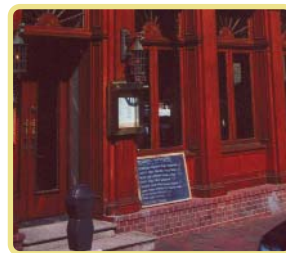
METAL



WOOD



CONCRETE



BRICK



MARBLE



PAINTED WOOD

## Doors and Windows

Well-maintained storefront systems and creative displays are critical to doing good business and to attracting more sales. Together, your storefront's doors, display windows and transom are called a "storefront system." The system works together as a unit. Therefore, the use of materials, colors and window glazing should be consistent or compatible. They allow those passing by to see your merchandise or service and attract potential customers into your store. Your storefront system is your greatest marketing opportunity so the more storefront windows that people can see through, the better. In general, greater visibility into the store is more inviting and makes potential customers feel more secure.

### DOORS

Storefront doors are best recessed from the storefront wall so that customers are shielded from weather upon entering or leaving your business.

**Well-maintained storefront systems and creative displays are critical to doing good business and to attracting more sales.**

The District has building codes and accessibility requirements for storefront doors. All new installations must be in compliance with these requirements.

### ENCOURAGED

- Restoring or replacing doors with appropriate commercial doors.
- Installing storefront doors made of glass or containing significant glass to allow additional visibility into a business.
- Adding new doors when required to meet disabled accessibility laws.
- Maintaining the continuity of storefronts on the primary business street by locating loading and service entrances on the side or rear of a building where possible.
- Installing new and maintaining existing durable wood or metal frame doors that can be painted a variety of colors to emphasize the business entry while adding visual interest.
- Installing folding/sliding doors that allow the activity of a business to be opened up to the sidewalk.

### STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Adding new doors that are not required by code and which are inconsistent with the building and/or storefront image.
- Sealing or closing off existing entrances or doorways with any material.
- Blocking doors with merchandise or any other obstruction.
- Installing doorways that swing out directly onto sidewalks.
- Covering or replacing glass door panels with any opaque substance or material that would prevent or limit visibility.
- Covering doorways with signage, interior cases or woodwork.

### DOOR EXAMPLES



# display windows

Display windows are the greatest marketing opportunity for a competitive business to attract the attention of those passing by and to generate new sales. Highly successful storefronts use transparent glass that allow potential customers who are walking or riding by to see that the store is open for business and that the business owner is competitively offering quality merchandise. Storefront transparency during

**Display windows are the greatest marketing opportunity for a competitive business to attract the attention of those passing by and to generate new sales.**

both daytime and nighttime hours is critical. Visibility during both periods is important for continuous marketing and branding of the business, as well as

promoting a sense of safety in the business district. (Creative solutions for combining business security with storefront visibility when your store is closed are on page 25.)

Frequently changing displays help to market the variety of goods and services offered in your business while also giving your business and business districts

character and interest. The original size, division, and shape of display window areas should be preserved when possible. Creative and thoughtful innovation, however, is desired and strongly encouraged.



DEJA BLUE (GEORGETOWN)



ORGANIC MARKET (CAPITOL HILL)

## ENCOURAGED

- Restoring or increasing the percentage or amount of transparent glass on a storefront.
- Replacing dark tinted or textured glass with clear glass when appropriate to increase visibility into the business.
- Matching new windows to originals.
- Preserving historic features such as frames, special glazing, and decorative moldings.
- Aligning window heights and unifying window sizes when appropriate.
- Painting window frames in order to add visual variety and interest.
- Using aluminum or wood frame windows that provide thermal insulation and prevent condensation. Non-traditional colors are encouraged for either frame type.
- Using upper floor windows that might be boarded up as retail display areas.

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Preventing visibility into display areas by covering or blocking a display window.
- Obstructing views into a business by using glass block, woodwork, paint, signage, lowered ceilings, shelves, refrigeration units, cases, posters, or other items except products being temporarily marketed by the business.
- Covering or obscuring existing window trim with metal or other materials.
- Removing historic windows or window components when restoration and maintenance are possible.
- Using less durable materials such as Plexiglass.
- Failing to maintain and repair broken or boarded display windows.

# display windows

## EXAMPLES OF DISPLAY WINDOWS MERCHANDISING, AND LIGHTING TECHNIQUES



PASARGAD (DUPONT CIRCLE)

NOTE USE OF UPPER FLOOR WINDOWS FOR DISPLAY



GINZA (DUPONT CIRCLE)



CAPITOL HILL BIKES (CAPITOL HILL)



(GEORGETOWN)



THE PROPER TOPPER  
(DUPONT CIRCLE)



(DUPONT CIRCLE)



RIGGS BANK (DUPONT CIRCLE)

NOTE UP LIGHTING ON BUILDING DETAILS



CONNECTICUT AVE. WINE-LIQUOR-DELI (DUPONT CIRCLE)



BETSY FISHER – (DUPONT CIRCLE)

NOTE USE OF THE INTERIOR WIRE MESH SECURITY GRILL

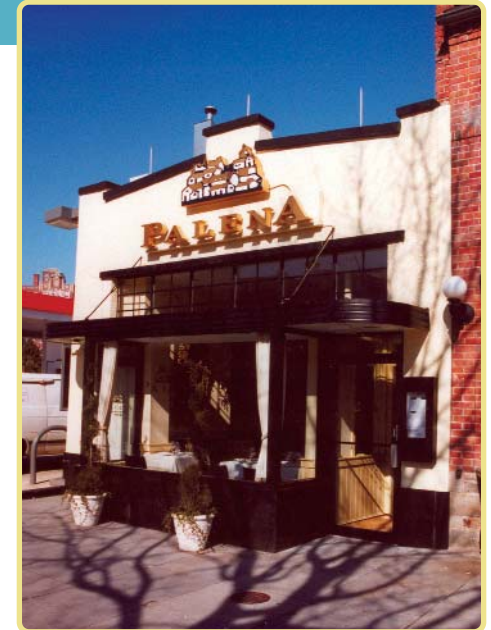
# transom windows

Transom windows are the band of windows above display windows and doors. They provide ventilation and allow daylight deeper into the store's interior. Many transom windows throughout the city have been covered by paint or wood to conceal ceiling dropped mechanical systems. Where possible, these windows should be restored in order to enhance the storefront image. For a number of businesses, the amount of light penetrating deep into the storefront may have an adverse effect on business operations and temperature, particularly for westward facing storefronts. There are creative solutions.



RUDOLPH CREE (CAPITOL HILL)

NOTE SUCCESSFUL USE OF PAINT ON BUILDING



PALENA (CLEVELAND PARK)

NOTE PIN-MOUNTED LETTERS FOR SIGNAGE.

## ENCOURAGED

- Restoring or maintaining the original pattern of transom windows.
- Using the same or compatible material and design that are a part of the storefront system.
- Restoring stained glass panes in transom windows where appropriate and feasible.
- Allowing the transom window to read as a distinctive architectural element by keeping all interior elements at least eight (8) inches behind or away from the transom windows. Concealed mechanical systems in a ceiling should be dropped no lower than the height of the display area or windows.
- Restoring and maintaining transom windows even when they will be hidden by awnings as awnings may be removed at some future date.

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Covering transom windows with paint, signs, awnings or wood panels.
- Filling transom windows with masonry, glass block, wood, ventilation / mechanical systems or other non-transparent materials.



TRYST (ADAMS MORGAN)

The “frieze” or “sign band” is the portion of the facade that is typically just above the storefront on the first floor and below the second floor windows, or building cornice on one-story buildings (see page 10). The frieze provides an area for building signage and is usually located in a consistent place from storefront to storefront. The frieze should be the first location considered for installing or replacing storefront signage. It should be maintained as a key component of the building design and as the business’ or tenant’s primary means of advertising the

## ENCOURAGED

- Installing or replacing storefront signage within the original frieze or sign band location.
- Maintaining visibility of the frieze by not covering it with awnings or other additions to the façade or storefront.
- Removing air conditioning, ventilation equipment or other obstruction from the frieze or sign band.
- Using signage to cover A/C units or ventilation equipment or creatively integrating signage with such equipment.

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Covering or concealing the frieze or sign band area of the façade with anything other than an acceptable sign.
- Installing air conditioning or ventilation equipment in the frieze or sign band.

**Over the years a number of District businesses have used the frieze band as a location to install air conditioning and ventilation equipment...storefront images have been negatively impacted.**

name of the business. Care should be taken to reduce the potential of weather damage or bird-nesting by placing signs flush against the wall. Over the years a number of District businesses have used the frieze band as a location to install air conditioning and ventilation equipment. Though the need for the equipment is justifiable in some cases, storefront images have been negatively impacted.

## SIGNS THAT FIT WITHIN THEIR SIGN BAND



RADIO SHACK (CLEVELAND PARK)



OKYO SALON (GEORGETOWN)



STEVE MADDEN (GEORGETOWN)



THE ART STORE (GEORGETOWN)



DESERT MOON (CLEVELAND PARK)

# commercial signs

The character of your storefront signage and that of your neighboring businesses contributes tremendously to how your business and your business district are perceived. Beyond windows that allow customers to see what you are offering, signage is by far the most important element of your storefront. Signage makes a strong and dynamic first impression. Signage can be a creative demonstration of your business' personality and attitude.

Businesses that have a lot of signs or signs that are big do not necessarily attract new customers. The more signs that a building has, the more cluttered and confusing the building façade appears.

On average, motorists can perceive only up to four (4) words or symbols on a storefront. The best signs rely on strong graphic character and few words. The best graphic character is achieved when there is a definite contrast between background and text

**The character of your storefront signage and that of your neighboring businesses contributes tremendously to how your business and your business district are perceived.**

colors. The best location for signs is typically centered over the storefront or the door into the business.

## ENCOURAGED

- Replacing, repairing or installing signs that are appropriately scaled for your buildings and storefront.
- Maintaining and restoring historic signs.
- Exploring very creative graphics and materials that maintain high standards in legibility and character.
- Building flexibility into signage components to allow for changes or upgrades.
- Installing signs on the frieze or sign band, windows, doors, awnings or other architecturally appropriate location.
- Establishing a sign band on buildings that may not have a clearly demarcated area for signs.
- Using durable wood, painted plastics, metals, or pre-fabricated pin mounted letters.
- Installing painted metal or wood signs.
- Installing fin or blade signs, projected from the building wall, to identify a business to those passing by walking or traveling parallel to the storefront.

- Exploring bold and vibrant colors, still according to good graphic design practice, as a method of distinguishing a sign while relating the sign to the storefront design and business type or product.
- Painting window signs that act as a secondary signage location or that provide an additional level of information about the business, such as store hours or types of services.
- Recommending three-dimensional, fixed signs that include an icon of the business type or are the business name and/or logo.
- Illuminating signs from behind. (Backlit box signs are strongly discouraged.)
- Using neon signs to indicate a business name or trade, but not to advertise products or sales.
- Complying with signage regulations in the District's Sign Code.

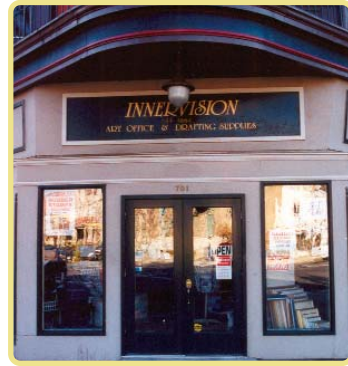
## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Applying too many signs to your storefront or building.
- Covering windows, cornices or decorative details with signs or any other element.
- Blocking visibility into your storefront with signs, shelves or other obstruction.
- Advertising alcoholic, tobacco or other merchandise in general.
- Installing internally-lit plastic or plastic faced signs.
- Maintaining obsolete advertisements or other temporary signs.
- Painting signs directly onto the building surface.
- Installing signage above the rooftop.

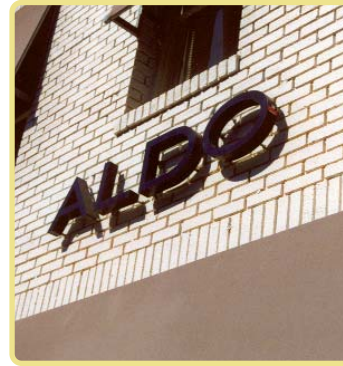
# commercial sign types



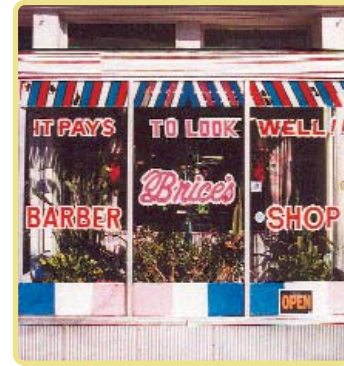
CREATIVE METAL  
RED GINGER (GEORGETOWN)



PAINTED ON WOOD / METAL  
INNER VISION (CAPITOL HILL)



PIN-MOUNTED LETTERS  
ALDO (GEORGETOWN)



SIGN PAINTED ON WINDOW  
BRICE'S BARBER (CAPITOL HILL)



ICON SIGN  
DC CD (ADAMS MORGAN)



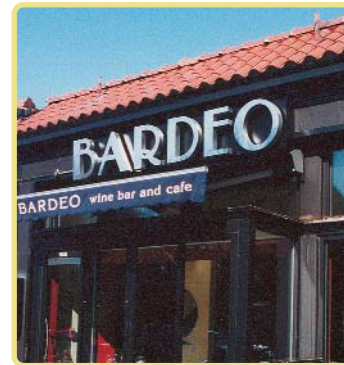
CARVED, PAINTED SIGN  
FINO (GEORGETOWN)



SIGN PAINTED ON SIGN BAND  
TRYST (ADAMS MORGAN)



PAINTED PROJECTING SIGN  
BLUE MERCURY (GEORGETOWN)



RAISED DIMENSIONAL LETTERS  
BARDEO (CLEVELAND PARK)



CUT, PAINTED SIGN  
BANANA CAFÉ (CAPITOL HILL)

# awnings

Awnings are canopies made of canvas, metal and other materials and are used to shelter people, merchandise and the display windows. They are typically installed above storefronts, doors and/or windows. Awnings should fit within the overall storefront and building's organization. Ideally, they should fit within or just over window openings. Awnings are particularly useful in shielding south facing storefronts, out-

achieving sunlight control and weather protection, such as blinds or shades, should be explored. This helps to increase visual diversity within a block and/or business district.

Awnings can be used to effectively enhance a storefront by adding color, pattern and texture. As with all storefront elements, particular attention should be

**As with signs, excessive use of awnings can significantly reduce the appeal and diversity of storefronts in a building or a business district.**

door seating areas, and entrances from heavy sunlight exposure. Awnings used on north facing facades are not the best use of funds given the negligible amount of northern sunlight exposure. As with signs, excessive use of awnings can significantly reduce the appeal and diversity of storefronts in a building or a business district. Other methods for

given to maintaining the awning and information it displays.

Awnings should not be used to conceal bad building conditions, i.e. water damage, broken windows, etc. which should be corrected.

## ENCOURAGED

- Installing canvas or metal awnings.
- Using individual awnings for individual storefronts in a building so that the building's structural frame, detail and rhythm are readable. This also helps to define the extent of an individual store and to establish better business identity.
- Installing retractable or fixed type awnings.
- Illuminating storefronts and sidewalks from beneath an awning.
- Using a consistent size, profile and location for awnings on a single building with multiple storefronts. Font styles may vary from business to business.
- Designing creative awning shapes that are complementary to the overall building.
- Locating signage on the valance of the awning. Signage Code requires that letters be no more than 12" tall.

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Backlighting or internally illuminating plastic awnings.
- Applying large signage on the sloped portion of an awning.
- Concealing architectural details including transoms and storefront cornices with awnings or other elements.
- Using a material other than canvas or metal, including vinyl.

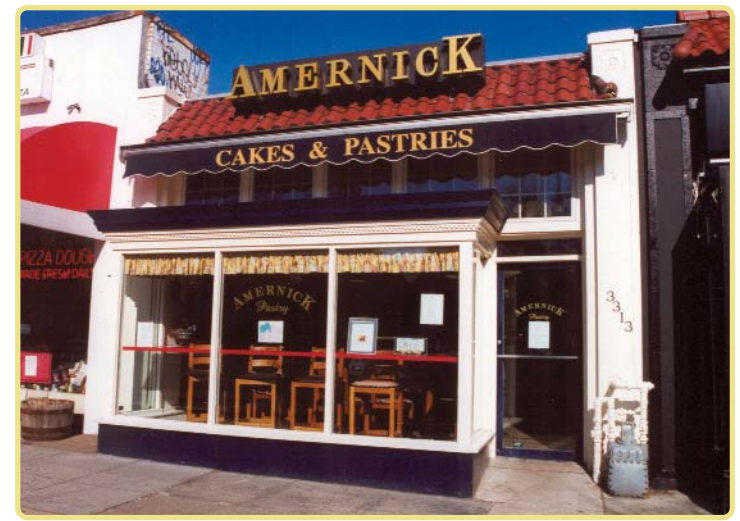
# types of awnings



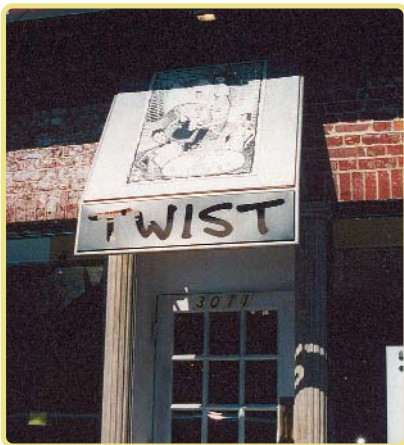
OPEN-ENDED STATIONARY AWNING WITH VALANCE FOR BUSINESS NAME  
MENDOCINO GRILL (GEORGETOWN)



CLOSED-ENDED STATIONARY AWNING  
CHARLIE'S BAR & GRILL (SHEPHERD PARK)



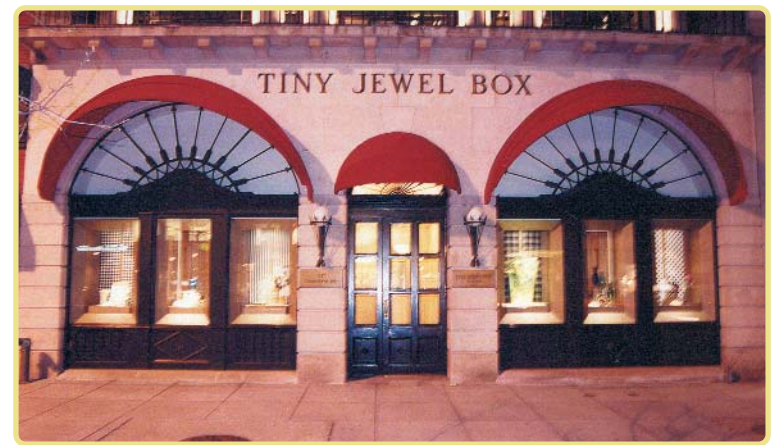
RETRACTABLE FABRIC AWNING WITH VALANCE FOR BUSINESS NAME OR OTHER BUSINESS INFORMATION  
AMERNICK CAKES & PASTRIES (CLEVELAND PARK)



EXPRESSIONIST METAL AWNING WITH BUSINESS NAME CUT OUT  
TWIST (GEORGETOWN)



OPEN-ENDED STATIONARY AWNING WITHOUT VALANCE  
CLUB MONACO (GEORGETOWN)



AWNINGS THAT FIT INTO OR THAT ACCENTUATE ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL  
TINY JEWEL BOX (CONNECTICUT AVENUE)

# colors

Selection of color is one of the most important improvement decisions that you can make for your business. The color selection ultimately becomes an integral part of your marketing strategy for your business.

## Selection of color is one of the most important improvement decisions that you can make for your business.

ness. Your color choice should complement the larger building and that of other businesses within your business district. The number of different colors used should be kept to a minimum.

Painting masonry that has not been painted before is strongly discouraged. However, for those buildings that have been painted, a simple change of color is a visual but inexpensive way to dramatically improve

your business. Painting your building or your storefront, however, is not always necessary or desirable. Resources are best used to improve the quality of materials used for storefront enhancements.



THE OPTIC ZONE (CAPITOL HILL)

### ENCOURAGED

- Selecting paint colors that complement the color of the larger building.
- Coordinating the colors of all storefront components as a marketing tool for your business.
- Using paint colors to accentuate architectural details such as dentils, rosettes, cornice lines, etc.
- Exploring how painting storefronts or buildings in selective locations might increase the visibility of a business without seeming inconsistent or out of character with others in that district.
- Installing pre-painted metal window and door frames and lighting fixtures (prohibited in historic districts).

### STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Painting masonry that has not been painted before, especially in historic districts.
- Failing to maintain painted or other colored storefront elements that have faded, peeled or flaked due to weather conditions.
- Selecting colors that detract from the overall image of the storefront and building.

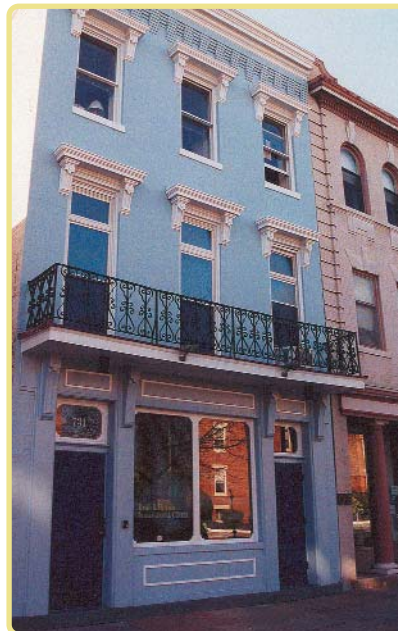
# painted storefronts



STARFISH CAFÉ (CAPITOL HILL)



BIG WHEEL BIKES (GEORGETOWN)  
NOTE WALL MOUNTED SIGNAGE AND  
AWNINGS FOR UPPER STORY WINDOWS.



DAVID R. HUNTER INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
(CAPITOL HILL)



LAZIO RISTORANTE ITALIANO (GEORGETOWN)  
NOTE SCONCE LIGHT FIXTURE ON WALL, OPERABLE WINDOWS, PAINTED  
BUSINESS SIGNAGE ON WINDOWS AND COMMERCIAL DOOR.

# lighting

Lighting dramatically enhances your business and storefront appeal. It creates a greater sense of security and can promote your business in the evening hours. Renovations to your storefront could include creative lighting for signage, display windows, architectural details, and dark corners/edges of the

## Lighting enhances your business and storefront appeal.

property or street. Storefront lighting should be carefully coordinated with nearby street lighting.

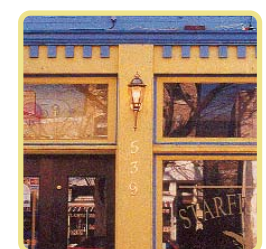
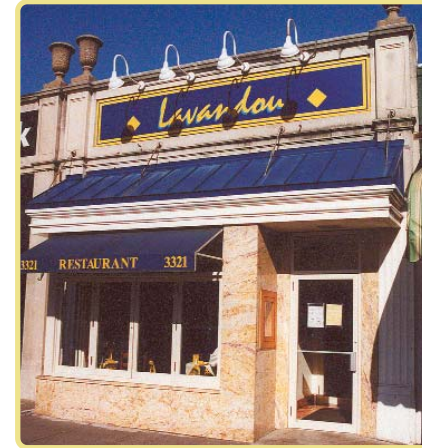
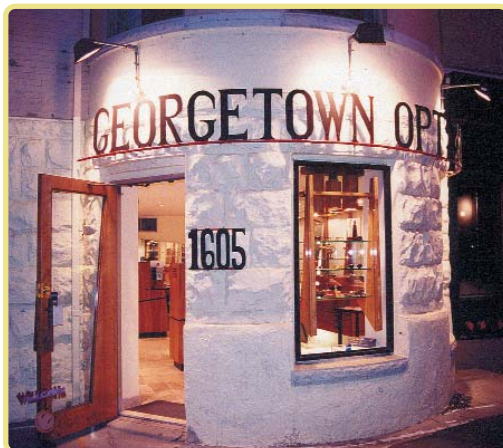
### ENCOURAGED

- Illuminating interior display areas to promote merchandise or services inside a business.
- Balancing the amount of building lighting with street lighting.
- Using exterior mounted light fixtures selectively, i.e. sconces or downlights to enhance overall building image.
- Using lighting to illuminate signage or special architectural details.
- Concealing lighting sources as much as possible.

### STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

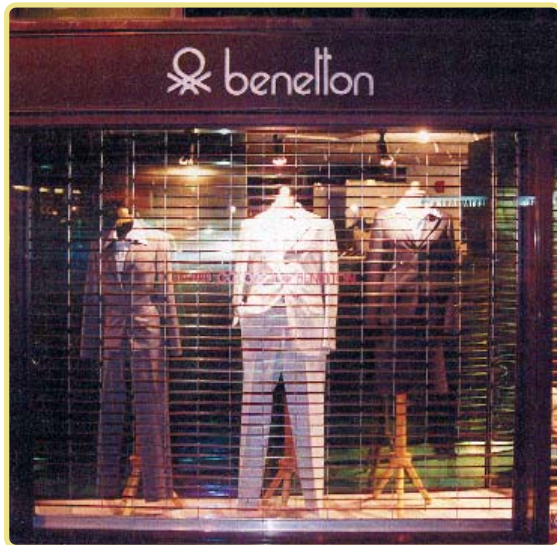
- Installing flashing, pulsating, or moving lights or lights that cause significant glare.
- Using non-commercial lighting fixtures.
- Using neon tubing to border windows, doors and storefronts.
- Using a lot of light fixtures.
- Installing fixtures that when applied to the building cause too much damage to masonry or other facade material.

VARIOUS LIGHTING FIXTURES AND STRATEGIES



The security of your business and business district is very important. Customers choose to patronize areas in which they feel safe. Safety operates on two levels: 1) the business owner needs to feel that his or her investment is protected, and 2) the potential customer needs to feel and see that your business district is safe and well managed. For example, metal bars and solid grates detract from an area's appeal and communicate that crime is a real problem. These systems are also commonly vandalized with graffiti. Perception becomes the reality that can strangle the life and economic vitality from a neighborhood business district.

Ironically, solid grates actually make it more difficult for area residents and the police to properly police your business district to prevent theft or other crimes because they cannot see into the businesses.



INTERIOR, WIRE MESH SECURITY GRILL  
BENETTON (DUPONT CIRCLE)

Other options are available to address safety concerns without creating a fortress around your business and the business district. Transparent windows and doors allow pedestrians and traffic to monitor activities in a well-lit business or district in the after hours. There are a variety of glass types (i.e. laminated safety glass, tempered, etc.) that provide additional layers of security, but can sometimes be more expensive. Quality security locks, internal alarms and security systems, and community watch efforts provide additional safety for your business. Open wire-mesh grates have gained a great deal of popularity lately because they keep burglars out while allowing potential customers and the police to see inside the business at night. Open wire-meshes are best built into the interior of the storefront ceiling where their mechanical systems are concealed.

## ENCOURAGED

- Replacing exterior roll-down grates and grate boxes with open wire-mesh type security grates with a minimum of 70% transparency. Wire mesh grates must have:
  1. The grate box or mechanical unit installed into the interior ceiling of the display window.
  2. Vertical and horizontal guide tracks should be installed parallel to display window's vertical and horizontal framing elements. Colors for all roll-down elements should match the color scheme of the building.
  3. Where possible, exterior wire-mesh grates should be built into the storefront.
- Replacing old single-pane storefront windows with laminated safety glass.
- Installing an electronic alarm system that automatically notifies the police and the business owner.
- Using ornamental gates to secure entry areas in front of storefront doors.
- Concealing existing grate systems with an awning only when circumstances would make removal of the grate prohibitive. The Department of Housing and Community Development's Design Review team must issue written approval on projects receiving funding from the District Government.

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Installing a solid roll-down grate.
- Maintaining non-retractable security bars on the exterior of windows and doors.
- Replacing or covering glass, display windows and doors with plexiglass.

# requirements for district funded improvements

Buildings in the District are generally in good condition, but many are a part of the city's older building stock. Some buildings have not been maintained properly for decades. Over time, the wear and tear that buildings have endured begins to show and the deterioration can effect how potential customers perceive your business and business district.

As a priority, business and property owners are strongly encouraged to determine if their storefront facades have water or structural damage that would impair improvements funded with District grant resources. Business and/or property owners should act to quickly correct such damages prior to submitting applications to participate in the District's storefront improvement initiative.

As an eligible participant within the initiative, owners should work with designers to select the materials that best meet their storefront image needs while understanding the maintenance requirements of those materials. Expensive materials are not always the best.

Owners are expected to maintain improvements that are funded by District Government in "good condition" for a five (5) year period. As a part of its periodic review during this period, the District's project manager will survey the condition of improvements with the following expectations in mind.

## EXPECTATIONS

- Owners should clean and repaint a storefront, if needed, during the third year following construction completion.
- Visibility into storefronts will be maintained per the guidelines outlined in this document.
- Signage and display windows will be lit during the evening hours as a marketing tool for the business.
- Should an establishment go out of business within the five (5) year period, property owners must maintain and/or make all improvements and needed changes in accordance with these guidelines. Proposed changes must be submitted and approved by the District's project manager at the Department of Housing and Community Development.
- Sidewalks must be swept and cleaned on a regular basis.
- Outdated signs must be removed immediately.
- Planters, window boxes and any landscaping elements must be properly maintained and free of debris.
- Graffiti must be removed immediately and the façade restored to its prior "improved" condition.
- Any additional improvements to facades within the five (5) year period should adhere to the guidelines in this document. All additions must be discussed with and approved by the District's appointed project manager, and must be executed by reputable DC licensed contractors.
- Any and/or all improvements must be in compliance with all applicable laws, codes and regulations of the District of Columbia.



THE OWNER OF HEAVEN'S LITTLE FLOWER SHOP (GEORGETOWN) RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF A WELL-MAINTAINED AND PRESENTABLE STOREFRONT TO INCREASING SALES.

# regulatory agencies and documents

All storefront improvements and new construction must comply with the rules and regulations of the District of Columbia's historic preservation (if within a historic structure or district) and zoning codes for land use, lot coverage, floor area ratio, parking, and exterior alterations. Additionally, all construction is subject to the requirements of the following building codes: 1. District of Columbia Construction Codes (1999 Supplement); 2. BOCA National Building Code/1996; 3. International Plumbing Code/1995; 4. International Mechanical Code/1996; 5. BOCA National Fire Prevention Code/1996; 6. BOCA National Property Maintenance Code/1996; and 7. NFPA National Electrical Code/1996.

## **OFFICE OF PLANNING REVITALIZATION PLANNING**

801 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 4000  
Washington, DC 20002  
202.442.7600

The District of Columbia's Office of Planning – Revitalization Planning Division works closely with the staff of the Department of Housing and Community Development on select project locations receiving Community Development Block Grant Funds for storefront improvements. Revitalization Planning staff provide design review assistance to DHCD for projects that are not historic or are not within historic districts. Information about the Office of Planning can be found at <http://planning.dc.gov/main.shtm>.

## **OFFICE OF PLANNING HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

801 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 3000  
Washington, DC 20002  
202.442.7600

The Office of Planning - Historic Preservation Division provides design review for new construction or reconstruction on historic landmarks or within historic districts. An inventory of historic sites can be found online at: <http://planning.dc.gov/preservation/inventory.shtm>. Maps of Historic Districts within the city are available.

## **DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

801 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 6000  
Washington, DC 20002  
202.442.7200

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) provides funds for community and economic development projects including storefront improvements in eligible areas. DHCD fosters partnerships with nonprofit organizations to 1. create and maintain stable neighborhoods, 2. Retain and expand the city's tax base, 3. Promote economic opportunities through community empowerment, and 4. Retain and create job and business opportunities. More information about DHCD can be found at <http://dhcd.dc.gov>.

## **DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS**

941 North Capitol Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
202.442.4400

The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) regulates business activities, land and building use, construction safety, rental housing and real estate, alcoholic beverage control, and occupational and professional conduct within the District. DCRA takes legal action against non-compliant businesses and individuals. The DC Construction Codes Supplement can be found at: <http://dcra.dc.gov/information>.

## **reSTORE DC – MAIN STREETS**

441 4th Street NW, Suite 1140  
Washington, DC 2000  
202.727.5208

reSTORE DC seeks to promote and market neighborhood business districts; improve their appearance and economic health; and strengthen the capacity of local groups to access effective District government services. The program focuses on building partnerships among retail/commercial revitalization stakeholders.

# acknowledgements

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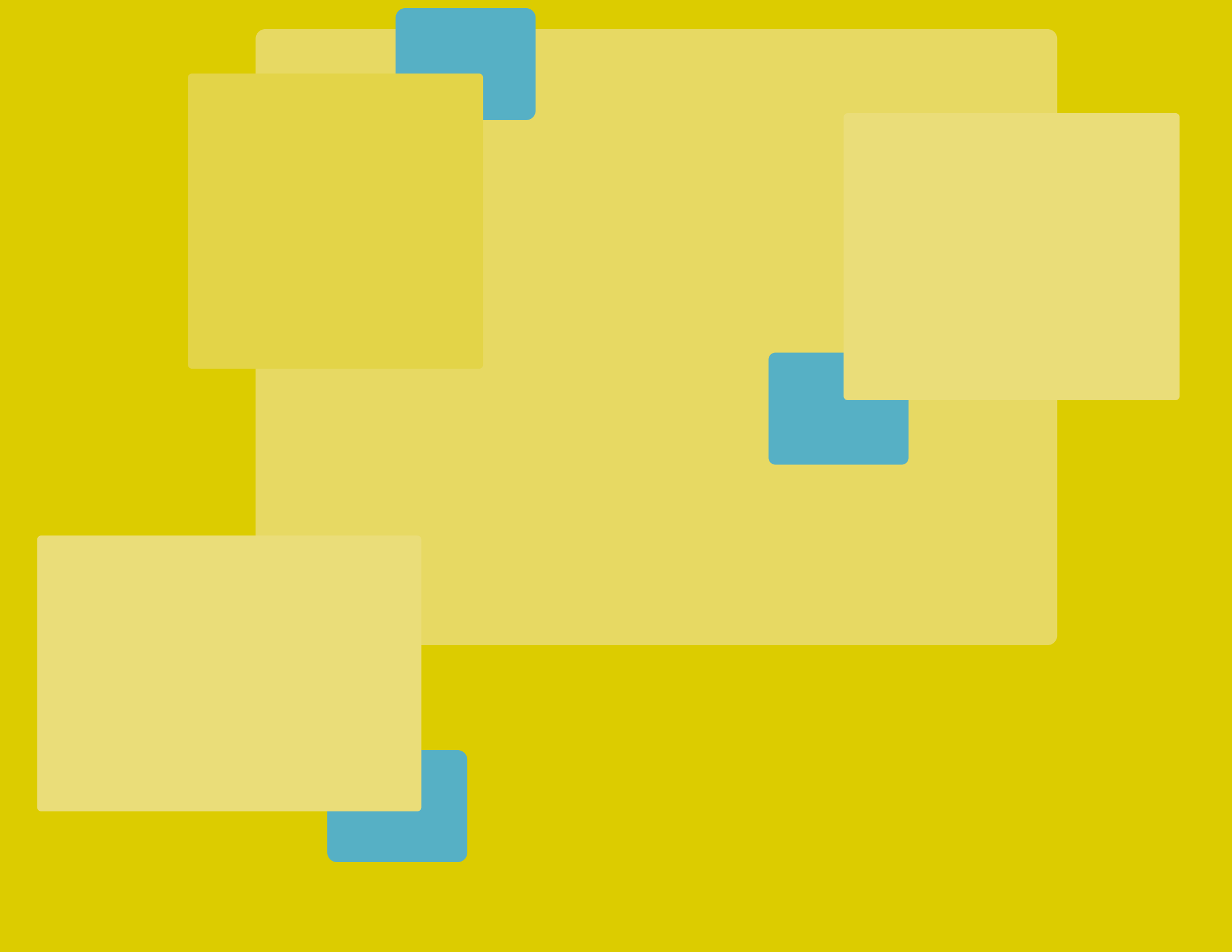
## PHOTOGRAPHY:

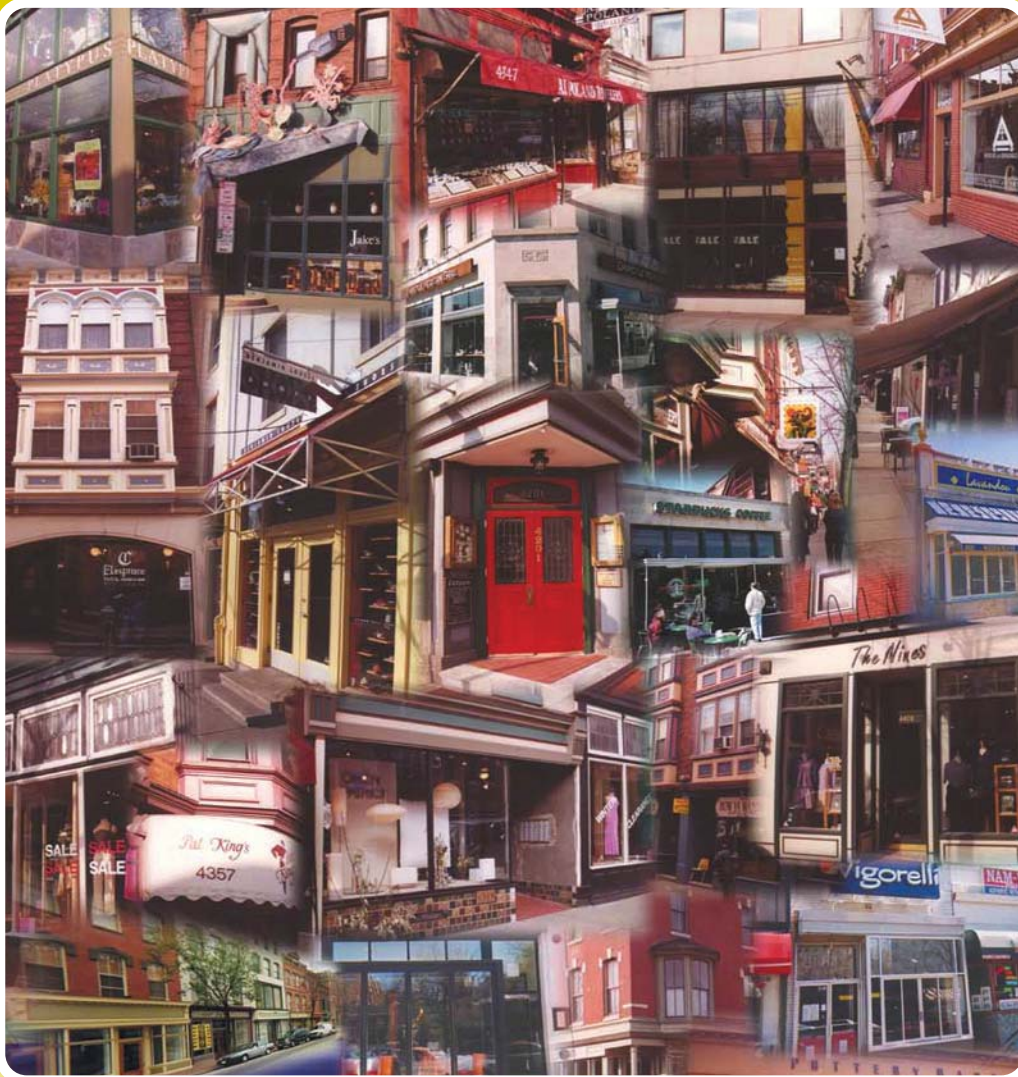
Steve Calcott, OP-Historic Preservation  
*The Optic Zone - Page 22*  
*Big Wheel Bikes - Page 23*

Ginger Carter, OP-Historic Preservation  
*Organic Market - Page 14*  
*Radio Shack - Page 17*  
*Heaven's Little Flower Shop - Page 26*

Jane Nelson, Nelson Architects  
*Several photographs used in the collage  
on the back cover*

Derrick Lanardo Woody  
*All other photographs*





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