



FAÇADE DESIGN GUIDE



A Placemaking Initiative of the City of Richmond
Department of Planning & Development Review

December 2013

arts DISTRICT Facade Improvement Target Area



arts DISTRICT

Facade Improvement Program & Design Guide

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A **façade** is a building’s primary exterior face. It generally includes the main entry to the building and has the most elaborate architectural features. As the most public face of a building, a façade is particularly important to your business. Studies have shown that thoughtful design improvements often lead to greater sales for a business by attracting more customers.

Together, a series of well-restored and handsome building façades in the Arts & Cultural District will improve the overall image of the District, draw more people to the District, promote retail activity, increase vibrancy, and make a place where our local businesses can thrive.

This design guide is an accompaniment to the City of Richmond’s Façade Improvement Program and provides ideas to get you dreaming about how to improve your building. It focuses on basic elements that are eligible for funding through the program, but we encourage you to take your ideas to a professional designer to develop them further. Design costs associated with the façade are an eligible expense in the Façade Improvement Program.

**To start,
analyze your
building's
current
appearance
and the
surrounding
commercial
area.**

What

is special about your building and your block that you want to enhance?

How

can you improve what your business has to offer?

How

can you emphasize what you like best about your building and the area?

First, Update the building's physical maintenance.

Regular maintenance is the best investment you can make in your building. Quickly repairing damage and deterioration keeps your building in its best working order and is the best way to preserve the value of your building over the long-term.

It is also your responsibility to maintain your building in good repair. Cracked windows, peeling paint, burned-out lights, and other damages diminish the professional image and appeal of our business districts. Well-maintained buildings express pride and care and enhance Richmond's economic vitality.

The first step in improving your storefront is to evaluate your building's maintenance needs. If repairs or maintenance are needed, they must be completed before or alongside other façade improvements in order to qualify for Façade Improvement Program funding.

Then, Research your building's past, historic architectural styles, and features.

The Arts & Cultural District and its fine storefronts have a rich history. You can frequently find old photographs and documents about your building at the Library of Virginia, the Valentine Richmond History Center, or publications by the Historic Richmond Foundation. Finding a historic photograph is not only fun, but can also be a great guide to rehabilitation.

Consult the City's guidelines for Old & Historic Districts and appropriate City staff before beginning any work and seek out professional design assistance for your project.

Finally, Apply for City permits and programs in advance.

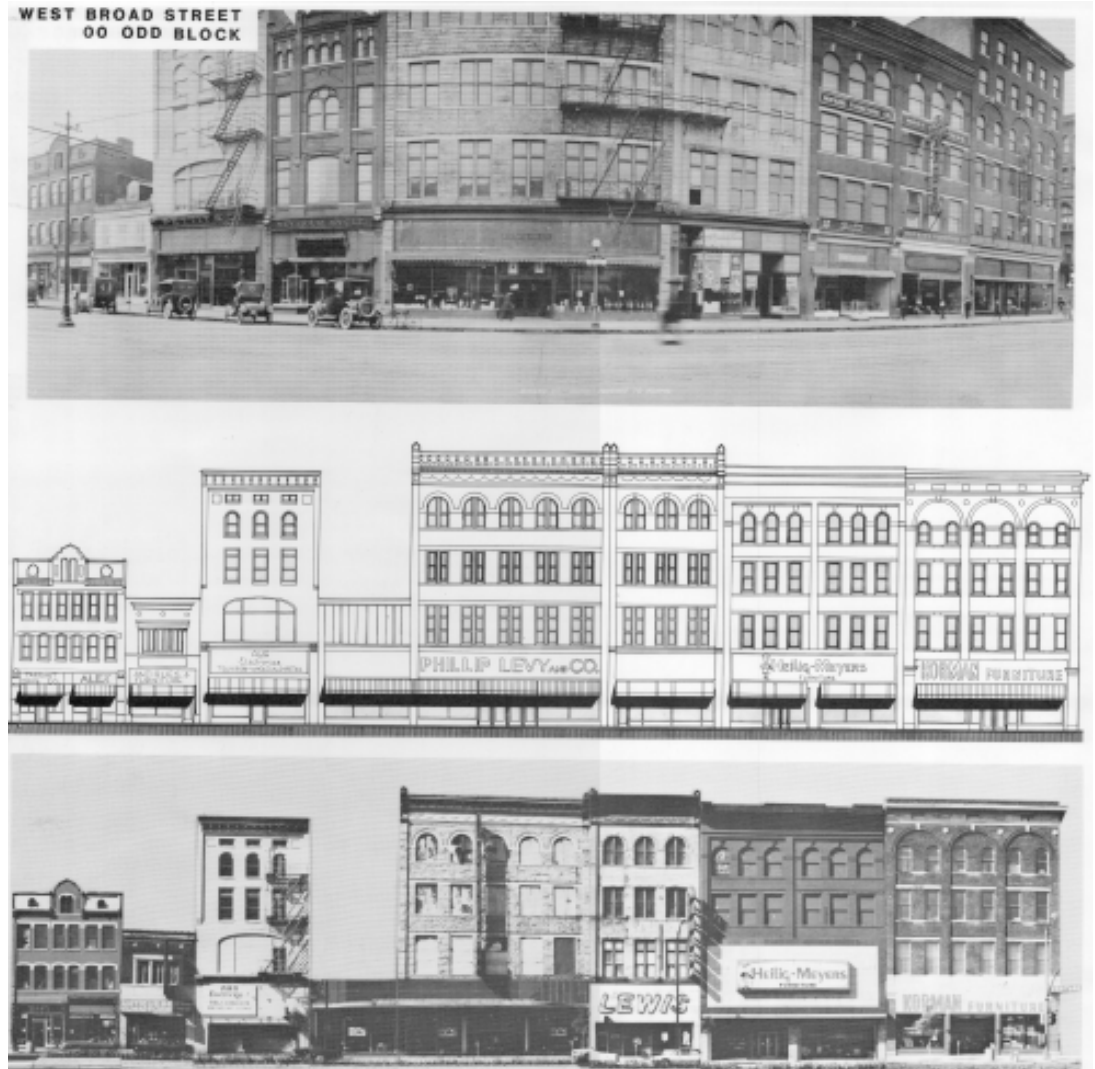
City of Richmond permits are required for most construction projects, and City regulations may require certain activities or designs and prohibit others. Regulations vary by historic district and zoning, so be sure to start by confirming your building's zoning status.

Check on what permits are needed early so that you can be prepared for work to go smoothly. Planning and Development Review staff are ready to sit down with you to review all City approvals that may be necessary to make your project a success.

Storefronts and façades are the most important architectural feature of most historic commercial buildings. They define the character of a historic commercial area like Broad Street and the Arts District.

Storefronts also play a crucial role in your business's advertising strategy to draw more customers and increase your profile. The façade is the face your business puts towards the public, and façade improvements can help your business stand out.

The following pages help guide you through the design choices you will think about as part of a façade improvement project. By making improvements in one integrated project for your building you can get the best bang for your investment and design project buck.



Source: *Broad Street Old and Historic District*, Historic Richmond Foundation, 1986

ELEMENTS OF A FAÇADE

Cornice - Ornamental trim or molding at the meeting of the roof and wall; defines the top edge of the building or the division between the storefront and upper floors

Sign bands or panel - Horizontal area above the storefront and below the second story windows where a sign can be placed

Transom windows - Horizontal windows above the storefront or door

Display window - Large, eye-level windows providing views from the street into the interior of the business that showcases interior activity and goods

Recessed entry - Protects passing pedestrians from out-swinging doors and allows shoppers a sheltered transition to and from the store





Cornice - Ornamental trim at the meeting of the roof and wall; defines the top edge of the building or division between the storefront and upper floors

Combination window - Contains lintel over the window, sash within, and sill underneath the window

Cornice between groundfloor storefront and upper stories

Display window - Large, eye-level windows provide views from the street into the interior of the business that showcases goods and services

Recessed entry - Protects passing pedestrians from out-swinging doors and allows shoppers a sheltered transition to and from the store

Skirtboard panels - Area that supports display windows of the storefront

Architectural style, character, and details are core components of how your building and business appears visually. Special architectural details, such as a classic stone cornice or historical decorative flourish, provide visual interest and mark your building as distinctive. Architectural details add to the character of your building and indicate to customers that you value your building and their experience of it.

Key Questions:

- What are the various **architectural features** comprising the storefront and how are they **arranged in relationship** to each other?
- Are there any **decorative elements**?
- Is there a **cornice or other detail** between the first and second floor?
- Are some elements older than others indicating **changes over time**?



Decorative elements in the cornice, signboard, windows, pilasters, and materials are key to the character of this highly-detailed façade.



Previous renovations and changes may become historically significant in their own right. If so, these significant changes should be maintained and preserved. The ironwork storefront on this Grace St building was added when the building was converted from a residence to a store; that change has become a significant part of its historical character and should be preserved as such.

ENCOURAGED

- Uncover and preserve historic details and materials.
- Repair deteriorated or damaged architectural details.
- Replace missing architectural details, when possible, with ones that closely match originals in appearance and materials.
- Define building edges and main entrances with architectural details that are sensitive to the building scale, historic character, and customer experience.
- Remove insensitive additions.
- Recognize changes over time that have become significant in their own right and retain them in good condition.
- Ensure all new alterations are sympathetic to the character of the building, its neighbors, and the district.

NOT ENCOURAGED

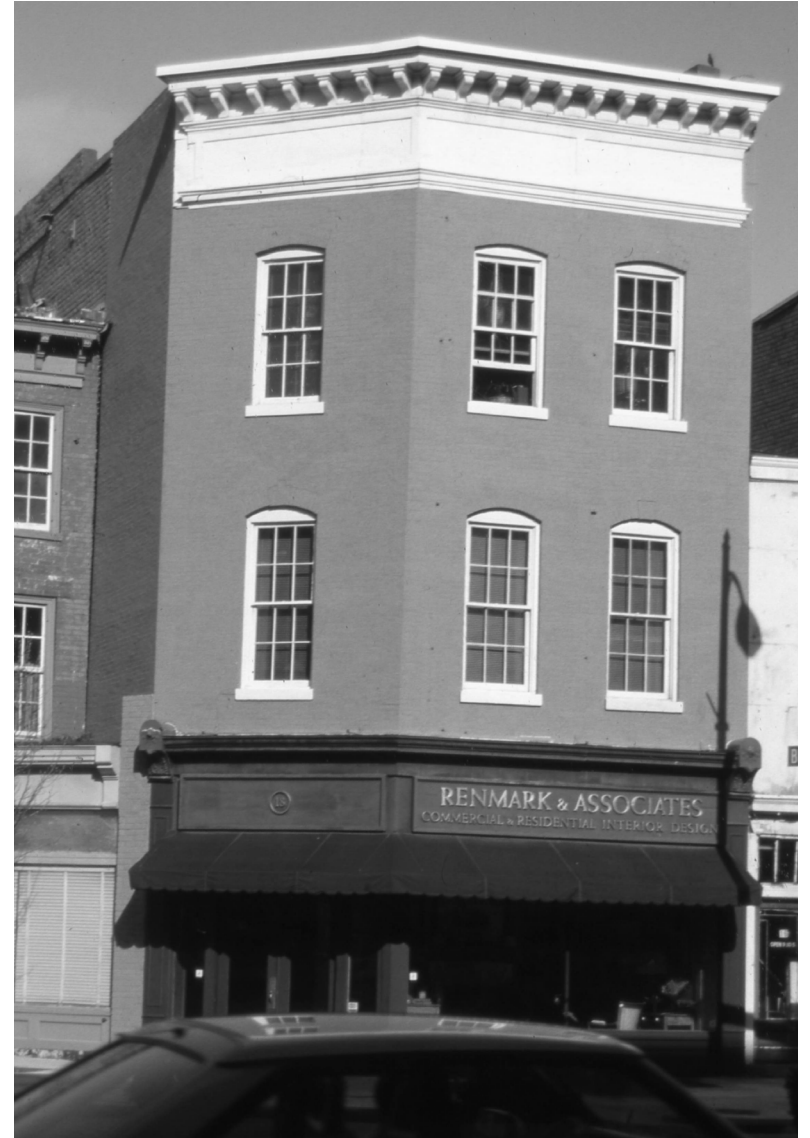
- Covering, obscuring, or removing cornices, trim, or other fine or historic architectural details.
- Alterations that have no historical basis.

FAÇADES OVER TIME

1988



1993



200 E. Broad St. Façade Improvement

The façade of 200 E. Broad St. was significantly improved between 1988 and 1993.

Improvements included:

- Removing boards and other window obstructions
- Repairing pilasters and storefront elements
- Replacing damaged materials
- Highlighting architectural details like the top cornice, the combination windows, and the storefront elements including pilasters, signboard, and awnings as appropriate to the building's use.

Since the 1993 renovation, the building's owners and tenants have maintained it in good condition and continued to improve the façade. Large display windows showcase goods for sale and important details are cared for.

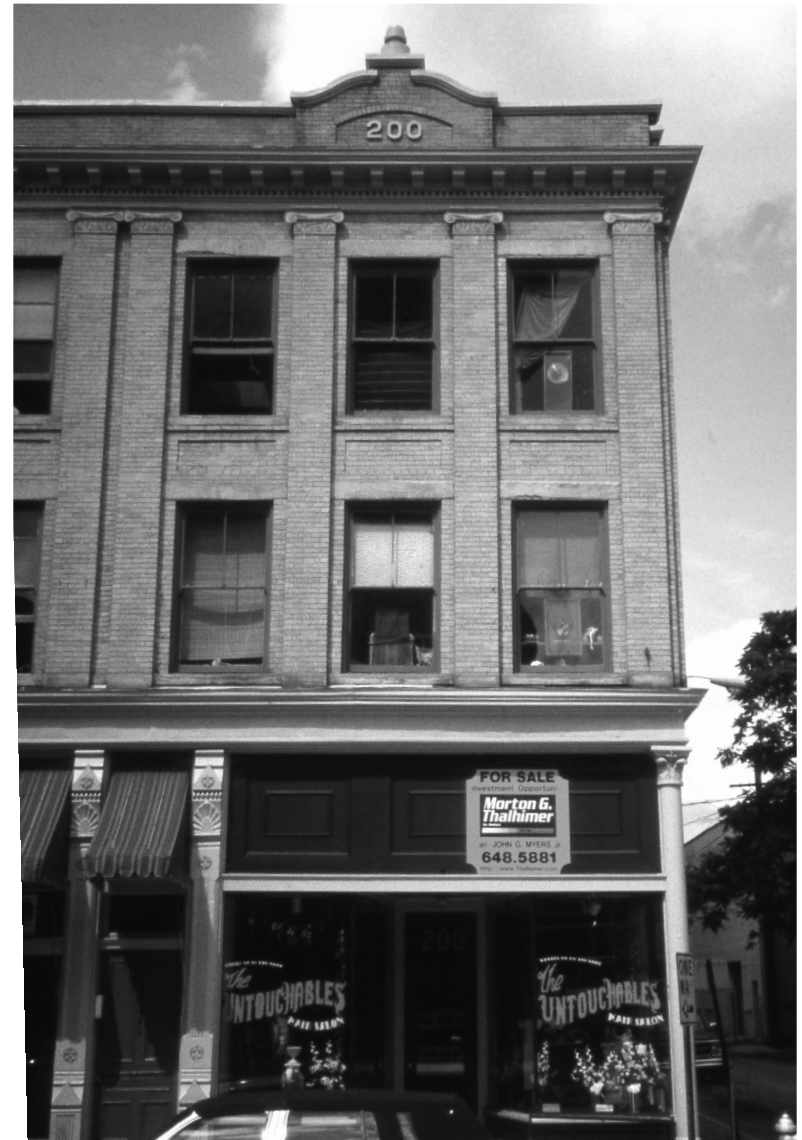
2013



The Arts & Cultural District is filled with buildings constructed of historic, durable materials like brick and stone. These traditional materials offer longevity and stability that help give the commercial buildings of the Arts District their grand nature and street presence.

Key Questions:

- What are the construction **materials**? Wood? Brick or other masonry? Metal? A **combination**?
- Is there a **difference in materials** between the storefront and the upper stories?
- Were the storefront and the floors above it created as an **overall design** or were they very different and **unrelated to each other**?



This façade shows a difference in materials between the first floor storefront and the brick upper stories, which each have a different use.

Source: City of Richmond Comprehensive Planning, 1997



ENCOURAGED

- Original storefront materials should be repaired whenever possible. Replacement materials should match existing materials and new materials should be complementary.
- Use durable, low-maintenance materials.

NOT ENCOURAGED

- Covering brick or stone with vinyl, aluminum, or wood siding.
- Alterations that introduce incompatible materials or damage historical materials.

Today, the building houses a restaurant that has added a sign on the signboard and continued to keep the materials in good repair.

Masonry is a term for historic materials

including brick, terra cotta, stucco, tile, mortar, and stone. Masonry is a key characteristic and material of most buildings in the Arts & Cultural District.

The character of masonry is influenced by color, texture, mortar, joint type, and masonry patterns.

ENCOURAGED

- Repair damaged mortar and prevent further weather damage.
- Repair masonry cracks.
- Maintain brick and stone façades with timely tuck pointing to replace deteriorated mortar.
- Ensure mortar used in repointing matches the original mortar in strength, composition, color, and texture.
- Consult City staff and historic rehabilitation professionals about appropriate masonry care. Masonry can suffer substantial damage from poor maintenance and improper repairs.

NOT ENCOURAGED

- Repairing or replacing mortar joints in a manner that does not match existing masonry.





Beautiful, effective lighting provides clear visibility for your storefront. Lighting should be visually appealing and appropriately illuminate storefront signage, window displays, and recessed areas of the building façade. Strategic lighting can also increase the perception of safety for passing customers and supplement the existing street lighting in the area. In general, façade lighting should call attention to the features of the building and the storefront it illuminates, not to the fixture.

ENCOURAGED

- Direct lighting downward at all building entrances and along walkways to maintain security while not casting excessive glare.
- Use lighting fixtures that complement the entire façade and accentuate significant architectural details.
- Light recessed doorways to discourage loitering in off hours.
- Light signs from above, not from behind.
- Use energy-saving light bulbs with a warm, inviting color spectrum.

NOT ENCOURAGED

- Lighting directed towards streets, sidewalks, or adjacent properties.
- Lighting that is too bright.
- Backlighting awnings.
- Internally-illuminated signs.

Key Questions:

Display windows and transoms:

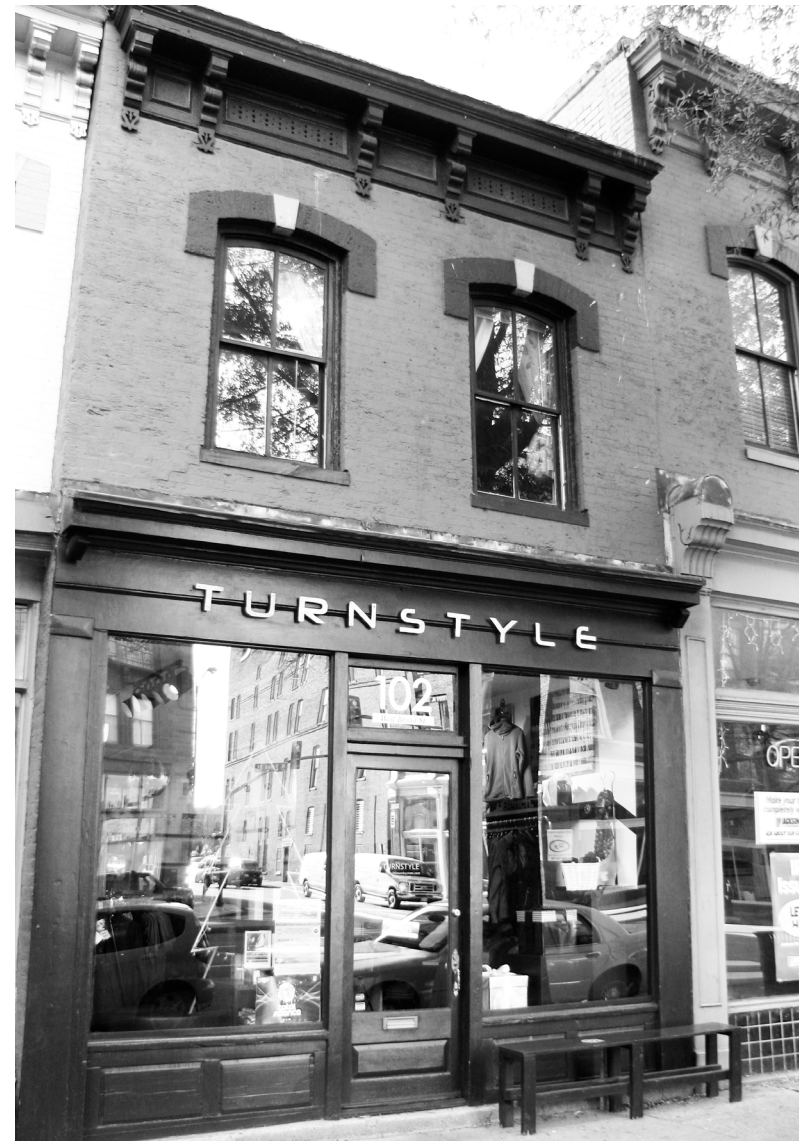
- Are the display windows and transoms single panes of glass or are they divided?
- Are they flush with the façade or are they recessed?
- What is the proportion or area between the display windows and the transom?

Entrances:

- Are entrances centered? Are they recessed?
- Is one entrance more prominent than the others?
- Is there evidence of entrances that have been added or relocated?
- Are the doors original or are they later replacements?

Supporting columns and piers:

- What do the columns or piers supporting the storefront look like?
- Are they heavy or light in appearance? Are they flush with the windows or do they protrude?
- Are they all structural elements or are some columns decorative?



Storefront windows are a key design feature of the Arts & Cultural District.



Corner buildings have two facades; both should be considered and improved together.



Sunshading and other screens may be necessary for your storefront, but should be removable like these blinds. Windows should not be permanently blocked, covered or reduced in size.

ENCOURAGED

- Use windows and doors made of clear glass to allow views into and out of the business.
- Remove boards or other obstacles from upper floor windows.
- Retain original windows whenever possible.
- Improve ADA accessibility to your building.

NOT ENCOURAGED

- Reducing existing window size to accept standard residential window sizes.
- Removing original windows.
- Filling in or covering window openings with wall surface, wood, metal, or other materials.
- Blocking windows or unused doors with storage shelves, product storage, opaque film, or excessive signage.
- Doors that appear to be for a residence, not a business.
- Plexiglas instead of glass.

**A Placemaking Initiative of the the City of Richmond
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<http://richmondgov.com/PlanningandDevelopmentReview/facades.aspx>



MAYOR DWIGHT C. JONES

This Design Guide is based on work by the City of Minneapolis' *Great Streets Facade Design Guide* and the US Department of Interior's *Preservation Briefs: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts*.

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