



City of Westminster

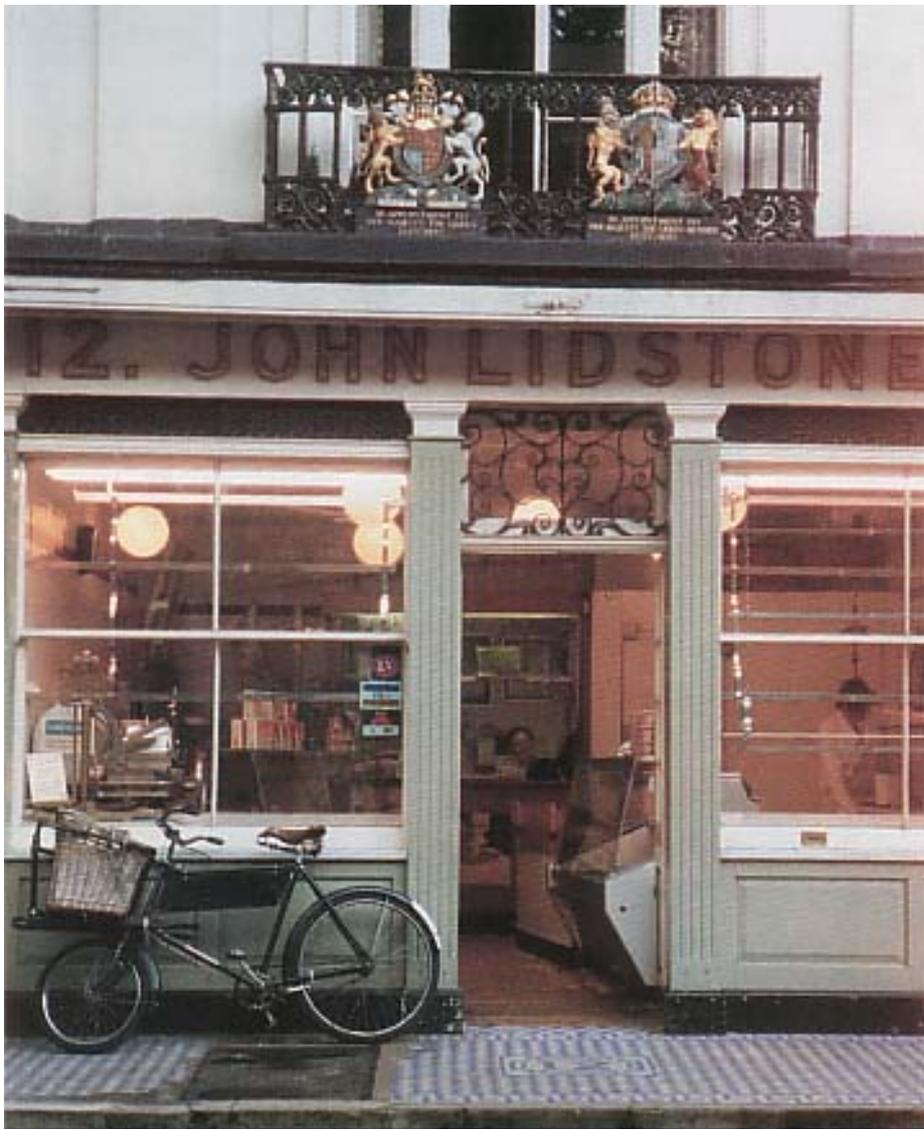
PLEASE NOTE

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) policies and planning, building control and other legislation and regulations referred to in the text of this guide were current at the time of publication. Because this guidance is an electronic version of the printed guidance as approved and adopted, these references have NOT been changed. For ease of contact; names, telephone numbers and locations have been regarded as non-material editorial changes and have been updated.

As UDP policies and government legislation may have changed over time, before carrying out any work, it is recommended that you consult the current UDP

<http://www.westminster.gov.uk/planningandlicensing/udp/index.cfm> for policy revisions and you may wish to check with planning and/or building control officers about your proposals.

Shopfronts, Blinds and Signs - A Guide to their Design



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1. Introduction

This Design Guide has been produced by Westminster City Council. It is based on and supplements the policies contained Chapter 9 of the City of Westminster Unitary Development Plan. Its purpose is not to suggest precise ways of designing alterations or to discourage imaginative new design, but to provide guidance for the alteration, replacement and restoration of shopfronts. The Council attaches considerable importance to suitably-designed shopfronts, not only for the preservation of the character of buildings and areas, but also for the attractive overall appearance of shopping streets and the impact on their commercial success.

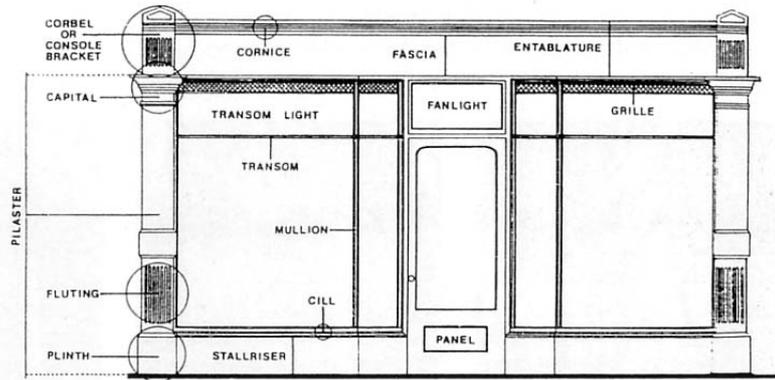
2. The Problem

The retail industry requires adaptability and flexibility in shopfront design in order to respond to the rapidly changing market and consumer pressures. However, the architectural integrity of individual buildings and groups of buildings can be destroyed by insensitive shopfront design. For example an over large plastic fascia may be inappropriate in terms of size and material and may cover traditional architectural features. Also, standardised 'house designs' (i.e. standard shopfronts of multiple or 'chain' shops) present a particular problem when they are applied insensitively to existing buildings. Whilst the desire for corporate image is appreciated, in some cases standard designs will need to be modified in order to fit sympathetically with the period and architectural style of the building. It is important, therefore, that alterations, restoration and replacement are sympathetically carried out, especially in conservation areas and on listed buildings, in order to protect their special character. Size, scale, elaborate or simple design and detailing, the use of correct materials and colour schemes are all important in making shopfronts acceptable parts of existing buildings and areas.



Shopfronts of poor design and poorly related to the period and style of the building façade in terms of materials, signage, size of fascia, lettering, type of blind, design of window area and use of shutters. Enforcement action is taken against shopfronts of such design where possible.

3. The Parts of a Shopfront



This diagram illustrates and names the parts that are found most commonly on shopfronts.

4. Legislation Planning Permission

The alteration and replacement of shopfronts generally requires planning permission. Advertisements may require a separate application for advertisement consent. However, routine maintenance works, such as redecoration or straightforward repairs, are 'permitted development' and planning permission is not therefore required.

Listed Buildings

Any alterations to shopfronts that are a part of a listed building will need to be consistent with the age or style of the building and requires listed building consent. In the case of the listed buildings, even minor alterations, which might otherwise be permitted development (such as alterations to the detailing of stucco or woodwork, small features or specially treated glass), would normally require consent.

Conservation Areas

The Local Authority is empowered to designate areas of special architectural or historic interest as conservation areas, in order to protect their character. In such areas, special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing historic shopfronts. Conservation area consent is often required for the demolition of an existing shopfront.

5. Principal Historic Shopfront Styles in Westminster



St. James's Street: An elegant 18th century shopfront.

Shopping streets and individual shops in Westminster reflect the City's very long and rich history. The City of Westminster is fortunate enough to still contain many fine examples of shopfronts from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries; their location is to some extent connected with the development of Westminster over the centuries.

Eighteenth Century

By the 18th century the St. James's Street area had been developed, as a residential and shopping area. Today some fine 18th century shopfronts still survive and can be found in St. James's Street itself. Soho and Bond Street also developed as local shopping areas in the late 18th century, but only fragments of

shopfronts from that period survive. 18th century shopfronts were mostly made of wood, with simple and well proportioned designs, most with classical details.

Nineteenth Century

Examples of original 19th century shopfronts can be found all over Westminster, as new areas were developed and older areas, such as Soho and Bond Street, grew in popularity and had their shopfronts replaced. In particular, Knightsbridge, Bayswater, Covent Garden, Soho and Mayfair contain many shopfronts from that period as they were all established shopping areas by then. There was an increasing use of plate glass, wrought iron and hardwood in shopfronts from the mid 19th century.



Litchfield Street, Soho: A fine early 19th century shopfront.



Asprey's, New Bond Street: Mayfair, 1865. Early use of plate glass, divided by cast iron pilasters

Towards the end of the 19th century, stonework and terracotta surrounds became common. Another important development in shopfront design in the 19th century was the arcade, magnificent examples of which can be seen in the Burlington Arcade off Piccadilly and the Royal Opera Arcade off Pall Mall.

Early Twentieth Century

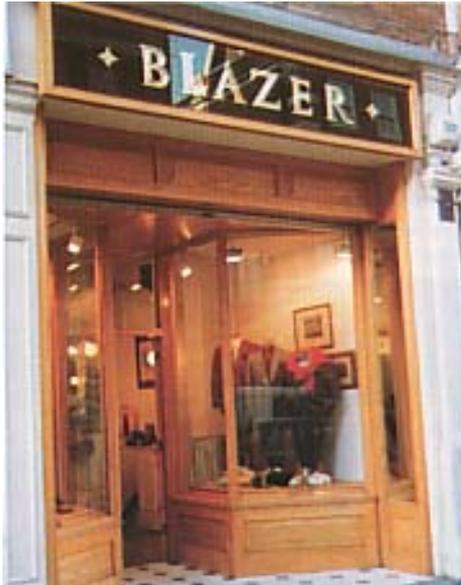


Oxford Street became very popular for shopping in the early 20th century, prompted by the development of the monumental Selfridges department store. Regent Street was also redeveloped in the early 20th century. In many streets of that period shopfront openings were an integral part of the uniform design of the street. The modernist movement emerged in the inter war years, characterised by more simple designs. Popular materials were black Vitrolite (a self coloured glass), chrome metalwork and chrome lettering. From the 1950's onwards the trend was for further simplicity in shopfront design, until the 1970's when new interpretations of classical designs became popular.

Oxford Street: A 1930's style shopfront with black Vitrolite and chrome detailing

Today many of Westminster's shopping streets are not only of local, but national and international importance, and display some fine original shopfronts of historic and architectural importance. Using its statutory powers as a Planning Authority and through providing advice, the Council is committed to preserving this part of the City's heritage.

Contemporary Design



Modern contemporary design can produce innovative, individual and eye catching shopfronts. To help achieve such successful design, the broad design principles and considerations contained in this guide should be followed. The design advice contained in this document can be applied to both modern and traditional designs. Contemporary design can be used to good effect where shopfronts are integrated into a new development with a consistent design principle running throughout. Shopfronts of modern design can also be successfully incorporated into traditional facades if respect is paid to the architectural form of the building and to its surroundings. The Council does not have a preference for either approach, however, to ensure a high standard of design that enhances the street scene, the principles of design discussed in this guide should be respected.

Long Acre: *Modern interpretations of earlier style shopfronts can be successful if suitable materials and details are used.*



Commendable (to some extent) attempts to harmonise modern shopfronts with older buildings, by maximising the use of glass and by minimising the visual effect of 'solid' modern materials and details. However, the Council encourages the retention or reinstatement of mullions, transoms and other traditional details on old shopfronts.
Bond Street (left) and Regent Street (right).

6. Policies

General Policies

Chapter 9 of the City of Westminster Unitary Development Plan on 'Conservation and Design' contains policies relating to shopfronts. These policies should be taken into consideration when any alterations or works to a shopfront are proposed. The design principles advocated generally in these policies aim to:

Preserve and restore good surviving shopfronts of all periods, by retaining or reproducing them,

Ensure that any alterations to an existing shopfront preserve or enhance the character of the overall building.

Achieve imaginative, high quality modern shopfront-design which respects the architectural characteristics of existing buildings and adjacent areas.

Access for People with Disabilities

In shopfront design, provision should normally be made for the easy access for people with disabilities as well as carers with prams and buggies. Doorways and entrances should be level and/or ramped and wide enough for a wheelchair to enter. If possible two wheelchairs should be able to pass. Stepped access

should be avoided. In this context, listed shopfronts will be judged on their individual merits. Advertisements, sandwich boards, etc. should not be located where they can be a danger to the public.

Specific Design Policies

Westminster City Council also produces policy documents regarding shopfronts, which apply to uniform development areas such as Regent Street or other streets of outstanding historic importance such as Bond Street, and to other related subjects i.e. advertisements, stucco decoration etc. These contain more specific policies and should also be referred to where appropriate for more detailed guidance.

Note: With regard to shops in Regent Street, the Crown Estate as property owners, have produced a detailed illustrated document which sets out their design policies concerning shopfronts.

Each Case on its own Merits

All cases are judged on their own merits as well as with regard to planning policies. Some aspects of proposed alterations to shopfronts may not be covered by the Council's general policies. In such cases, the proposed alteration, replacement or renovation will be judged according to its own merits. The criteria will depend on existing circumstances such as surrounding buildings and shopfronts and the extent to which the guidance contained in this document relates to them and has been adhered to.

7. Design Considerations

The following are the Council's main considerations in deciding the suitability of proposals for shopfronts.

Relation to Building Facade

A shopfront should not be designed in isolation but should be conceived as part of the whole building into which it is fitted. With traditional shopfronts, respect is paid to the scale, proportions and architectural style of the building and the relationship with other surrounding façades. The same principle should be adopted in the design of modern shopfronts. Building widths and vertical sub-divisions in the form of pilasters, columns and fenestration, should be continued through or otherwise related to the ground, to maintain the vertical emphasis. The horizontal emphasis provided by a consistent fascia line, transoms and glazing heights should also be respected.

Before altering or replacing a shopfront, consideration must be given to the quality of the old shopfront and the possibility of restoring it. When replacing or restoring shopfronts the details should be determined as far as possible by the evidence of the original building itself, and not by later incorrect replacements, such as small, Georgian style glass panes on a mid 19th century building designed for plate glass. If too little of an original shopfront remains for it to be restored with confidence, evidence can often be taken from adjacent shopfronts which are fitted into building facades of a similar period and style. In any case, whether it is a modern or traditional façade, disunifying and inharmonious shopfront elements ought to be removed and replaced by architectural features of a more appropriate style.

In Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian buildings, shopfronts are often set within a framework of classical elements of pilasters, columns and a frieze incorporating a fascia, usually topped by a cornice. It is important that these features are retained intact and, if damaged, replaced in replica. The materials used in original traditional shopfronts were usually wood, brick, stone and occasionally iron work. In the restoration of shopfronts, these materials should be used and plastics and reflective modern materials avoided in old buildings and in conservation areas. Sombre colours were often used on traditional shopfronts such as maroon, dark green, black, dark blue and brown. Harsh and gaudy colours, unsympathetic to the building should be avoided. Great care in the selection of materials and colours for the use on shopfronts is required and an investigation into the various alternatives available ought to be made.



Shopfront examples in the City of Westminster that have been designed with the scale, proportions and detailing of the building façade in mind.

Relation to the Street

The special character of a shopping street is created either through a uniformity in design and architectural style, or by a variety of styles that can sometimes provide richness and vitality. Street vitality and interest needs to be maintained through the use of colour, detailing and design, but not at the cost of destroying the character and quality of the street as a whole. Shopfronts ought to harmonise with and enhance the character of the street scene as well as the buildings which contain them.

In the design of a new shopfront it is important to acknowledge the common features which occur in adjacent shops or throughout the street. A common height of stallriser, consistent bay widths and depth of fascia and the existence of rhythmically positioned vertical subdividing glazing bars, mullions and columns should be noted. However, in old parades with a strong period character and on listed buildings, a facsimile replacement shopfront will often be the preferred solution. The materials and colours used should also be compatible with the character of the street and attention should be paid to the choice of fixtures. Inappropriate signs, blinds, alarm bells, handles, letter boxes, doorbells etc can disrupt an otherwise consistent design. Original existing period fixtures of this type should be retained.

Making a shop 'stand out' in the context of the street, does not always make it more attractive to shoppers. Evident respect for the character of the street and the area, will generally produce a high quality retail environment which is likely to attract more shoppers.



Continuous cornices and fascias at the same height, act as strong unifying features and allow for an endless 'internal' variety in the design of individual shopfronts, without upsetting the overall character of a street.



Steps, railings, bollards and other similar external features are very important parts of the original appearance of old shops.



Contrast in scale, colour etc, can enhance (see photo, right) or can be detrimental (see photo, left) to the character of the street.

Altered Shopfronts with Typically Inappropriate Features



Inappropriate mock Georgian glazing, over-large fascia and lettering. Removal of traditional features such as pilasters and entablature.

Large expanse of glass inappropriate for the street. No stallriser and inappropriate door design and fascia lettering.

Fascia obscures architectural detail. Fanlight louvres are unsuitable and stallriser of inappropriate material and design. Door design and undivided window out of character.

Plastic shopfront with octagonal window and door openings out of character with the street and building façade. Obscures window sill.

Shopfronts that Relate well to the Street and building Façade



Architectural details, pilasters, entablature, mullions, panelled stallriser and door retained. In character with the façade and street.

Vertical sub-divisions of building façade carried down to shopfront. Sub-divided window and a simple stallriser in character with the street.

Panelled stallriser and door, window sub-divided, entablature revealed. Metal grille retained. Painted lettering and timber shopfront.

Architectural details of the original early 19th century shopfront are retained and relate well to the proportions of the façade and the character of the street.

Design of Details

The character of a shopping street is largely determined by the design and detailing of individual buildings. A long stretch of flat shopfronts with little or no modelling or recession of the various planes, can be bland and dull. A more interesting effect can be created by modelling facades and juxtaposing the various elements, such as fascia, lettering, glass, and doors.

If a new shopfront is intended to be in keeping with adjacent traditional shopfronts, the design and detailing must be correct, reasonably scholarly and not over elaborate. If it is to be a modern shopfront it ought to be uncluttered in appearance and should acknowledge the broad design principles of adjacent original ones.

The ill-considered removal or addition of glazing bars can produce a historically incorrect and unacceptable shopfront design. To avoid this, respect should be paid to the pattern of glazing bars on the original façade. Plate glass was not introduced until the first part of the 19th century and therefore the size of glass panes available tends to increase throughout that century. Attractive ornamentation and detailing on shopfronts, such as ornate pilasters, frieze and other features of fine craftsmanship and design, should be retained intact and restored wherever possible. Other traditional features on shopfronts are wood panelled stallrisers and doors. The original design and materials used (and if possible the original method of construction) should be acknowledged in the replacement and restoration of such features.



Neal Street A reproduction of a traditional style fascia, based on classical detailing.



Knightsbridge Early 20th century shopfront with ornate stone and wood details.

Other very important details must be acknowledged and retained, such as the precise shape and size of the profile of transoms, mullions and glazing bars, the stallriser panelling and trimmings, cast iron ventilation grilles, etc.



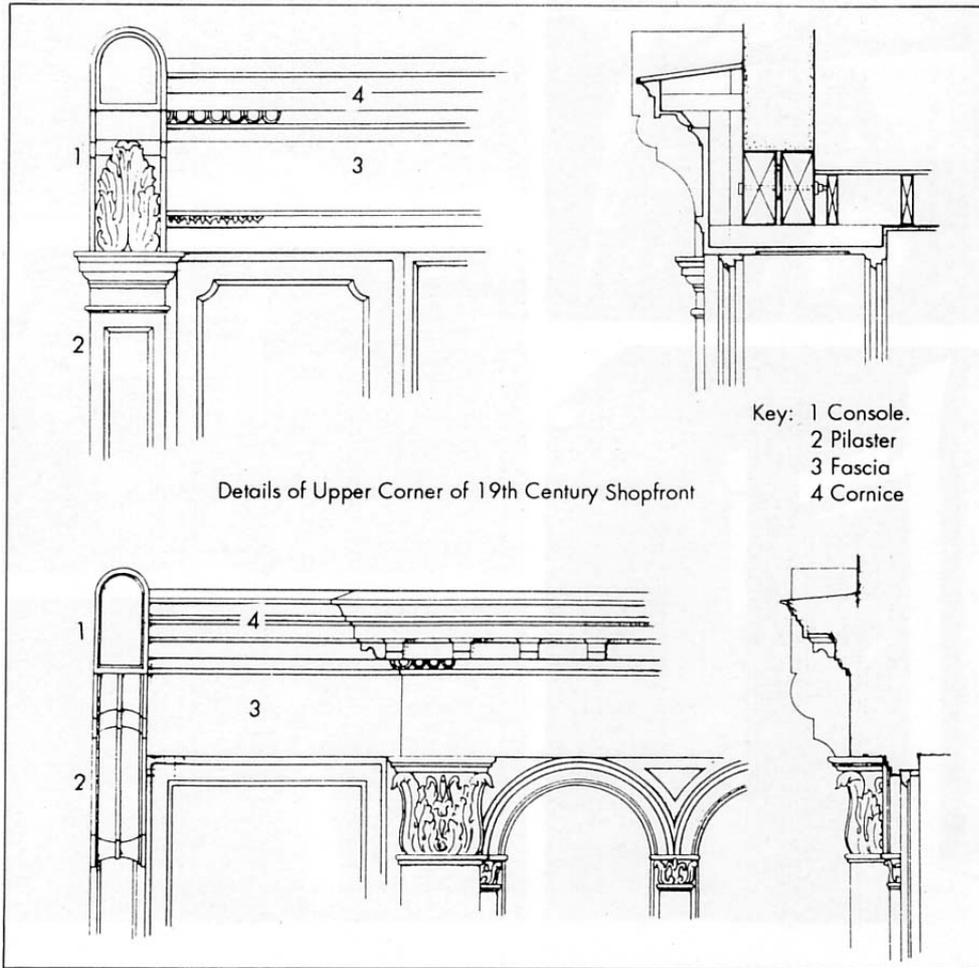
Knightsbridge An Edwardian shopfront with sinuous, curved transom lights.



Bond Street Details of entrance and shop window, reminiscent of the 1930's style.

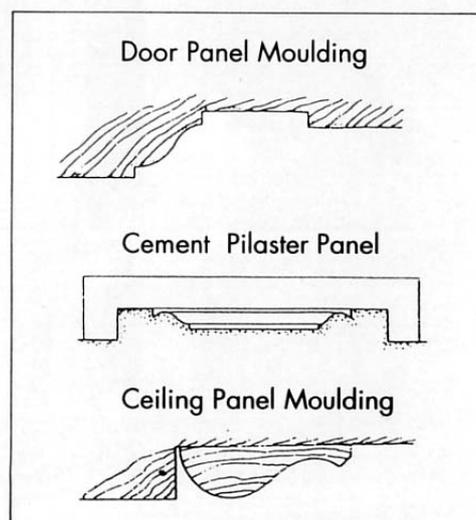
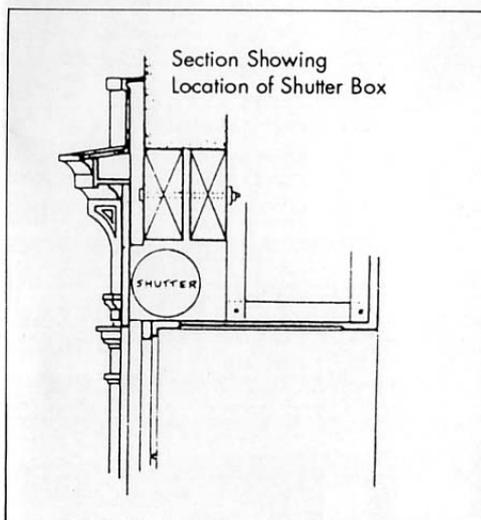
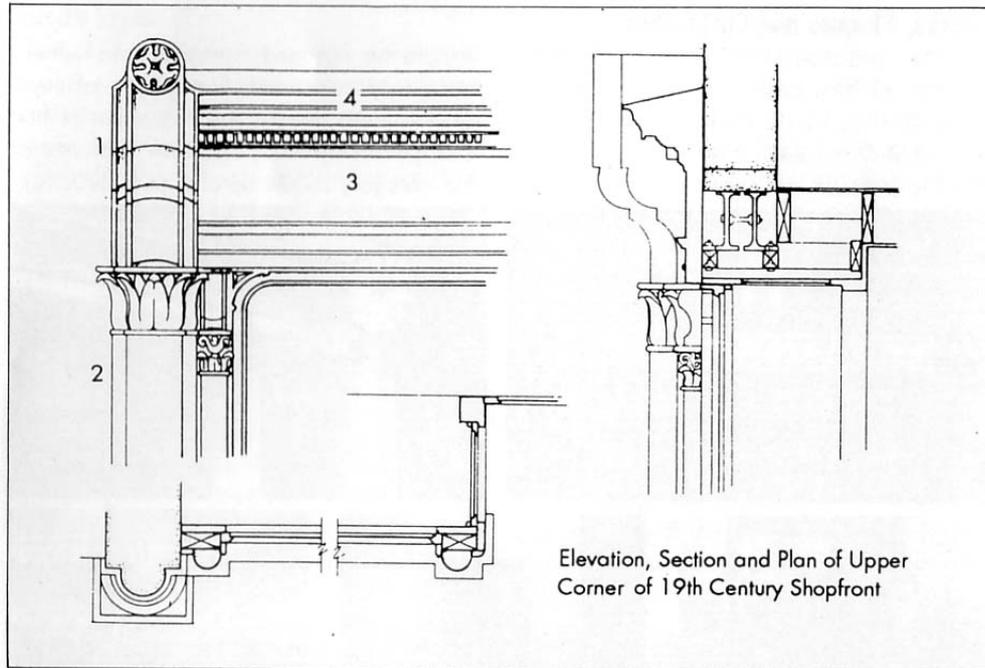
Classical Detailing

Illustrated on these two pages are a variety of designs for parts of shopfronts, all based on accurate classical detailing. The details and profiles shown here are but a small selection of a variety of period details which would be suitable for use in appropriate cases of historic shopfront restoration. It is emphasised that copying such details does not always guarantee successful restoration. Advice should be sought from Development Planning Services of the Department of Planning and City Development (see Contacts below for further advice and information).



Details of Upper Corner of 19th Century Shopfront

Key: 1 Console.
2 Pilaster
3 Fascia
4 Cornice



Clocks, Plaques and Cartouches

Clocks, plaques, cartouches and other details of fine craftsmanship found on period shopfronts make an important contribution to their overall appearance and to that of the street. Such features should be retained, restored and, where necessary, reinstated. The beauty of these objects demonstrates the true value of fine craftsmanship. Any modern features of this category should be of high quality.



Fascia Signs

One of the aims of this design guide is to make the shop owner aware of the importance of the appearance of fascia signs, both to the overall character and quality of a street and in attracting shoppers. A well-designed shop sign can give a shop, individuality and a unique character without showing contempt for its

surroundings. In the past, shop signs were often designed as works of art and still today modern fascias of equivalent high quality are produced. The street number should always be displayed and the fascia is an ideal location. Part II of the London Building Acts (Amendment) Act 1939, requires the name and number in the street of any building to be permanently displayed on the outside.

The fascia is an important focal part of the shopfront and its style and proportion should relate well to the surrounding building and shops. Shops with oversized fascias can break the continuity of the visual line of a string course and obscure architectural details such as cornices or corbels, thereby destroying the architectural unity.

The materials and colours selected should be compatible with the building and those used on surrounding shopfronts and buildings. Acrylic and shiny materials, and the use of fluorescent colours tend to clash with traditional finishes and are visually inappropriate. On more traditional buildings, a painted timber fascia with painted lettering or individual letters of another suitable material is preferable. The lettering should be in proportion with the fascia size and only show the name of the shop, the trade and the street number, with no additional advertising.

The illumination of fascias requires careful consideration. Large, internally illuminated box signs, for example, produce a crude visual effect and are inappropriate in most cases, especially in historic streets. More subtle and acceptable solutions can be provided by externally illuminated fascias with carefully directed light beams, back lit letters (where the background is blacked out), or halo lit (where the letters stand proud of the fascia and are individually lit from behind).

Additional advice on fascia signs and projecting signs can be found in the Council's publication, 'Advertisement Design Guidelines' (1992).



Beak Street: A mid 19th Century simple fascia with elegant and appropriate lettering.



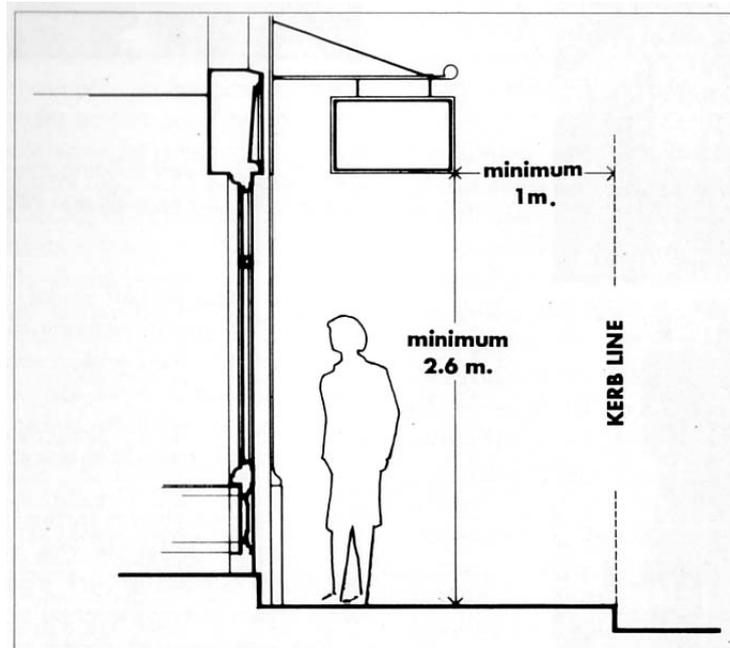
Traditional fascias and hanging signs in Cecil Court.

Projecting Signs

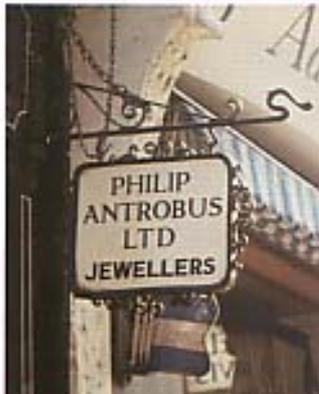
A well designed hanging sign suspended from traditional brackets can enhance the appearance of the shopfront and add vitality to a traditional shopping street. Indeed, sign-written hanging boards of a modest size are an established feature of traditional streets and should be retained. Projecting box signs, however, are generally inappropriate in historic streets. A sign should relate well to the character, scale and architectural features of the building onto which it is placed. A projecting sign should be positioned centrally on a pilaster, at fascia level, at a minimum height of 2.6m from the pavement to the underside and 1m minimum in width from the outer side to the kerb line (see diagram below). High level signs are inappropriate in the majority of locations. No more than one per business is permitted with deemed

consent, and the size must not exceed 0.75m². If these standards are exceeded or a sign of any size is illuminated, advertisement consent may be required. Listed building consent is also required for any type of sign attached to a listed building.

The most appropriate form of illumination for hanging signs is 'picture-lighting'; i.e. a strip light covered with a metal cowl, usually attached to the top of the sign. Spotlights attached to the building adjacent to the sign are acceptable in some cases.



Positioning of Projecting Signs



The examples shown are intended to illustrate the variety of traditional designs of such signs and the way in which they should be incorporated in the design of a shopfront and its surroundings.

Blinds

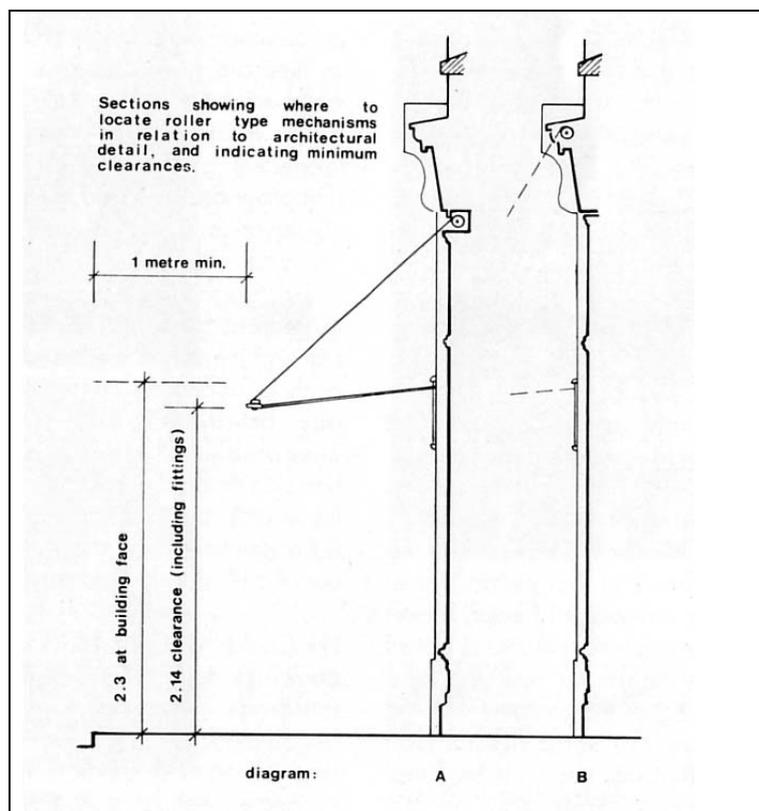
Blinds can add colour and interest to the street scene if they are appropriate to the period and character of the area. Care is needed in the selection of an appropriate blind and fabric for a building, especially in conservation areas. On listed buildings correct detailing and traditional craftsmanship is also required.

Some 18th and 19th century buildings may be so delicately detailed that a blind would not be appropriate at all. In such cases internal blinds may be the only desirable solution, if shade is needed. Traditional canvas roller or 'apron' blinds were a common feature on 19th century shopfronts, and would be suitable in older parts of the City and shopfronts of that period. These blinds have the advantage of being almost imperceptible when retracted into a slot at the top of the shopfront opening (see diagram A) or incorporated with the cornice above the shop fascia (see diagram B). Blind boxes must be fitted above the glass, preferably on the underside of the structural soffit, so to avoid obscuring any architectural detail.

Some 20th century buildings are visually robust enough to take a rigid blind or modern roller blind, if well suited within the opening. It is unwise, however, to consider modern buildings in isolation. Thought must be given to the impact on the street scene as a whole and the character of the area. Curved, rigid framed, fixed blinds, for example, should not be used in conservation areas or on historic buildings, as they are generally unsympathetic with the character of such buildings and areas. Blinds made of plastic or very bright, fluorescent, glossy materials would also be inappropriate on listed buildings and in conservation areas, the preferred material being canvas with a matt finish.

In general, there is no objection to the name of the firm that occupies the building or shop, appearing on the blind; however, any additional advertising is not acceptable. The use of a traditional hanging board, crest, logo or symbol is more appropriate for more prominent advertisements in the street scene, than the use of a blind for that purpose.

The Council will generally not permit blinds above first floor sill level. However, on old buildings which are designed to accommodate blinds on upper levels, renewal will be acceptable if the blinds are concealed behind a traditional, detailed valance and do not carry advertisements. Planning permission is normally required for blinds that do not carry lettering or symbols. Blinds that do carry symbols or lettering do not need planning permission but the advertisement on them may require advertisement consent. Listed building consent is also required where a listed building is affected. In any case advice from the Council's Design Officers of Development Planning Services should be sought prior to installing a blind.



Highways regulations require that there should be a minimum of 1m in width from the outer edge of the blind to the kerb line (or if appropriate, to the centre of an alleyway), and the height must not be less than 2.14m from the pavement level to the underside of the blind. Canopies constructed from solid materials and designed as a fixed part of a building, require planning permission and are not considered within this Design Guide. Canopies are also subject to requirements under highways regulations but these differ from those for blinds. For further advice on Highways matters click on Contacts List below for details.



Traditional white canvas retractable blind. When extended, it makes an attractive and unobtrusive sun blind.



When retracted the traditional roller blind is almost imperceptible;

Flagpoles

The erection of a flagpole and flag(s) may require planning permission and/or advertisement consent. In addition, on listed buildings, listed building consent is required. Advice should be sought on individual cases. Flagpoles may not always be appropriate in sensitive parts of conservation areas, residential areas, on listed buildings or on business premises with narrow frontages.

Security Shutters

Security shutters normally require planning permission, and for listed buildings listed building consent is also required. Roller shutters will not normally be given consent as they contribute nothing to the street scene, and can detract from the architectural integrity of a building. In sensitive streets and buildings which require security measures, anodised or otherwise treated, internally fitted shutters of the brick bond grill type, is the preferred solution. Other suitable methods are internally fitted 'concertina' shutters and jewellers' security devices. If necessary, on open fronted shops, a combination of grill and roller shutter may be acceptable but their use is not encouraged.

Open Fronted Shopfronts

The removal of shopfront features such as doors, stallrisers, transoms, mullions, glazing and glazing bars, in order to create an open fronted shop, can detract from the architectural integrity of the building and character of the street. At night such shopfronts, which necessitate security shutters, create dead and uninviting spaces which offer no interest to the passer by. This type of shopfront will therefore be discouraged. However, where such shopfronts exist, the installation of sliding glass panels which form a glass shopfront at night, is the preferred solution.

Burglar and Fire Alarms

These items are often necessary, but their insensitive siting can be visually detrimental to a building. Sometimes it is preferable to install alarms either near ground level or on upper storeys, where they are less visually intrusive. Ideally they should be incorporated into the design of a shopfront, which is often easy on modern shops. For traditional shops it may be possible to modify a small part of the shopfront, such as one panel of the stallriser, to accommodate such a fitting.

Floodlighting

Floodlighting does not normally require planning permission; however the installation of the necessary light fittings does. Where a listed building is involved listed building consent is required for the light fittings as well as the actual floodlighting. It is often preferable for light fittings to be located at basement level out of view. Consideration must be given to the effect on traffic when positioning light fittings, as the light can sometimes cause confusion to drivers.

Further Advice and Information

Further advice on shopfront replacement and alteration, blinds and signs, can be obtained by contacting the conservation and design officers of Development Planning Services. Click below for details

CLICK HERE FOR LINK TO
WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL
CONTACTS LIST

For copies of the **Unitary Development Plan**, please contact your local One Stop Services (click above) or ring

General Inquiries Tel: **(020) 7641 6000**.

Department of Planning and City Development, Development Planning Services, May 1993