



Subject: Adding Awnings to Historic Storefronts and Entrances

- Applicable Standards:**
2. Retention of Historic Character
 6. Repair/Replacement of Deteriorated or Missing Features Based on Evidence
 9. Compatible New Additions / Alterations
 10. Reversibility of New Additions/Alterations

Issue: Historic awnings are found in a variety of styles, shapes and materials. Standard hanging awnings, steel rolling awnings and flat metal or wood awnings that stretch along an entire main street were both functional and decorative. They kept rooms cool and shaded and protected window shoppers from inclement weather. Awnings with solid colors, stripes or patterns complemented paint schemes, called attention to openings and provided a background for advertising.

Repair and reinstallation of awnings can be an important component of a building's rehabilitation. But an inappropriate awning treatment can diminish the building's character, or create an entirely new appearance that has no historic basis. Unless documentation exists, awnings generally should not be installed on building types that did not customarily have awnings, for example, utilitarian structures like warehouses and mills. The same goes for secondary doors and entrances that would not have historically been emphasized with an awning. New replacement awnings should be compatible with historic examples. So called "long dome" or convex awnings are usually not appropriate either in shape or, if they are vinyl, in material and appearance. Advertisements and store names should be muted rather than the central focus of the awning. If an awning treatment adversely affects the historic character of a building, the project will not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, despite the fact that it may be less permanent, and more reversible, than some other rehabilitation treatments.



Historic photo showing retractable canvas awning.

Application 1 (*Incompatible treatment later corrected to meet the Standards*): This relatively modest, four-story commercial structure was built in the 1890s on a corner in a small-town business district. A decorative cornice, arched window openings and wood windows and spandrel panels on the upper stories survived to the period of rehabilitation, but the main entrance and display area had been replaced with a permastone storefront. Historic photographs indicated that the storefront was originally topped by a narrow projecting roof with a large shed-shaped canvas awning below.



Building with permastone storefront prior to rehabilitation.

Application 1, continued -

As part of the rehabilitation, a compatible storefront was installed consisting of a simple glass display window with a standing-seam metal shed roof above it. The replacement awning, however, was a contemporary "long dome" awning with a glossy vinyl covering.

To conform with the **Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**, the inappropriate awning was replaced with a type that more accurately resembled the shape and material shown in the historic documentation and known to be common among turn-of-the-century storefronts. The replacement awning is a standard, shed shape that is sold by many companies as a stock product. Although a functioning, retractable awning would have been the most appropriate solution, the fixed, shed awning was an acceptable compromise.



Original "long-dome" treatment for replacement awning.



Revised solution matches historic awning shape and material.

Application 2 (*Incompatible treatment corrected to meet the Standards*): The same rehabilitation project converted two doors on the side of the building to main entrances for upper floor tenant space. A long dome awning, like that used on the front of the building, was installed over the two doors and decorative wood surrounds were applied on the sides of both entrances. The awning was not a traditional style that would have been used historically, nor would a single awning have been placed over two separate entrances. The new surrounds were also not based upon historic documentation. These two treatments were incompatible with the historic character of the building. Together they gave this secondary facade a prominence it never had.

In order to meet the **Secretary's Standards**, the surrounds were removed and the long dome awning was replaced by two individual awnings. The revised treatment was more in keeping with traditional awning arrangement, shape and material. This approach identified the entrances but did not group them into a single arrangement that was contrary to the building's historic design and appearance.



Side entrances with single continuous awning.



Revised treatment with a shed awning over each entrance.

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These bulletins are issued to explain preservation project decisions made by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The resulting determinations, based on the **Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**, are not necessarily applicable beyond the unique facts and circumstances of each particular case.