

Shopfronts and Advertisements Design Guide



154 Union Street, 1951

INTRODUCTION

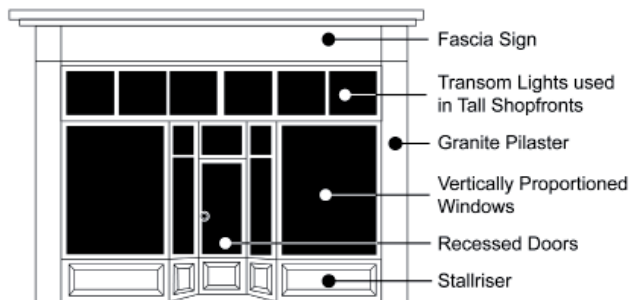
The high architectural quality of the City Centre of Aberdeen is widely recognised. It is demonstrated by the large number of listed buildings and by the fact that most of the central area comprises a conservation area designated as outstanding for grant purposes. The most important and best known street in Aberdeen is Union Street and here more than anywhere else in the City Centre can be seen the importance of the design of shopfronts and signs to the character of the area.

These shopfronts and signs however, are subject to relatively frequent alteration or replacement. To ensure that the character of individual buildings and the street as a whole is safeguarded, this Design Guide has been produced to illustrate certain basic principles that should be respected in the design of shopfronts and advertisements.

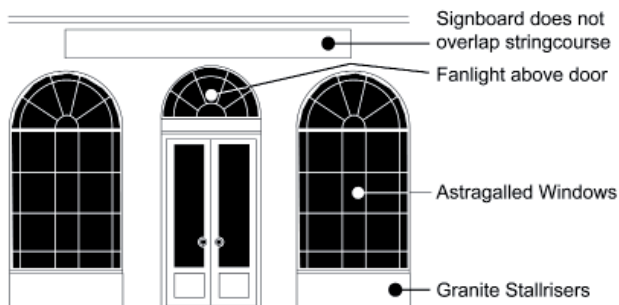
The guidance material is primarily aimed at the specific problems of the Union Street Conservation Area but it can also be usefully applied to other conservation areas and throughout the City generally.

ORIGINAL SHOPFRONTS

Where good original shopfronts survive they should be retained and restored. The illustration shows the arrangement of a typical Union Street shopfront.

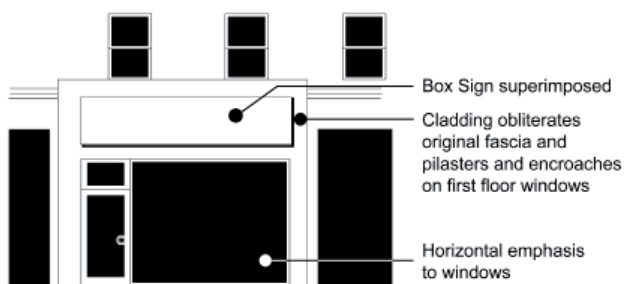


Many of the original buildings at the eastern end of Union Street incorporated arched door and window openings at street level. Today the greatest number of this type of frontage is to be found in King Street. Most are much altered but where they remain, owners will be encouraged to restore them to their original appearance. Number 23 King Street is an example of where this has been carried out.



INAPPROPRIATELY ALTERED SHOPFRONTS

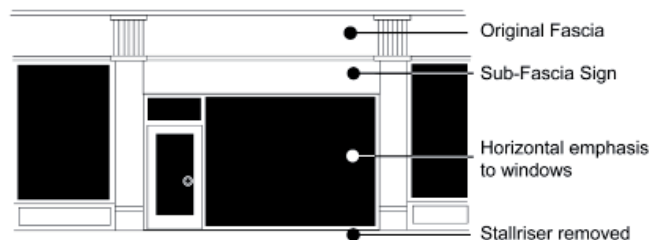
The illustration below shows the type of shopfront that destroys all trace of the original and alters the relationship between the shopfront and the rest of the building frontage.



SUB-FASCIAS

Whilst not quite so disfiguring to the building as the previous example, a very widespread problem has developed over the years where the occupants of shops have lowered the ceilings within their premises and then correspondingly lowered the height of their shop windows by inserting a 'sub-fascia' sign beneath the building's original fascia level. This tends to be very unsightly in that it alters the balance of solid to void within the shopfront and has been a particular problem in Union Street where there are many very tall shopfronts. Sub-fascia signs will not be permitted in new shopfronts and the removal of existing sub-fascias will be encouraged.

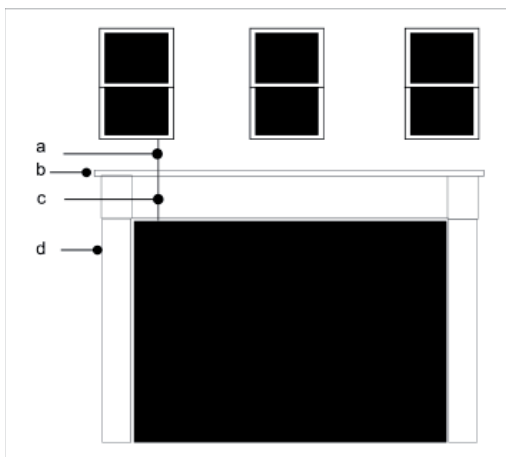
CORPORATE IDENTITY MATERIALS



An ongoing trend that has had a detrimental effect on the character of Union Street is the displacement of local retailers by national companies who make use of a 'corporate identity' in shopfront design and signage. This had often been done with no concern for the character of the building occupied or for the wider streetscape. Often associated with the insensitive imposition of a corporate identity is the use of inappropriate materials. Traditionally, shopfronts would be constructed from timber, glass and granite. Some modern materials such as brightly coloured and highly reflective plastic, sometimes used in signboards, do not complement the original granite facades. Similarly the cladding of pilasters that were originally intended to be the same granite as that used in the rest of the building frontage, in other types of polished stone, also alters the character of the building. Where shopfronts have been inappropriately altered, an application for a new shopfront or for major alterations will be treated as an opportunity for restoring the frontage in accordance with the principles described in this guide.

FRAMING THE OPENING

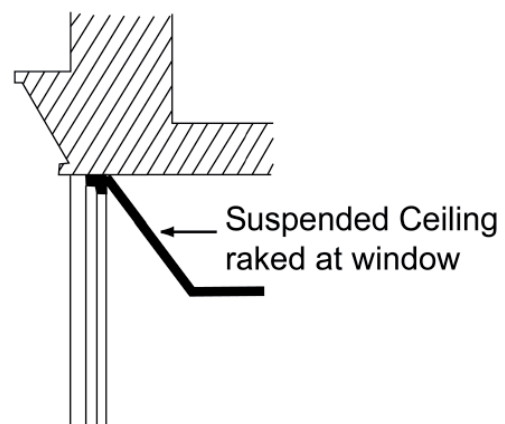
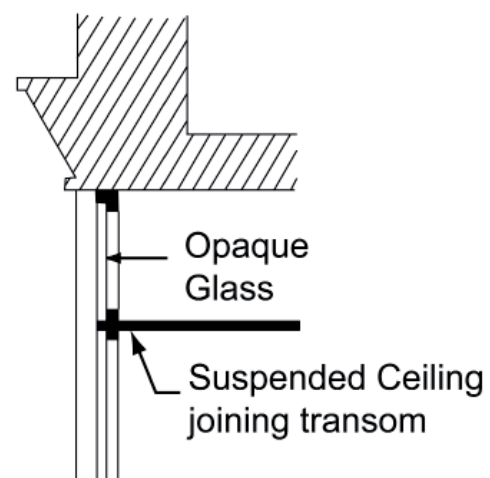
On a shopfront where original pilasters, fascia and cornice survive, these elements should be retained or, where they have been covered over or removed, they should generally be re-instated. This is particularly important where there are several shopfronts in one building and the continuous cornice and uniform pilasters are part of the architectural composition of the elevation. Many shopfronts have been inserted into buildings that originally had a domestic frontage at ground level. Depending on when this was done, there may never have been the traditional arrangement of fascia and pilasters. However, this is such a successful method of ensuring a satisfactory relationship between the shopfront and the building as a whole that when a new shopfront is proposed, consideration should be given to framing the opening in this way. The main points to be observed are:



- a) The shopfront should not encroach upon the first floor windows.
- b) Stringcourses should be retained or reinstated if previously removed. Where there is no stringcourse on the building to delineate the upper limit of the shopfront the new fascia should incorporate a cornice to define this junction and, more functionally, to throw water clear of the shopfront.
- c) The fascia should not be too deep. The depth should be determined by its relation to the height of the shopfront and the height of the building as a whole. It should never be more than 25% of the height of the shopfront.
- d) Pilasters should be granite (to match the granite of the building) or timber.

WITHIN THE OPENING

Within the frame of fascia and pilasters, most of the area of the shopfront will be glazed. A large, undivided expanse of glass can give the appearance of a gaping cavern over which the upper storeys look uncomfortably unsupported. It is more satisfactory to sub-divide the glazed area. Generally this should be done so as to give the display windows a vertical emphasis as was normal in historic buildings. Transom lights (as illustrated on page 2) can be employed in the case of tall shopfronts to further sub-divide the frontage. Where there is a suspended ceiling in the shop, there are various ways in which full-height windows can still be used within the shopfront opening. Two are illustrated:



Rather than taking the window down to pavement level it will generally be preferable to use a stallriser. This protects the window and visually provides a base to the shopfront, again preventing the cavern effect. The doors to the shop, though predominantly glazed, should incorporate a solid panel in the lower part corresponding in height to that of the stallriser.

MATERIALS AND FINISHES

Timber is the traditional material for shopfronts and it remains the most versatile. Aluminum may be an acceptable alternative except where a reproduction of an original shopfront is required, but powder coated finishes in light primary colours or white are not appropriate for door and window frames as this tends to give these elements undue prominence. Where a new shopfront in a traditional style is being contemplated, it is essential that the details of the shopfront are historically accurate. For example, where a stallriser is to be timber panelled it must be formed with real timber inset panels. Plywood with applied mouldings is not acceptable.

FASCIA SIGNS

The preferred method of advertising the name of the shop is by painted lettering on a timber fascia. In all but the most sensitive locations a matt-finish plastic or pressed metal fascia board may also be acceptable with individual cut-out letters applied to this.

On granite fascias that are an integral part of the building, individual cut-out letters may be acceptable though there is concern about frequent changes to the signage leaving the granite marked by fixing holes. One solution to this problem is to cover the face of the fascia with a board and fix the lettering to this. Internally illuminated box fascia signs are not acceptable unless the box can be completely recessed into the building. In this case only the individual letters may be illuminated, whilst the background must remain opaque. Alternatively, internally illuminated individual letters fixed to a board may be acceptable. Fascia signs may be illuminated externally by means of a trough down-lighter or spotlights, except where the light fittings would interfere with architectural features of the building. Trough down-lighters are to be preferred to spotlights where the number of spotlights required would be considered obtrusive.

The height of internally illuminated lettering on a sign will be no more than 300mm high. Where the sign consists of lower case lettering preceded by a capital, the capital may be 350mm high.

SUPPLY CABLES

Generally lighting cables should be concealed within the building. Cables may be acceptable on the surface of buildings if they can be made inconspicuous by running them in to angles formed by projecting features such as string-courses. Any external cable must be grey in colour to blend in with the granite walling. Applications for illuminated advertisements should indicate any proposed external cable runs.

PROJECTING SIGNS

The preferred type of projecting sign is the traditional hanging signboard. If it has to be illuminated this should be by means of lighting troughs located at the top of the board or by spotlights mounted on the supporting bracket. There are many internally illuminated projecting box signs at present in the Union Street Conservation Area, but hanging signs are considered more appropriate where the shop front is of a traditional character. When box signs are considered acceptable the maximum overall projection permitted from the face of the building is 700mm, whereas there may be more leeway in the overall size and projection of a non-illuminated traditional hanging sign. The use of projecting signs traditionally displayed by certain businesses such as a chemist's mortar and pestle is to be encouraged. Such signs can add interest and variety to the street.

OTHER SIGNS

Generally, no signs or advertisements will be permitted on the upper storeys of buildings other than the names of businesses located on upper floors which may be displayed on their windows by means of black or gold lettering applied directly to the glass.

ROLLER SHUTTERS

The use of roller shutters to protect windows or whole shopfronts is not encouraged within conservation areas. Where it is accepted that a roller shutter is necessary in a conservation area then the roller box must be totally concealed (without enlarging the shop's fascia or moving it forward). The shutter should be in the form of an open lattice and must be located on the inside face of the shop window.

RECORDS OF ORIGINAL SHOPFRONTS

The guidance contained in this leaflet provides general principles that can be applied to shopfronts throughout the City Centre. For many buildings, particularly in Union Street, we hold records of original shopfronts in the form of photographs and architect's drawings. There is the opportunity, therefore, for reconstructing particularly interesting shopfronts. We will advise on what records are available and for which buildings a historic reconstruction of the frontage is the preferred solution.

CONSENTS REQUIRED

The replacement or alteration of shopfronts is controlled by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. Signs and advertisements are controlled by this Act and the Control of Advertisements (Scotland) Regulations 1984. Where a shop is part of a listed building, any alteration which affects the character of the building will need listed building consent. As a result of this legislation, almost any material change to a shopfront in the City Centre will require consent. Anyone considering carrying out such work should ascertain from us which consents are necessary in any particular case and submit the appropriate applications.

373-377 Union Street, 1937



CONTENTS OF DRAWINGS

This guide has emphasised that shop fronts should not be considered in isolation from the buildings in which they are installed. For this reason, drawings that accompany the application should include an elevation, not only of the shop front itself, but also of the floors above and the shop fronts on either side.

If you require any further information please contact:

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154 Union Street, 1978



154 Union Street, 1996