

2.11 PARAPETS AND CORNICES

Parapets and cornices mark the transition between buildings and the sky; they cap the building and conceal the roof.

Parapets often extend well above the roof to create an illusion of height and give the building a more imposing frontage than it would otherwise have.

Some of the Victorian parapets use a number of decorative devices such as ornamental gables, balustrades, finials, towers and flagpoles to great effect, giving identity to the street and adding interest and variety to the city form.

A variation of parapet heights and variety of forms contribute much to the architectural character of the street. Parapets of variable heights establish a frontage rhythm.

Buildings in the traditional town centres exhibit a wide range of parapet treatments ranging from flat or stepped parapets and small pediments to more elaborate examples with towers and domes. Flat parapets are uncompromising and lack detail, rhythm and interest. Therefore, use parapets as a dominant architectural device to define streetscape.

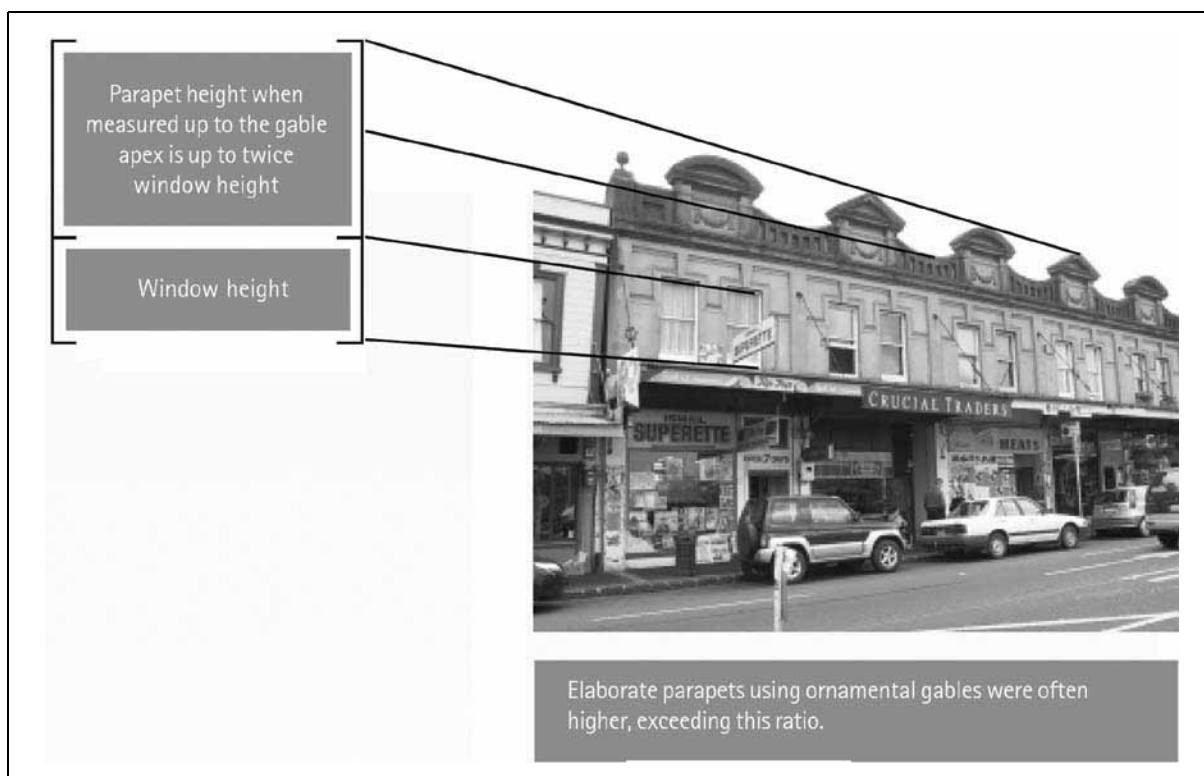


Parapet height equals window height

Window height

In order to achieve a balanced and well proportioned facade, a particular relationship between window height and parapet height exists.





2.12 FACADE MODULATION

In accordance with the design philosophy of their time, facades were modulated both vertically and horizontally.

The even repetition of elements across a frontage was avoided by the architects of the time. For example, windows were nearly always grouped in twos and threes.

A central bay of the building was often projected forward slightly, or distinguished by grander windows, pilasters, ornamentation, or parapet elements. On longer frontages bays to each side also received such treatment. Rather than the bland homogeneity or repetition of most modern buildings, a rhythmic hierarchy of bays was built up, each bay in turn being a composition of windows and ornamentation. This subdivision of a building into visually articulated elements related back to the human scale and suggested the variety of spaces behind the frontage.

The many vertical elements combine to give a visual intricacy to a frontage when seen in perspective along the street. Human scale and a sense of the hierarchy of levels in a building were achieved by dividing a frontage into two or more horizontal bands.

These horizontal bands are:

Ground floor defined by the verandah line (and sometimes by a cornice).

Second and subsequent levels defined by spandrel panels, windows and cornices.

In three-level buildings, the middle level is usually higher and grander in its detailing than the top level.

Therefore, modulate all building facades facing the street to pick up on existing vertical and horizontal rhythms.



A simple paired grouping of windows.





A symmetrical grouping of windows.

2.13 WALLS

The manner in which a wall is detailed and perforated dictates the way in which an observer perceives its structure.

The constraints of brick masonry construction have resulted in frontages throughout the traditional town centres appearing visually monolithic above shopfront level: thick walls perforated with individual door and window openings with deep reveals. Regardless of whether their structure was brick, reinforced concrete or structural steel, buildings were generally finished so as to resemble solid masonry, and thus maintain this permanent, monolithic image.

The continuity of the wall predominates over openings within it: above verandah level, the area of wall generally comprises 3 to 6 times as much of the frontage as the aggregate area of window openings. This ratio is critical to the apparent solidity of the wall.

For the wall to be read as a solid integrated mass rather than a post-and-beam structure it is also important that individual openings are relatively small, that their proportions generally be vertical rather than horizontal, and that their surrounds be detailed as part of a continuous wall structure (e.g. arch forms). Glazing should be inset deeply so as to show or suggest the thickness of the wall.

Similarly, vertical or cut-out parapet features can also demonstrate the solidity of a wall by exposing its thickness at the top.

Therefore, maintain the continuity of solid looking walls perforated by openings, especially above shopfront level.



A "monolithic" frontage with narrow arched windows.

Note how window openings and the perforated parapet reveal the thickness of the wall.





2.14 WINDOWS

Windows are the "eyes" of the building; their shape and arrangement on the frontage gives pattern, rhythm and a human scale to the streetscape.

Windows were often spaced along frontages to present an ordered appearance to the street. In Victorian and Edwardian times shops often had living accommodation on the first floor, with the shape, size and placement of windows conveying this domestic scale. Construction techniques and the small unit sizes of materials used allowed a high degree of variation and individuality to be expressed.

Bay windows projecting from the frontage reflect the importance of the interior space while giving the occupants better lighting and improved street views.

Therefore, other than for shopfront, design windows as holes in the wall and as an integral part of horizontal and vertical rhythms along the street.



2.15 SHOP FRONTS

Shop fronts are the dominant visual element under the verandah, competing with each other to provide commodities and services we require. Well designed shop fronts can enhance the street and complement the design of the building in which they are set.

Shopkeepers need to make their whereabouts known and to display their merchandise. All this helps to create the busy, colourful and vibrant atmosphere we associate with traditional shopping streets.

Many existing shop fronts are subject to pressure for regular refurbishment, to maintain a "progressive" retailing image for the occupants, and so many have a relatively short life span. Because of this, and to maintain an overall street character, guidelines are desirable for existing and future occupants, developers, and designers.

A traditional feature of shops is the use of the recessed entrance way. Many town centres consisted predominantly of small specialist shops. The entrance way is a welcoming gesture; it is a space of human scale providing a transition or pause between the bustling dynamic street space and the individual shop space. It encourages window shopping without disruption to the pedestrian flow along the foot-path, and allows a greater window display area to the street.



2.16 MATERIALS

Although there are still a few of the old buildings remaining which have frontages of timber detailed to imitate masonry, solid plasterwork is common to the frontages of many of the character buildings of the traditional town centres.

Solid plasterwork was a highly developed technique to create detailed decorative forms in cement or lime plaster. This was applied over brick or other solid substrates which "roughed out" the same forms to provide a base and key for the plaster. The plaster was easily worked into a variety of architectural styles and was often used to suggest stone construction.

The appropriateness of modern materials in the traditional town centres subject to the character overlay will depend very much on their position and function and the way they are used and detailed. Therefore, building materials suitable for town centre frontages should seek to achieve a similar visual effect.





Solid plasterwork illustrating a variety of structural and ornamental motifs.



Exposed brick masonry as a counterpoint to solid plasterwork.

2.17 DECORATION

In the past, decoration was regarded as an integral part of design; as an expression of the building's individuality, it personalised and humanised architecture.

Decoration provided a further layer of complexity and visual definition. It was frequently applied as relatively small-scale elements which:

give visual cues as to the function and importance of a building - civic and private buildings were often richly decorated, with the style, amount of decoration and materials involved reinforcing the use and significance of the building;

provide a human scale to buildings, unlike plain frontages and simple unadorned shapes which provide few visual cues as to scale;

enliven the frontage and enrich the streetscape by providing changing patterns of shadow, according to season and time of day - shadows from decorative elements such as window

openings, cornices and pilasters projecting from the building face create a high degree of modelling;

provide visual delight, especially on those parts of the building that are seen and appreciated by pedestrians;

enhance a favourable building location or attract attention - buildings on corner sites are often more elaborately decorated to emphasise their corner position, landmark quality and sense of place.

Therefore, use decoration and art work in innovative ways to continue the tradition of decorative elements.



SECTION CONTINUED

