

Shopfronts

CHAPTER 12





Well-designed and constructed shopfronts, whether or not they are original to a protected structure, are generally of special interest, adding significantly to the attractiveness of shopping streets

12.1 Introduction

12.1.1 Carefully-designed and well-constructed shopfronts are important features of many buildings and streetscapes. There are now few shopfronts in Ireland remaining from the eighteenth century but many, mostly of timber construction, survive from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are examples throughout the country of fine early twentieth-century shopfronts constructed in render and also a number of increasingly rare mid twentieth-century Art Deco or Modern Movement-style chrome, steel, marble and glass-panelled frontages.

12.1.2 Because of the prominent role which shopfronts play in businesses, they are frequently subject to pressures for alteration or replacement to meet changing needs. A balance will need to be struck between the commercial requirements of the owners and the protection of shopfronts of special importance within the context of architectural heritage.

12.1.3 The presence of well-crafted and historic shopfronts is an important part of the character of some ACAs. Every effort should be made to protect shopfronts that are of special interest. Expert knowledge and advice may be needed in order to identify such shopfronts and their associated features. In assessing the qualities of a shopfront, the following issues should be addressed:

- a) Is the shopfront original to the building?
- b) If not, how does the shopfront integrate with the rest of the building?
- c) Does the shopfront complement the design of the upper floors of the building?
- d) Does it obstruct openings at the upper levels of the building?
- e) Does the shopfront stretch across two or more distinct buildings? If so, does it contribute to the character of the buildings or the ACA or detract from it?
- f) What contribution does the shopfront make to the street?
- g) Are the materials and proportions of the shopfront appropriate to the scale and fabric of the building and/or the street?
- h) If not, is the shopfront nonetheless special in its own right and worthy of protection?

- i) Is there good lettering or signage incorporated within the front? This could be on the fascia signboard, on other signboards, on the windows or on the façade and gable walls of the upper floors;
- j) Are there any interesting details associated with the shopfront such as sill guards, retractable blinds, shutters, gates or tiling?
- k) Are there any details likely to be concealed behind later work? These could include parts of an earlier shopfront or parts of the original building façade;
- l) If there are concealed features, should they be re-exposed or is the later work of such merit that it should be left undisturbed?
- m) Is the shopfront intact or are there small details missing or damaged? Would replacing these details enhance the appreciation of the design?
- n) How is the shopfront now finished? Would its design and special character be enhanced by a more appropriate paint scheme?
- o) Are there later added details, for example signage, lighting, cabling or advertising boards, which detract from the character of the shopfront and which could be easily removed or relocated?

IDENTIFYING SPECIAL FEATURES FOR PROTECTION

- 12.1.4 Features of shopfronts, which are likely to be of interest and which should be identified and protected, include pilasters or uprights, apron panels, stall risers or plinths below the display windows, any mullions or glazing bars to the display window, sill guards, fascia signboards, blinds and blind boxes, shutters and shutter boxes, cornices, cresting, consoles or brackets, doors, gates, decorative tiling to the floor of the entrance porch, and others. Where the frontage includes a display window of architectural merit at first or even second floor level, this should be protected as part of the composition.
- 12.1.5 Good lettering on fascias, signboards, windows or doors should be identified, as should interesting hanging signs or trade emblems, which are now increasingly rare.
- 12.1.6 While most of the features listed above are generally associated with traditional timber shopfronts, the importance and special interest of more recent types and designs of shopfronts and other commercial frontages should not be overlooked. Many of the materials used in twentieth-century shopfronts such as Vitrolite may no longer be manufactured and as such are irreplaceable.



The functional and decorative features common to many historic shopfronts including tiled stall risers (top), ornate brackets (middle) or original shutters (bottom) are all part of the special interest of a shopfront



Good lettering on sign boards, fascias or hanging signs advertising the shopholder or type of establishment may be of artistic interest, whether painted or gilt, in faience, timber, cement, steel or neon. This watchmaker's sign is painted in gold paint on the reverse of a glass plate with acid-etched flourishes



While traditional timber shopfronts are often valued, there is also a legacy of Art Deco-style steel and Vitrolite fronts that should be equally treasured as they represent the modern spirit, new materials and design ethos of their time, illustrated in this elaborate example

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS AFFECTING SHOPFRONTS

- 12.1.7 Architecturally valuable shopfronts, whether original to the building or of a later period, should not be demolished or dismantled even if a change of use is proposed which will make the shopfront redundant. This may occur, for example, when a commercial premises is to be converted to a dwelling. It could be a requirement that the shopfront be retained in place after the change of use. Proposals to remove a good, but later, shopfront in order to build a new ground floor façade purely on the basis of speculation should generally not be considered acceptable.
- 12.1.8 Where, within an ACA, there are proposals to remove a shopfront that is obviously of little interest or merit in order to restore a façade to its previous appearance, either matching the rest of a terrace or in accordance with the character of the area, this should normally be acceptable.
- 12.1.9 All light-fittings, security alarms, cameras, cabling etc. which are proposed to be fitted to or across a historic shopfront, and cannot be located elsewhere, should be required to be carefully located and fixed in order to minimise their visual impact and to avoid physical damage to the fabric.

12.2 Repair of Shopfronts

- 12.2.1 Where small amounts of detail are missing from a shopfront that is part of a protected structure or is within an ACA, matching replacements could be fitted. However, any such replication should always be based upon firm evidence of the original design of the shopfront using old photographs or drawings, or by replicating surviving details, for example where one bracket is missing but others remain. It should be clear on close inspection which is the original material or detail and which the replacement.
- 12.2.2 As with the repair of other external joinery items, as much as possible of the original fabric should be retained. The replacement of whole elements or sections for the sake of cost or convenience should not be permitted. Decayed sections should be repaired by the splicing-in of new, matching pieces of timber. The use of substitute materials such as glass-reinforced plastic to simulate carved joinery should not be permitted on shopfronts of special interest.



A good quality shopfront can be retained even following a change of use, allowing it to continue to contribute to the character of the structure and of the wider area



The essence of good repair work is to retain the maximum amount of viable fabric that contributes to the character of the shopfront, to carry out the work using proven methods of repair and to fit appropriately detailed new elements where necessary. This shopfront was carefully repaired with grant assistance from the local authority

12.3 Signage

- 12.3.1 New lettering and signage should be required to respect the character of the protected structure and its setting and, where relevant, the character of an ACA.
- 12.3.2 Where good lettering exists, but where it is imperative that new lettering be added, the new lettering could be mounted over the existing in a way which does not damage the earlier lettering and which allows for easy reversal at a later stage if required.

12.4 Awnings and Blinds

- 12.4.1 Proposals to install new awnings or blinds to the shopfront of a protected structure should be treated with caution. Some modern awnings require large blind boxes that can be difficult to integrate successfully with an existing shopfront without damaging its special character. Blind boxes should not be allowed to mask or cut through any detailing which contributes to the interest and quality of the façade or shopfront. Where this means that full protection of the window display cannot be achieved by means of an external blind, alternative protection such as internal filter blinds or glazing could be considered where these would not compromise the special character of the shopfront.
- 12.4.2 Where the fitting of a new awning or blind is considered acceptable, the design and materials should be appropriate to the character and quality of the building and its setting and, where relevant, to the character of an ACA.

12.5 Security Screens

- 12.5.1 External steel roller shutters are generally not suitable for use either on historic shopfronts or on the fronts of buildings within an ACA. Externally mounted shutters require large shutter boxes and side channels which are difficult to accommodate successfully on a historic façade without a substantial loss of architectural quality to both the building and its setting. The appearance of one or more closed shutters on a street can be damaging to the character of the street.



Where good lettering or signage exists but a premises has changed hands, it may be possible to add new signage while leaving the original lettering in place. For example, a new signboard can be mounted over the existing one without damaging the original lettering below or, as in this illustration, new signage can be placed elsewhere on the shopfront, leaving the old name in place



A new awning has been successfully fitted to this shopfront without the need for a visually obtrusive blind box



The entrance doors to this establishment have been fitted with roller shutters. Although the physical impact has been minimised, the closed shutters nonetheless have a large visual impact on the appearance of the structure and the streetscape. This impact can sometimes be overcome with the use of internal demountable grilles, a less visually obtrusive option of securing a historic shopfront, especially when painted a dark or neutral colour

- 12.5.2 Where there is an obvious need for enhanced security, the use of alternative methods of protection should be considered, including, where appropriate, the use of laminated glass, internal shutters mounted behind the shopfront display or external demountable grilles.

12.6 New Shopfronts

- 12.6.1 The design of a new shopfront for installation into a protected structure requires careful consideration and should not detract from the character of the rest of the building. This does not mean that the design of the new shopfront should be an imitation of past styles. A sympathetic well-designed modern intervention will usually be preferable to an ill-proportioned imitation of a traditional shopfront.
- 12.6.2 New shopfronts should generally not be permitted to extend into the floor above, thus concealing the first-floor windowsills and perhaps part of the openings, unless this was part of the original design of the building. Where a new shopfront is proposed as a replacement for an inappropriate one of little merit, the opportunity could be taken to ensure that elements of the new shopfront, such as the signboard and the display windows, are appropriately scaled in relation to the building as a whole.
- 12.6.3 Standard corporate frontages are rarely appropriate to historic buildings or streetscapes, nor are large plate glass frontages that require the partial demolition of a ground-floor façade. Large, illuminated fascia or projecting signs can potentially damage the character of a historic building or street and proposals to install these should be carefully scrutinised.
- 12.6.4 Where the shop or premises now occupies more than one original building, a new, single shopfront should not be allowed to straddle originally distinct elevations.
- 12.6.5 Commercial usage does not necessarily require the insertion of new shopfronts or display windows. Where the existing ground floor of a protected structure retains its original openings and intact wall fabric, the planning authority should not generally permit proposals to alter these original features to provide a shopfront or display windows.



Often new, so-called 'traditional-style' timber shopfronts have little in common in their proportioning and detailed design with the true traditional shopfront, sometimes using glass-reinforced plastic imitation brackets and plywood pilasters. A well-designed contemporary shopfront, such as this example, which reflects the design values of its own time while respecting its historic location, can be a more honest and pleasing solution



Some protected structures, in which every element of the façade is carefully orchestrated, cannot readily take the alterations required by a change of use without affecting the strong character of the original design. In this illustration, a successful transition has been made from a bank to a shop with discreet signage located inside the shop window