

C H A P T E R

6

INFILL AND
ALTERATIONS
TO NON-HISTORIC
HOUSES



This chapter presents design guidelines for the following design elements:

- Site Design p. 82
- Building Mass, Scale and Form p. 84
- Building Materials p. 86
- Architectural Character p. 88
- Windows and Doors p. 89

6

INFILL AND ALTERATIONS TO NON-HISTORIC HOUSES

This chapter presents design guidelines for the construction of a new building, both single-family and multifamily developments. These guidelines also apply when alterations are being considered for non-historic houses. These “infill” principles relate to the fundamental relationships of a building to its context—such as mass, scale and form. These same principles are the most important for other, non-historic houses. *Also note that for many of the design topics presented in this chapter other City regulations may apply, in particular Title 13 Streets, Sidewalks and Public Places and Title 20 Zoning Ordinance of the San Jose Municipal Code. Please consult the City of San Jose before planning a project to determine which requirements are applicable.*

Designing a building to fit within the historic character of a neighborhood requires careful thought. First, it is important to realize that historic houses remain dynamic, with alterations to existing structures and construction of new buildings occurring over time.

Preservation does not mean that a neighborhood or historic district must be “frozen” in time, but it does mean that, when new building occurs, it should be in a manner that reinforces the basic visual characteristics of a block. This does not imply, however, that a new building must look old. In fact, imitating historic styles is generally discouraged.

Rather than imitating older buildings, a new design should relate to the fundamental characteristics of the historic houses on a block while also conveying the stylistic trends of today. It may do so by drawing upon basic ways of building that make up a part of the character of the property. Such features upon which to draw include the way in which a building is located on its site, the manner in which it relates to the street and its basic mass, form and materials. When these design variables are arranged in a new building to be similar to those seen traditionally, visual compatibility results.

These basic design relationships are more fundamental than the details of individual architectural styles and, therefore, it is possible to be compatible with the historic context while also producing a design that is contemporary.

It is also important that a new building in close proximity not impede one’s ability to interpret the character of a historic house; therefore, a new structure should be compatible in scale, site relationship and style. Simplicity and modesty in design are encouraged.



Rather than imitating older buildings, a new design should relate to the fundamental characteristics of the historic houses on a block while also conveying the stylistic trends of today.



Although some buildings and their entrances were raised a few feet traditionally, a first floor or entrance that is raised an entire story—to accommodate a garage—is inappropriate. (Pasadena, CA)



Design the porch of a new residence to be similar to those seen historically. (Pasadena, CA)



Orient the front of a house to the street and clearly identify the front door. This principle applies to multifamily structures as well.

Site Design

Maintain the pattern in which buildings relate to the street.

All historic houses significantly contribute to the design character of San Jose and should be preserved. Where new construction will occur it should **not** be constructed to block views to a historic house or visually distract from them.

6.1 A building should fit within the range of yard dimensions seen in the block.

- The front yard setback should match the established range of adjacent buildings.
- Where the setbacks are uniform, a building should be placed in general alignment with its neighbors.

6.2 Maintain the spacing of side yards.

- Side yard setbacks should be similar to others in the block, as seen from the street.

6.3 In some areas, setbacks vary, but generally fall within an established range.

- A greater variety in setbacks is appropriate in this case, but a building should be located within the average setback.

6.4 Orient the front of a house to the street and clearly identify the front door.

- A prominent entry will contribute to the “pedestrian-friendly” character of the street.
- Use a porch element to define the entry.
- Although some buildings were raised a few feet traditionally, a first floor or entrance that is raised an entire story—to accommodate a garage—is inappropriate.

6.5 Design a porch to be similar to those seen historically.

- A new porch should not visually overwhelm the primary facade.
- Use materials similar to those seen historically. Wood balustrades and porch posts (sometimes with brick piers) were most common.

6.6 Porch posts or columns should be of a substantial enough size that the porch does not appear to float above the entry.

- Wood, brick or stone columns are best for most structures in the neighborhood.

Maintain the traditional character of a building's site.

The progression of space on a property is an important characteristic in San Jose. Especially since most of the historic resources have residential characteristics, such as grassy front, side and rear yards. These site characteristics are important and should be respected when new construction occurs.

6.7 Maintain an attractively landscaped yard where residential characteristics existed historically.

- Do not pave this area with concrete so it effectively serves a parking lot.
- The use of rock and gravel is discouraged and, if used, should only occur as an accent element.
- Consider using decorative modular pavers, grass and cellular paving systems in order to minimize the impact of hard surface paving for patios or terraces where grass or other landscaping cannot be provided.

6.8 Maintain the visual connection of the building to the street.

- A walkway should lead straight from the sidewalk to the main entry.



Do not pave the front yard with concrete so it effectively serves as a parking lot.



Maintain an attractively landscaped yard where residential characteristics existed historically.



A building should fit within the range of yard dimensions seen in the block.



Subdivide larger masses into smaller “modules.” This single-family residence is broken into modules so it will not dominate the scale of the neighborhood. (Lafayette, CO)



Subdividing a larger building mass into smaller “modules” that are similar in size to buildings seen traditionally is encouraged. This new house is divided into modules, which is appropriate. (Pasadena, CA)



A new building should be similar to nearby historic homes in material, density and relationship to the street.

Building Mass, Scale and Form

Design a new building to reinforce a sense of human scale in San Jose.

The mass and scale of residential buildings are important design issues in San Jose. The traditional scale of buildings—originally designed as single-family houses—still dominates and enhances the pedestrian-friendly character of the streets. To the greatest extent possible, new construction should maintain this human scale. While new buildings are typically larger than many older houses, new construction should not be dramatically larger and cause the visual continuity to be compromised.

Also, while some larger institutional or multifamily structures were constructed historically, the tradition of single-family residences dominates the character of most neighborhoods. This tradition should be continued.

6.9 A new building should convey a sense of human scale. Consider the following techniques:

- Use building materials that are of traditional dimensions.
- Provide a one-story porch that is similar in size to that seen traditionally.
- Use a building mass that is similar in size to that seen traditionally.
- Use window openings that are similar in size and location to those seen traditionally.

6.10 A new building should not be significantly larger than those single-family structures seen traditionally.

- A new building should not be greater than two stories in height.
- Subdividing the mass of a larger building into smaller “modules” that are similar in size to buildings seen traditionally is encouraged.
- Other, subordinate modules may be attached to the primary building form.

6.11 Step a larger building down in height as it approaches a historic house.

- This will diminish the impact a new structure may have on a smaller historic house.

Use building forms that are similar to those of residential buildings seen traditionally.

A similarity of building forms also contributes to a sense of visual continuity. In order to maintain this feature, a new building should have a basic form that is similar to that seen traditionally.

6.12 Simple rectangular building forms with sloping roofs are preferred.

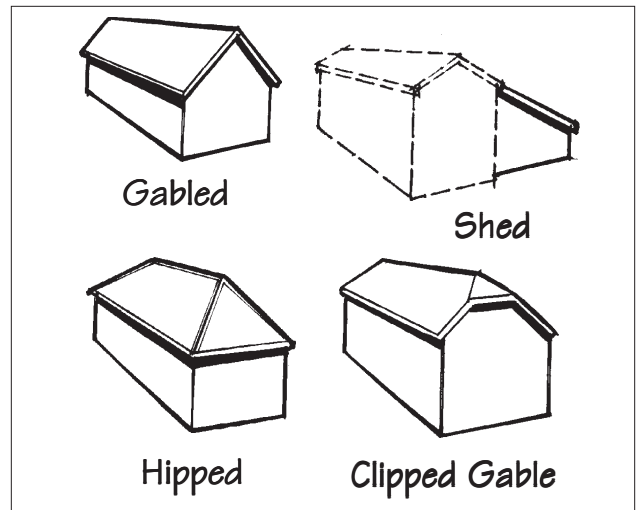
- “Exotic” building forms that would detract from the visual continuity of the streetscape are discouraged.
- Building forms should be similar to those seen traditionally.

6.13 Pitched gable and hip roofs are encouraged where they exist on surrounding historic houses.

- Shed roofs are appropriate for porches or on small additive forms attached to a building.



Use building forms that are similar to those of residential buildings seen traditionally, such as was done in this infill development in Memphis, Tennessee.



Pitched gable and hip roofs are encouraged where they exist on surrounding historic houses.



Pitched gable and hip roofs are encouraged where they exist on surrounding historic houses.



A new building should appear similar in mass and form to that of a single family structure seen traditionally in San Jose, such as the one on the right.



Alternative materials should appear similar in scale, proportion, texture and finish to those used traditionally. The synthetic wood siding in these two photos conveys a lap dimension similar to that used historically and is appropriate on these new buildings. (top photo: Port Royal, SC; middle photo: a commercial building that has been designed to fit into a residential context in Sarasota, FL; bottom photo: Steamboat Springs, CO)

Building Materials

Use building materials that appear similar to those used traditionally in San Jose.

Building materials of a new structure should be compatible with adjacent historic houses. They should appear similar to those seen traditionally to establish a sense of visual continuity.

6.14 Horizontal lap siding should be applied in a manner similar to that seen historically.

- New materials should relate to the lap exposure, texture and finish of traditional wood siding.
- The use of trim boards, that show depth and typify high-quality construction, is encouraged.
- All wood siding should have a weather-protective, painted finish.
- Use of highly reflective materials, such as glass or polished metal, is inappropriate as a primary building material.

6.15 The use of masonry that appears similar in character to that seen traditionally is also appropriate.

- Brick should have a modular dimension similar to that used traditionally.
- Stucco may also be appropriate on building styles that typically incorporate these materials.

6.16 New materials that are similar to traditional materials may be considered.

- Alternative materials should appear similar in scale, proportion, texture and finish to those used traditionally.
- They also should have a proven durability in locations that have a similar climate.

Use roof materials that are similar to those used traditionally.

6.17 Roof materials should convey a scale and texture similar to those used traditionally.

- Roof materials should be earth tones and have a matte, non-reflective finish.
- Tile may also be considered if it is integral to an architectural style, such as Spanish Eclectic.



Roof materials for new construction should convey a scale and texture similar to those used traditionally.



Using contemporary interpretations of historic styles is encouraged for new buildings. Although these infill bungalows do not have raised foundations, they do relate to many of the design traditions seen historically in San Jose. (Little Rock, AR)



Using contemporary interpretations of historic styles is encouraged for new buildings. (Memphis, TN)



New interpretations of traditional building styles are encouraged. (Pasadena, CA)

Architectural Character

Design a new building to be visually compatible with nearby historic houses.

Features such as one-story porch elements which define entries, columns, posts and brackets contribute to the sense of character of the street and add visual interest to pedestrians. Their continued use in new construction is encouraged.

6.18 Use simplified interpretations of architectural features that are common to traditional buildings in San Jose.

- These include porch columns, balustrades, brackets, rafter ends, windows, doors and other trim elements.
- Historic details that were not found in San Jose are not appropriate.
- Other styles that would also be misleading about the history of San Jose are inappropriate.
- *See also Chapter 2: Architectural Resources for more information about the design character of traditional buildings.*

6.19 Using contemporary interpretations of historic styles is strongly encouraged for new buildings.

- A new building should accurately convey the evolution of the city and not mimic historic architectural styles.
- The exact copying or replication of historic styles is discouraged, but may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- A new building should be complementary and compatible to the streetscape. Modern or futuristic styles that are incompatible, or “jarring,” to the streetscape are inappropriate.

6.20 Building components should be similar in scale to those used historically.

6.21 Maintain the alignment of horizontal elements along the block.

- Window sills, moldings and eave lines are among those elements that should align whenever possible with similar elements on adjacent historic properties.

Windows and Doors

Windows and doors should be used in a manner similar to those seen traditionally.

Windows and doors are some of the most important character-defining features of houses. They give scale to buildings and provide visual interest to the composition of individual facades. Distinct window design often defines a historic building style. Usually they are inset into openings or they have surrounding casings and sash components which have substantial dimensions. Because windows and doors so significantly affect the character of a house, their design is a very important consideration.

6.22 Windows and doors should be of a traditional size and should be placed in a similar solid-to-void relationship as historic buildings.

- Windows should be simple in shape, arrangement and detail.
- Unusually shaped windows, such as triangles and trapezoids may be considered as accents only.
- The number of different window styles should be limited.

6.23 Windows and doors should be finished with trim elements similar to those used traditionally.

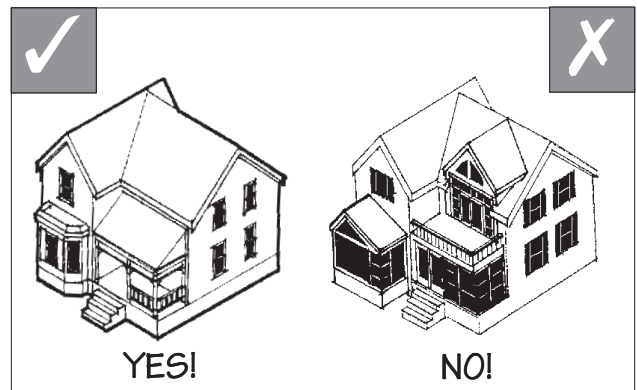
- This trim should have a dimension similar to that used historically.

6.24 If security is a concern, consider using wire glass, tempered glass, or light metal security bars.

- These should be installed on the interior of the window or door whenever feasible.



Windows and doors should be of a traditional size and should be placed in a similar solid-to-void relationship as historic buildings.



Windows and doors should be placed in a similar solid-to-void relationship as historic buildings.

