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# Chapter 6. Architectural Details

## Context & Character

Architectural features and details play several roles in defining the character of a historic structure: they add visual interest, define certain building styles and types, and often showcase superior craftsmanship and architectural design. Features such as window hoods, brackets and columns exhibit materials and finishes often associated with particular styles. Their preservation is therefore important.

Preserving original architectural details is critical to the integrity of the building, and its context. Where replacement is required, one should remove only those portions that are deteriorated beyond repair. Even if an architectural detail is replaced with an exact replica of the original detail, the integrity of the building as a historic resource is diminished. Preservation of the original material is preferred. See Chapter 2 on materials and repair.

## Design Objective

The architectural details associated with a historic building are essential to its character, style and integrity, and should be retained and preserved.

### 6.1 Protect and maintain significant stylistic elements wherever possible.

- Distinctive stylistic features and examples of skilled craftsmanship should be treated with sensitivity.
- The best preservation procedure is to maintain historic features from the outset so that repair or replacement is not required.

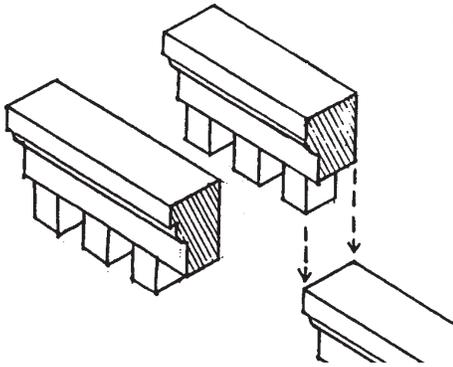
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*The fine Classical details help to define the facade and fenestration of this Italianate style.*



*The deep eaves, rafter tails, arches and columns help to define the individuality of this bungalow design.*



*Where replacement of a detail is required, one should remove only those portions that are deteriorated beyond repair.*



*Original and reinterpreted/restored intricate detailing helps to define the front facade of both properties.*

- Protection includes maintenance through rust removal, caulking, limited paint removal and reapplication of paint, as well as maintenance of roof drainage and water removal systems.
- Refer to Chapter 2 for appropriate repair materials and methods.

### **6.2 If replacement is necessary, design the new element using accurate information about the original features.**

- The design should be substantiated by physical or pictorial evidence.
- In historic districts, intact structures of similar age may offer clues about the appearance of specific architectural details or features.
- Speculative reconstruction is not appropriate for individual landmarks, since these structures have achieved significance because of their historical and architectural integrity. This integrity may be jeopardized by speculative reconstruction.
- Replacement details should match the original in scale, proportion, finish and appearance.

### **Replacement Materials**

Using a material to match that employed historically is always the best approach. However, a substitute material may be considered when it appears similar in composition, design, color, and texture to the original.

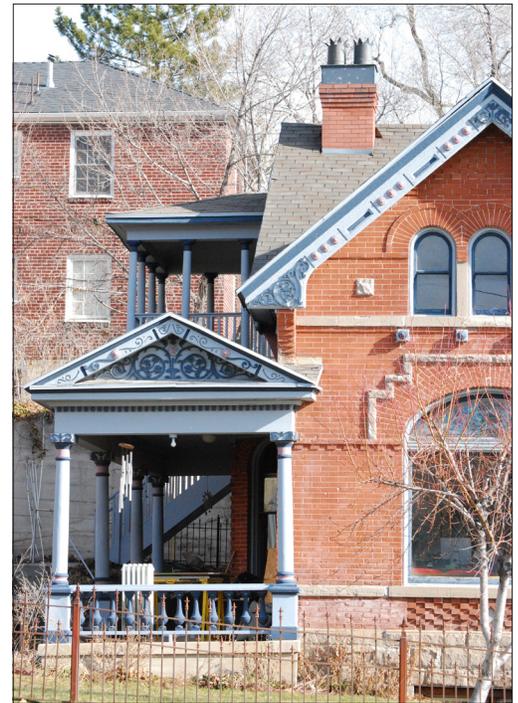
In the past, substitute materials were employed as cheaper, quicker methods of producing architectural features. For example, in the late nineteenth century cast metal window hoods replaced those previously constructed of wood or stone. Many of these historic “substitutes” are now referred to as traditional materials. Just as these historic substitutes offered advantages over their predecessors, many new materials today hold promise.

In Preservation Brief 16, *The Use of Substitute Material*, the National Park Service comments that “some preservationists advocate that substitute materials should be avoided in all but limited cases. The fact is, however, that substitute materials are being used more frequently than ever. They can be cost-effective, can permit the accurate visual duplication of historic materials, and last a reasonable time.”

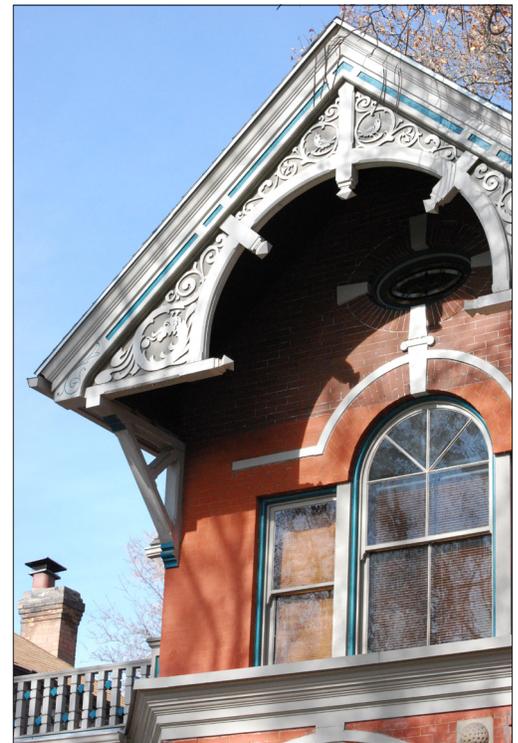
[<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/16-substitute-materials.htm>] However, these substitute materials should not be used wholesale, but only when it is absolutely necessary to replace original materials with stronger, more durable substitutes.

Substitute materials may be considered when the original is not easily available, where the original is known to be susceptible to decay, or where maintenance may be difficult (such as on a church spire).

Many materials that might appear to be a substitute for the original material have not been in use long enough to have an established record for durability and weathering. Care should be exercised to ensure that they will maintain the appearance of the original after installation. Additionally, certain materials will not readily maintain a coat of paint, and hence may preclude the use of a color scheme to unify the building materials or enhance the architectural details.



*Maintaining the composition and embellishment provided by original architectural detail is essential.*



*Using non-paintable substitute materials may preclude enhancing architectural details through a carefully considered color scheme.*

## PART II Design Guidelines



*A new porch in character with the house.*



*Restoring the detail, character and architectural importance of an original porch (below) following insensitive alterations in the past (above).*

Another factor that may determine the appropriateness of using substitute materials for architectural details depends on their location and degree of exposure. For example, lighter weight materials may be inappropriate for an architectural detail that would be exposed to intense wear.

**6.3 When the original element is missing and cannot be documented, develop a new design for the replacement feature that is a simplified interpretation of the original.**

- The new element should relate to comparable features in general size, shape, scale and finish.
- Such a replacement should be identifiable as being new.
- Use materials similar to those that were used historically, wherever feasible.



*Intricate detail picked out in color.*

### Additional Information

One of the best sources for historic photographs is **Salt Lake County Records Management**, which maintains early tax photographs for thousands of buildings.