

# Additions to Historic Properties: Design Considerations Cheat Sheet

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## Introduction

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior publishes a set of standards for the rehabilitation of historic properties (buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts) that forms the basis for many local preservation programs. The City of Beverly Hills has utilizes *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings* (herein referred to as the SOI Standards) as a basis for its design considerations when dealing with historic properties (see Attachment A).

New additions are appropriate as long as they do not destroy historic features, materials, and spatial relationships that are significant to the original building and site. Consistent with the SOI Standards, new additions should be differentiated from the original building and constructed so that they can be removed in the future without damage to the original building.

## Considerations

New additions should never compromise the integrity of the original building or site either directly through destruction of historic features and materials or indirectly through their location, size, height, mass, and scale. The impact of an addition on the original building can be significantly diminished by locating it on the least character-defining elevation (which is usually the rear) and by keeping it deferential in volume and/or mass. The new addition should never overpower the original building through height or size. The form, design, relationship of openings, scale, and selection of materials, details, colors, and features of proposed new additions should be reviewed in terms of compatibility with the original building.

Although designed to be compatible with the original building, an addition should be discernible from it. It may be differentiated from the original building through a break in roofline, cornice height, wall plane, materials, siding profile, window type, or the use of trim boards just to name a few examples.

The impact of an addition on the building site must also be considered. The addition should be designed and located so that significant site features, including a detached garage, other important accessory structures, or mature trees and landscaping are not lost. The size of the addition should not overpower the site or dramatically alter its historic character.

## Rehabilitation Design Principles:

Based off the recommended treatment approaches outlined in the SOI Standards, the following is a list of preferred rehabilitation design principles that form the foundation for design review when considering the appropriateness of additions and other modifications to historic properties.

- Construct new additions so that there is least possible loss of historic fabric and so that the character-defining features of the historic building are not destroyed, damaged, or obscured.
- Design new additions so that the overall character of the site, site topography, character-defining site features, and notable landscaping features, as well as any significant vistas and views within area (if property is located within a potential historic district) are retained.
- Locate a new addition on an inconspicuous elevation of the historic building, usually at the rear.
- Limit the size and scale of an addition in relationship to the historic building so that it does not diminish or visually overpower the original building.
- Design an addition to be compatible with the historic building in mass, materials, color, and relationship of solids to voids in the exterior walls, yet make the addition discernible from the original.
- It is not appropriate to construct an addition if it will detract from the overall historic character of the main building and the site, or if it will require the removal of a significant building element or site feature.
- It is not appropriate to construct an addition that significantly changes the proportion of the built mass to open space on the individual site.
- If an addition must be taller than the original building, set it back substantially from primary character-defining features and connect it with a smaller linking element. This will help to maintain the perceived scale and proportion of the historic portion.
- Windows in an addition that are visible from the public right-of-way should be compatible with those of the historic building. Consider window to wall ratio as well as design, type, and materials of new windows for compatibility purposes.
- Protect large trees and other significant site features from immediate damage during construction and from delayed damage due to construction activities, such as loss of root area, lack of water, or compaction of the soil by equipment. It is especially critical to avoid compaction of the soil within the drip line of trees.

## Conclusion

The goal of any rehabilitation project is to respectfully add to or alter a historic property in order to maintain its historic character and continue its original use or meet new use requirements. Under the SOI Standards some exterior alterations to a historic property are generally needed to assure its continued use. However, it is most important that such alterations do not radically change, obscure, or

destroy important character-defining materials, features, or finishes that identify and define the historic property. Such impacts may be considered direct (physical) and/or indirect (visual or audible).

If the proposed work preserves the important historic materials and character-defining features that identify it as a historic property, preserves its overall historic character, and also protects the property's historical significance by making a visual, yet compatible distinction between the old and the new work then the proposed "rehabilitation" work is considered acceptable and may be approved.

## ATTACHMENT A:

### SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

The ten standards for rehabilitation are as follows:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive material or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive historic feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.