

Character-Defining Features

When preserving, rehabilitating, or restoring a historic building, strive to preserve the historic materials and character-defining features. Once an original feature has been altered, removed, or destroyed, the character of the building has been changed. Buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places or located within a local historic district may be distinguished due to their architectural style, setting, and history.

The National Park Service's Preservation Brief 17 introduces a three-step process to understanding the character of a building. It provides guidance on identification of the character-defining features of a building and on understanding what should be preserved. What is the overall appearance and setting of a building? What are the details in its construction that give it character? How is the interior arranged? What are the materials and finishes inside and outside?



Resources

National Park Service Preservation Brief 17
"Architectural Character—Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving their Character"
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/17-architectural-character.htm>

Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office
<http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpoplanning.htm>
Guidance on preserving and rehabilitating historic buildings



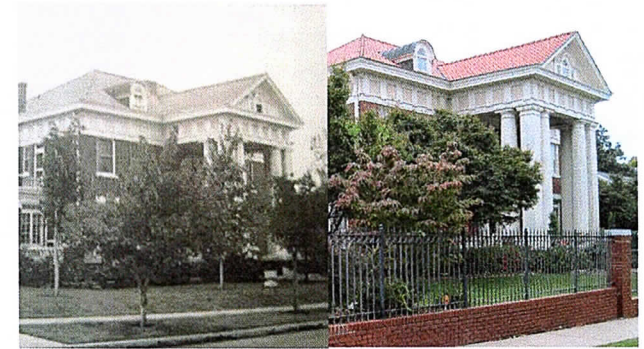
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1201 Eye Street, N.W. (2740)
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Taking a Closer Look At Historic Buildings



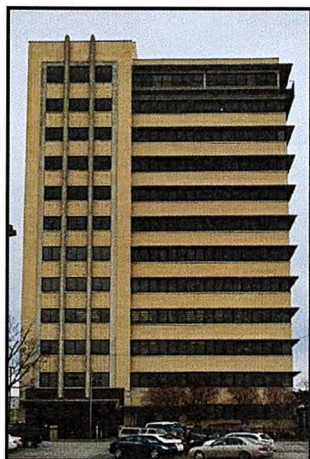
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How to Look for Design Features of a Building

1. Overall Appearance

Step away from the building to observe its overall appearance and its site. Look at the building from a distance to understand the character of the building and of the surrounding area. Do all of the buildings on the street face the same way? How close to each other are they? Are there driveways and sidewalks? All sides of the building are important, so walk around and notice the way the sides differ in appearance.

Contributors to a building's overall visual character include large details, such as its form, the size and number of openings, the shape of the roof, and projections. For example, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Oklahoma Building has a slightly projecting vertical section with vertical bands and entry at the base. Another section has horizontal bands of windows extending to the corner and wrapping around the side. Typically all sides are not exactly alike, the less public faces of the building are more simplified in appearance. The overall appearance as well as the interiors, small details, and materials all contribute to the character of the architectural style.



2. Characteristics

Next look more closely at the building for its materials and craftsmanship. Materials are essential to a building's character due to color, shape, texture, and size of different materials. There are many unique elements that change from building to building including the type of roof, windows, and siding through the use of different materials. Tulsa's residential architecture features materials such as brick, wood, and stucco, sometimes displayed together. As seen A Craftsman-Style Bungalow, below, may have a brick foundation and porch with wood siding and eave brackets.

The craftsmanship may be very obvious in some buildings and very subtle in others. In Tulsa's Art Deco skyscrapers, the details, such as terra cotta ornament, are highly visible. In Mid-Century Modern architecture, there is a lack of ornament, which defines the character. Architects designed sleek buildings with open interiors, using popular materials, such as glass, steel, and concrete.

3. Interiors

Finally look at the interior of the building. How are spaces arranged? What are their functions? What rooms seem important? How are materials used in those rooms? When buildings are rehabilitated and given new uses, it is important to retain the original spaces, openings and materials. The interior of the Philcade, seen below is an excellent example of an Art Deco interior.

