

Porches



Queen Anne wrap-around porch



Porch replicated using archival information

The porch is an important architectural element, not only as a protected entry to a house but as a feature of the larger streetscape as well. Porches became popular during the mid nineteenth century, and porches are common on Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne Style houses. The individual porch components, such as the columns, pediment, and railings, have all been selected to enhance and reinforce the architectural style of the building. Some porches have plain posts and minimal ornamentation, and others are designed with complex shapes, elaborate columns, and cornice details. Porches need regular preventive and corrective maintenance because of exposure to the elements, use, and proximity to the ground. Porch elements are some of the most frequently replaced elements of the house. The removal of a porch or any of the individual features detracts both from the character of the house and the neighborhood.

Porches have been removed from several houses in the District. Property owners desiring to restore a missing porch, when documentary evidence exists, are encouraged to do so using vintage photographs or drawings.

Recommendations

- Every effort should be made to retain all elements of historic porches, including porches added after the building was constructed. If repairs are necessary materials should be replaced in-kind, matching the original as closely as possible. Porches should not be removed, even if entrances are no longer used.
- Porches on primary elevations should not be enclosed, and porches on secondary elevations should not be enclosed in a manner that changes the historic appearance of the building.
- If a porch is to be reconstructed where one was removed in the past, physical evidence or photographic documentation should be used as a guide. If a porch is to be rebuilt or expanded, the new construction should match the design and materials of the original.
- Conjectural details, such as brackets, scrollwork, and spindles, should not be added to a porch, unless physical or photographic documentation shows they existed on the building in the past.
- If handrails must be added to granite steps, drilling or cutting the original stone is not recommended. If possible, handrails should be mounted in the ground adjacent to the steps.

Siding



Wood flush board siding and clapboards



Wood siding scored to resemble stone

Wood Siding

The exterior wall treatment of a building is a principal character-defining feature of the structure. Siding protects the house from the damaging effects of weather, and requires regular maintenance. Many of the structures in the District retain their original siding, and there is considerable diversity in design and appearance. Traditional wood clapboards are the prevalent siding material, although flush boards, board-and-batten, and boards scored to resemble stone were used with specific architectural styles. In addition, wood shingles in various shapes and sizes are found on several buildings.

Despite ads touting its maintenance free qualities, artificial (aluminum or vinyl) siding requires regular removal of mold and dirt, the color will oxidize or fade, and it is extremely difficult to repair. Artificial siding does not permit a building to breathe, trapping moist air on the interior of the siding and contributing to deterioration of the framing, especially the sills. In addition, artificial siding covers up the distinctive surface and features of the building, as well as covering up deterioration.

Recommendations

- If original or historic siding survives on a building, it should be repaired rather than replaced. If replacement is necessary when more than fifty percent of the original siding is substantially deteriorated, the siding should be duplicated in-kind, matching the original as closely as possible.
- Painting is an appropriate treatment for historic structures with wood siding in the District. The use of varnishes or bare, weathered wood should be avoided unless documentation exists confirming that this was the original finish of the siding.
- The use of physical, historical or pictorial evidence to reproduce or replace historic wood finishes is recommended. Scraping the bottom edge of clapboards often produces clues to prior finishes, especially color. Vintage photographs and archival material from sources such as The Brick Store Museum also provide information about historic finishes.
- The installation of artificial siding on historic structures is prohibited. The Commission recognizes that artificial siding was approved in the past; however, it does not approve the use of artificial siding. The removal of artificial siding is strongly encouraged, both to restore the historic appearance of the structure and to uncover and repair possible deterioration.