



Subject: Installing New Systems in Historic Corridors

Applicable Standards: 2. Retention of Historic Character

Issue: Updating or introducing new systems in a historic building requires careful planning and some resourcefulness in order to avoid altering important interior spaces. Corridors are considered public areas within a building's interior, and as such, are very important in conveying the qualities that give a particular historic building its individual character. Whether highly ornamented or simply detailed, unsympathetic installations of new mechanical, plumbing, or electrical systems negatively impact the character of these spaces.

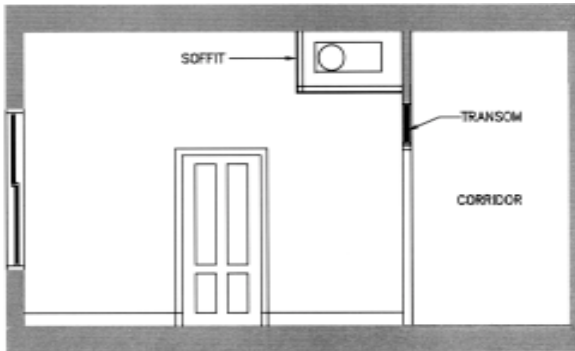
Application 1 (*Incompatible treatment*): The tangle of pipes along the corridor of this 1926 bank building, which was rehabilitated into apartments, creates a sharp visual distraction. Given the straightforward detailing of this corridor, installing a new ceiling to hide the overhead pipes would have been the preferred treatment, even if it meant lowering the original height of the ceiling. Where there is insufficient room in the corridor space to drop a new ceiling without significantly altering the volume of the space or interfering with existing features such as door transoms, trim, or other features, other solutions are required.



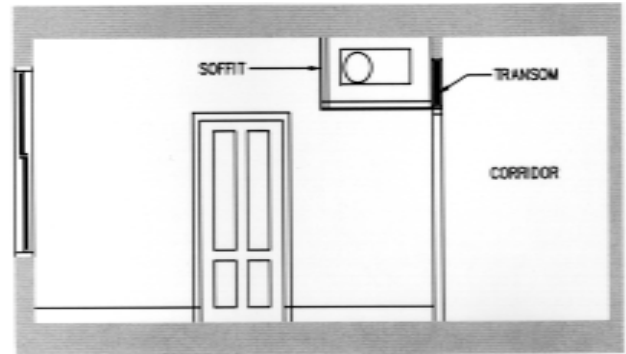
Left: The exposed pipes give the corridor, although quite plain, an unfinished appearance which is not compatible with the historic character of this 1926 bank building.

Right: These ducts should have been installed in a secondary space since lowering the corridor ceiling would have concealed the transoms.

Application 2 (*Incompatible treatment and suggested remedial treatment*): A new dropped ceiling would have not been the appropriate solution for hiding the large ducts in the corridors of this 1886 commercial building. Dropping the ceiling height low enough to conceal the ducts above would have required the ceiling to drop below the door transoms. In this case, if the ducting could not be reduced in size, a possible treatment could entail routing the ductwork parallel to the corridor in less significant interior spaces. The first drawing illustrates a scheme in which the ductwork is encased by a soffit above the existing transom. When the ceiling height does not allow sufficient room above the transom, other compromises might be required, such as the one depicted in the second drawing. In this case, the new mechanical equipment was also installed parallel to the corridor, but the lack of clearance between the top of the door transom and the existing overhead structure requires that the new soffit cover the transom behind the corridor wall. Although obscuring existing historic features is generally not recommended, when such alterations cannot be avoided, it is preferable to limit these treatments to less significant or secondary service areas such as closets, bathrooms, or kitchens inside new offices or apartments to avoid altering more significant public spaces such as corridors.



Routing HVAC and other systems along spaces on either side of corridors is a more sensitive approach that often works well in rehabilitations of historic office buildings.



Although obscured on one side, the transom can be retained on the more visible corridor side.

Application 3 (*Compatible treatment*): Another possible approach is illustrated in the conversion of this 1925 office building into a hotel. The design of this new floating ceiling allows covering new HVAC systems without obscuring or damaging existing features along the corridor walls. Holding the ceiling back away from the walls allows the existing trim and other details to be retained and kept visible.



A partial ceiling can cover new systems in a corridor without obscuring existing historic features.