

Rooftop Additions

Rooftop additions are seen as a way of increasing the usable floor area of historic buildings. Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation states that such additions shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment. The Guidelines recommend that all new additions be designed in a manner that makes clear what is historic and what is new; specifically, that rooftop additions, be set back from the wall plane and be as inconspicuous as possible when viewed from the street. The Guidelines also recommend that rooftop additions are inconspicuous from the public-right-of-way and that they not damage or obscure character defining features. Numerous *Interpreting the Standards* bulletins describe rehabilitation projects with rooftop additions. *Preservation Brief 14* provides guidance as well. The following is intended to amplify and clarify this existing guidance.

1. Can the historic building accept a rooftop addition at all?

Adding one or more floors to a two-or three-story building generally will change the massing of the building and result in a change of character. Such additions to buildings that are located in a historic district comprised of low-rise structures or even in districts with buildings of varying heights, can also have a dramatic, negative impact on the district in which they are located. Adding one or more floors to a high-rise building generally will not have such an impact because the addition is a small proportion of the total architectural expression. One new floor on a 10-story building probably will not affect the building, provided it is set back from the wall plane, **unless** the building's skyline is particularly distinctive and its outline against the sky will be obscured or dramatically changed by the new addition. A two-story addition to a ten-story building, however, would very likely alter the historic character of the building.

2. Where is it appropriate to evaluate the impact of a rooftop addition?

A rooftop addition's impact is properly evaluated from any public right of way (street, public park, sidewalk): from the front, sides, and rear. Where it is **not** appropriate to evaluate the new addition is from a privately owned empty but buildable lot across the street or from a high-rise building looking down on the addition. Less emphasis should be placed on the impact of a rooftop addition on non-character-defining side walls (including party walls) and rear walls, provided they are not highly visible.

3. If a rooftop addition is determined appropriate, where should it be placed?

The Guidelines recommend setting the addition back from the wall plane; this is to ensure that the new construction is as inconspicuous as possible. Setbacks should be considered for all elevations that can be readily seen from the public right-of-way. In certain very limited cases (high-rise buildings and

buildings with pronounced parapets in particular), significant setbacks may not be necessary if the building's historic form reads clearly despite the addition of a new floor.

4. How much should a rooftop addition be set back?

No formula exists for determining the proper amount of setback. Field mock-ups are better than sightline studies as indicators of the potential effects of a rooftop addition. For low-rise buildings, the new addition's setback from the facade should be sufficient to make it inconspicuous from across or down the street. For medium-rise buildings, some visibility may be acceptable given the overall size and scale of the building. For districts with wide streets, neighborhood parks or moderately scaled buildings, greater setbacks may be necessary.

5. How should a rooftop addition make clear what is historic and what is new?

There are a number of ways to make the distinction between old and new: through set-backs; by changing the materials of the new addition; by altering the pattern of window openings; by simplifying the surface ornamentation of the new addition. How these options are manipulated is the prerogative of the project architect, although in the end, the project must meet all ten Standards.

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