

DOWNTOWN

DESIGN GUIDE

CITY OF LOS ANGELES



Chapter 8:

Architectural Detail



Bad example of building façades that provides little to no visual relief and too much blank surface.



Good example of a break in the street wall to provide pedestrian access to an open space.

Good example of horizontal variation along a façade.



Once a building's massing and street wall have been defined, architectural details, including façade variation, materials and window treatment, shape a building's visual identity. Buildings should be well-detailed with long-lived materials that can be appreciated when viewed as a part of the distant skyline, or at the most intimate level by the pedestrian.

A. HORIZONTAL VARIATION

Vary the horizontal plane of a building to provide visual interest and enrich the pedestrian experience, while contributing to the quality and definition of the street wall.

1. Avoid extensive blank walls that would detract from the experience and appearance of an active streetscape.
2. Horizontal variation should be of an appropriate scale and reflect changes in the building uses or structure.
3. Vary details and materials horizontally to provide scale and three-dimensional qualities to the building.
4. While blank street wall façades are prohibited, an exception may be made for integration of public art or a graphic-based façade if it adds scale and interest to an otherwise bland frontage. In these cases, the façade should be a maximum of four floors high, and should have horizontal variation in its surface plane (using cut outs, insets or pop-outs). It should employ different scales of elements as viewed when seeing the entire building massing and as seen by pedestrians at a more intimate scale near the street.
5. Provide well-marked entrances to cue access and use. Enhance all public entrances to a building or use through compatible architectural or graphic treatment. Main building entrances should read differently from retail storefronts, restaurants, and commercial entrances.

B. VERTICAL VARIATION

Both classical and modern buildings can exhibit basic principles of visual order in the vertical plane -- often with a distinct base (street and pedestrian lower levels), a middle (core mid-section, and often consistent for multiple floors of a mid- to high-rise building), and a top (the upper level that distinguishes a building and defines how it “meets the sky”). Modern or contemporary building designs often layer this principle with more variation and syncopation to create interesting architectural compositions.

Variation in the vertical plane of a building shall clarify the building’s uses and visually differentiate ground floor uses, from core functions and how the building “meets the sky.”

1. Employ a different architectural treatment on the ground floor façade than on the upper floors, and feature high quality materials that add scale, texture and variety at the pedestrian level.
2. Vertically articulate the street wall façade, establishing different treatment for the building’s base, middle and top) and use balconies, fenestration, or other elements to create an interesting pattern of projections and recesses.
3. Provide an identifiable break between the building’s ground floors and upper floors designed for office or other use. This break may include a change in material, change in fenestration pattern or similar means.
4. In order to respect existing historic datums, the cornice or roof line of historic structures should be reflected with a demarcation on new adjacent structures.
5. Where appropriate, employ shade and shadow created by reveals, surface changes, overhangs and sunshades to provide sustainable benefits and visual interest on façades exposed to the sun.



Good examples of vertical variation from the street level base of lofts, to the middle, and at the top where the building meets the sky with a thin overhang.



Good example of a street wall with balconies and varied windows that create a pattern of projections and recesses.



Good examples of an identifiable break between ground level retail and the upper floors.

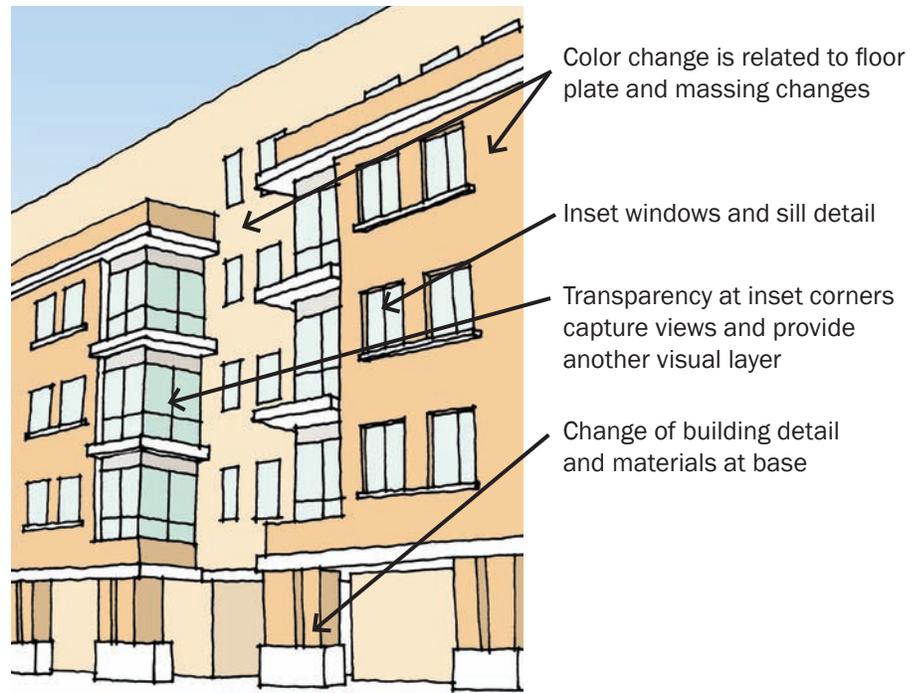
C. MATERIALS

After establishing a building's overall massing and vertical and horizontal variation, it is important to develop a building's visual character at the level of material choices and detailing. The interplay of materials, windows and other elements should support the larger design objectives as articulated by the architect.

Buildings shall aim for a "timeless design" and employ sustainable materials and careful detailing that have proven longevity.

1. Feature long-lived and sustainable materials. The material palette should provide variety, reinforce massing and changes in the horizontal or vertical plane.
2. Use especially durable materials on ground floor façades.
3. Generally, stucco is not permitted.
4. Detail buildings with rigor and clarity to reinforce the architect's design intentions and to help set a standard of quality to guide the built results.

Layering. A building's skin should be layered and bear a direct relationship to the building's structural elements.

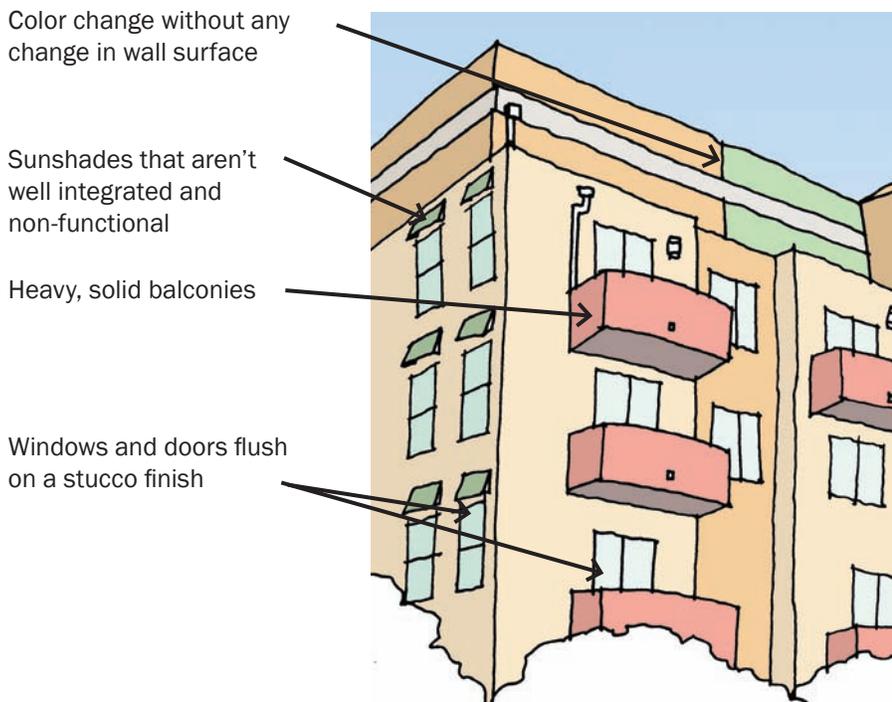


5. To provide visual variety and depth, layer the building skin and provide a variety of textures that bear a direct relationship to the building’s massing and structural elements. The skin should reinforce the integrity of the design concept and the building’s structural elements, and not appear as surface pastiche.
6. Layering can also be achieved through extension of two adjacent building planes that are extended from the primary façade to provide a modern sculptural composition.
7. The building’s skin, especially for towers, should be primarily transparent.
8. Cut outs (often used to create sky gardens) should be an appropriate scale and provide a comfortable, usable outdoor space.
9. Design curtain walls with detail and texture, while employing the highest quality materials.
10. Design the color palette for a building to reinforce building identity and complement changes in the horizontal or vertical plane.



Layering with two adjacent planes that extend from the primary façade forming a modern composition.

Bad example of a building with poor variation, materials and detail choices.





Windows should be well-detailed have a recessed depth.



Lighting should be designed to enhance the identity of a project with appropriate character and scale.



Landscape lighting, combined with facade lighting, can enhance the pedestrian environment.

D. WINDOWS AND DOORS

Provide high-performance, well-detailed windows and doors that add to the depth and scale of the building's façade.

1. Window placement, size, material and style should help define a building's architectural style and integrity.
2. In buildings other than curtain wall buildings, windows shall be recessed (set back) from the exterior building wall, except where inappropriate to the building's architectural style. Generally, the required recess may not be accomplished by the use of plant-ons around the window.
3. Windows and doors shall be well-detailed where they meet the exterior wall to provide adequate weather protection and to create a shadow line.

E. GLAZING

Incorporate glazing that contributes to a warm, inviting environment.

1. Ground-floor window and door glazing shall be transparent and non-reflective.
2. Above the ground floor, both curtain wall and window/door glazing shall have the minimum reflectivity needed to achieve energy efficiency standards. Non-reflective coating or tints are preferred.
3. A limited amount of translucent glazing may be used to provide privacy.

F. LIGHTING

Provide well-designed architectural and landscape lighting.

1. All exterior lighting (building and landscape) should be integrated with the building design, create a sense of safety, encourage pedestrian activity after dark, and support Downtown's vital nightlife.
2. Each project should develop a system or family of lighting with layers that contribute to the night-time experience, including facade uplighting, sign and display window illumination, landscape, and streetscape lighting.
3. Architectural lighting should relate to the pedestrian and accentuate major architectural features.
4. Landscape lighting should be of a character and scale that relates to the pedestrian and highlights special landscape features.
5. Exterior lighting shall be shielded to reduce glare and eliminate light being cast into the night sky.

Security lighting

6. Integrate security lighting into the architectural and landscape lighting system. Security lighting should not be distinguishable from the project's overall lighting system.
7. Illuminate alleys for both vehicles and pedestrians.

G. SECURITY GRILLS AND ROLL-DOWN DOORS AND WINDOWS

Balance the need for security doors and windows with the need to create an attractive, inviting environment.

1. Exterior roll-down doors and security grilles are not permitted except as noted below.
2. Subject to approval of the Reviewing Agency, interior roll-down doors and security grilles may be permitted, provided they are at least 75% transparent (open), retractable and designed to be fully screened from view during business hours.
3. Subject to approval of the Reviewing Agency, exterior security grilles and roll-down doors may be permitted in the City Markets, provided they are designed to be fully screened from view during business hours.

H. MINIMIZING IMPACTS ON NEIGHBORS

In Downtown, many projects are viewed directly from adjacent properties where tenants and residents have clear sight lines to roofs and back-of-house functions. It is important that new projects respect neighboring properties, and that the major mechanical systems, penthouses and lighting are designed to limit adverse impacts.

Architecturally incorporate or arrange roof top elements to screen equipment such as mechanical units, antennas, or satellite dishes.

1. Mechanical equipment shall be either screened from public view or the equipment itself shall be integrated with the architectural design of the building.
2. Penthouses should be integrated with the buildings architecture, and not appear as foreign structures unrelated to the building they serve.
3. Ventilation intakes/exhausts shall be located to minimize adverse effects on pedestrian comfort along the sidewalk. Typically locating vents more than 20' vertically and horizontally from a sidewalk and directing the air flow away from the public realm will accomplish this objective.
4. Antennas or satellite dishes shall be screened.

Minimize glare upon adjacent properties and roadways.

5. Lighting (exterior building and landscape) shall be directed away from adjacent properties and roadways, and shielded as necessary. In particular, no light shall be directed at the window of a residential unit either within or adjacent to a project.
6. Reflective materials or other sources of glare (like polished metal surfaces) shall be designed or screened to not impact views nor result in measurable heat gain upon surrounding windows either within or adjacent to a project.
7. Other sources of glare, such as polished metal surfaces, shall be designed or screened to not impact views from surrounding windows.



Interior grilles that are more than 75% open are less visible during non-business hours and easier to screen from view during business hours.



Awnings can be used to conceal existing exterior roll-down doors during business hours. Left: overall view of the storefront. Right: detail of the grill housing.



There are always exceptions: this security grill is not retractable, but could be approved given its aesthetic contribution.