

Historic District Windows

PDS

Department Application

#188

Preserving the Charm of Boise's Historic Districts

The windows within historic districts are as varied as the houses themselves. Each architectural style's unique windows are integral to interpreting the style. Altering the windows can potentially change the structure's status from contributing to noncontributing to the historic district. The window type (slider, double hung, single hung, etc.), the material used (wood, vinyl, aluminum, etc.), and the window depth within the wall plane all affect the overall building design.

Whether ornate or plain, windows are an integral part of a building's style, and express its history and architectural style. Although it is easy to see the need to preserve the high-style windows of a Queen Anne mansion, the humbler windows of a small cottage are as important since they may be the building's only stylistic feature. On a simple building, altering the windows' shape or configuration could easily change the structure's entire appearance and historic integrity.

The Secretary of the Interior

The U.S. Department of Interior has written a set of Historic Preservation recommendations titled *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. These guidelines are widely used by the nationwide preservation community. This resource was used in developing the City of Boise *Design Guidelines for Residential Historic District* document. In this publication, the Secretary of the Interior recommends against "changing the historic appearance of windows through the use of inappropriate designs, materials, finishes, or colors which noticeably change the sash, depth of reveal, and muntin configuration; the reflectivity and color of the glazing; or the appearance of the frame." (pg. 81).

Although a vinyl window with a large sill depth and compatible framing may meet this recommendation, the figures below illustrate the results of using an incompatible material and design when replacing a historic window.

Historic Window Modifications

The Secretary of the Interior recommends "identifying, retaining and preserving windows-and their functional and decorative features-that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building. Such features can include frames, sash, muntins, glazing, sills, heads, hoodmolds, paneled or decorated jambs and moldings and interior and exterior shutters and blinds."

When making decisions regarding renovations in a historic district, first identify these important window features. Consider making small improvements such as removing paint that has sealed the window closed, and weatherproofing by recaulking or installing weatherstripping or storm windows. If elements of the window's structure have rotted, consolidation or in kind replacement of those elements can be an effective way to save an otherwise viable window while retaining the window's character defining elements.

The Secretary of the Interior states that when an entire window is too deteriorated to be saved, the replacement of the window is acceptable. However, it is important that the new window is compatible with the structure and the other windows. For instance, if the historic windows are long, double hung windows, replacing them with short, wide horizontal sliders is inappropriate. Likewise, if a large, multi-paned window has always been on the front elevation of a house, replacing it with two single-hung windows is inappropriate. Replacement windows should be congruous, or compatible with the shape, placement and material of the windows historically on the house.

www.cityofboise.org/pds

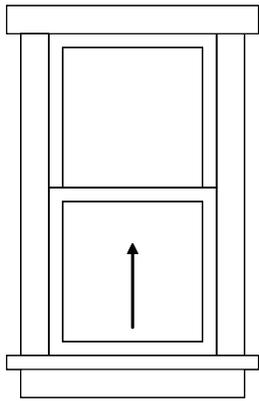
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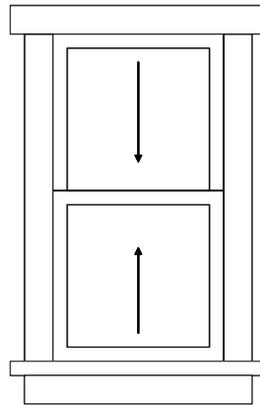


Window Information



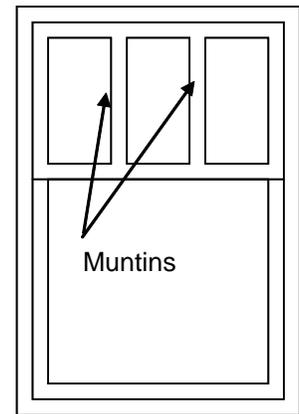
Single-hung

A window whose bottom sash slides along vertical tracks.



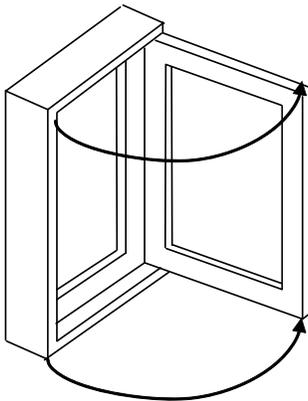
Double-hung

A window whose top and bottom sashes slide along vertical tracks.



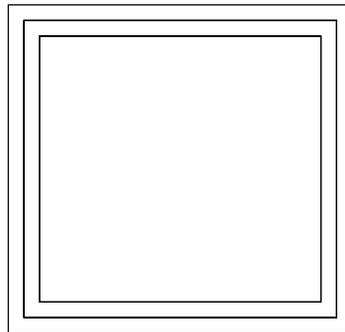
Muntin

A rabbeted member that holds the glass panes in place



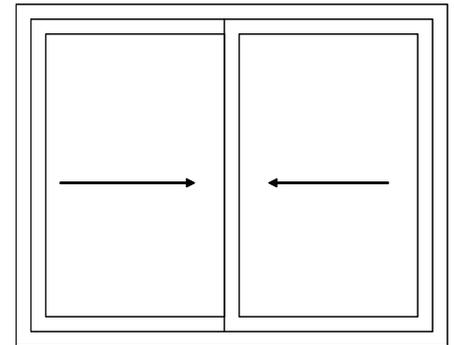
Casement

The sash opens on hinges usually attached to the vertical side of the frame.



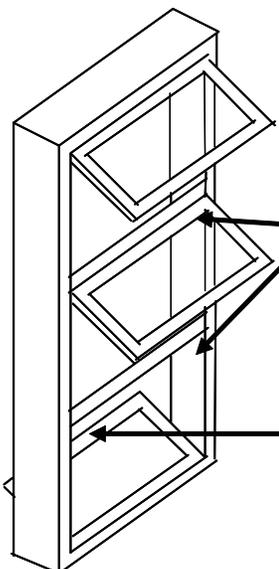
Fixed Pane

A window whose sash does not open.



Horizontal Slider

A window whose sashes slide along horizontal tracks.



Awning

A window whose sashes open on hinges attached to the top of the frame

Hopper

A window whose sash opens on hinges attached to the bottom of the frame.

Sill

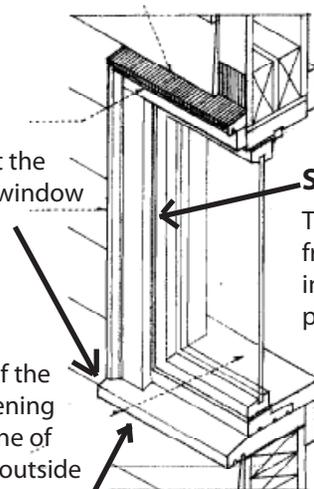
The ledge at the base of the window opening

Sash

The openable framework in which the pane is set

Sill Depth

The depth of the window opening from the pane of glass to the outside wall.



Vinyl vs. Wood: Does it Really Matter?



Vinyl



Wood

These houses are similar in age and sit side by side in the North End. While the house on the right retains its original double hung windows, the one on the left has all new vinyl windows replacements.

The vinyl window's top pane sits flush with the wall, while wood window's top pane is recessed. The difference in sill depth is also easy to see, as the sill on the vinyl window is much shallower than that of the wood window.

This example highlights the difference between the wood window's muntins and the interior grid system of the vinyl window. In this picture, it is almost impossible to see the grid system of the vinyl window, and, while muntins cast shadows and break the reflective surface of the window, an internal grid system allows for an uninterrupted reflective surface.

Inappropriate Windows



This home's replacement windows are inappropriately sized and configured. The window openings were altered and windows were changed from wood, double-hung windows to vinyl horizontal sliders, and the window frames were replaced with simpler, thinner

frames. This alters the building's look so it no longer contributes to the district's architectural or historical characteristics.

Appropriate Materials

Appropriate materials to use are wood, metal clad wood and wood clad composite.

Additional Information

These resources provide more information on windows in historic buildings, They are available online or at the Planning & Development Services Library.

Fisher, Charles Ed. *The Window Handbook: Successful Strategies for Rehabilitating Windows in Historic Buildings.*

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses.*

Myers, John H. "Technical Brief #9 The Repair of Historic Wood Windows." *The National Register of Historic Places.* www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief09.htm.

Park, Sharon C. "Technical Brief #13 The Repair and Thermal Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows." *The National Register of Historic Places.* www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief13.htm.

Park, Sharon C. "Technical Brief #24 Heating, Ventilating, and Cooling Historic Buildings: Problems and Recommended Approaches." *The National Register of Historic Places.* www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief24.htm.

Smith, Baird M. "Technical Brief # 3 Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings." *The National Register of Historic Places.* www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief03.htm

Weeks, Kay D. and Anne E. Grimmer. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards For the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Restoring, Rehabilitating and Reconstructing Historic Buildings.* www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/