

# Preservation Guidelines: Business Signage

## Business Signage

While signs may or may not be directly attached to a building, they can significantly affect its character. Appropriate signage can enhance a building's historic character and visual interest; if not carefully designed, it can detract from character by obscuring or competing with historic design features, or even physically damaging a building. The good and bad effects of lighting and signage can be seen not only on Bennington's commercial streets, but in residential buildings as well, especially when these have been converted to office or commercial use.

## Basic Guideline

Maintain existing signs which contribute to the historic and architectural character of a building or street. All new signs should comply with both the general and historic preservation provisions of the Town of Bennington Sign Ordinance. The Ordinance provides detailed specifications for appropriate signage, and details compliance procedures. Do not install signs or related lighting fixtures which damage or cover important features of a building, such as storefront cornice moldings, windows, or substantial areas of wall. Signs and lighting should be compatible with the architectural style, scale, materials and color of the buildings they relate to. They should not have mechanical moving parts or lighting which is obtrusive in color or intensity. The primary recommended locations for signs in commercial buildings are across the flat fascias below the moldings of storefront cornices, and painted on the inside of display windows. Signs on converted residential buildings should be simple painted boards, smaller, less obtrusive and less prominently lighted than on commercial buildings. They may be either attached to the building wall, or on a non-obtrusive, free-standing post adjacent to the building.



Fig. 5-85: 469 Main St. These small signs work together by being similar in size, shape and color.

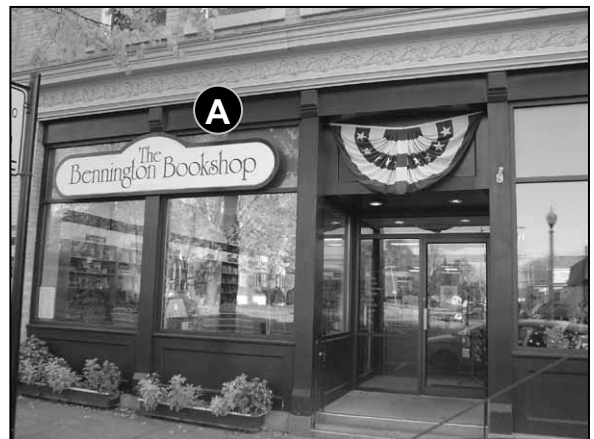


Fig. 5-86: 467 Main St. Sign is designed to blend in with the storefront materials and is framed by the structure.

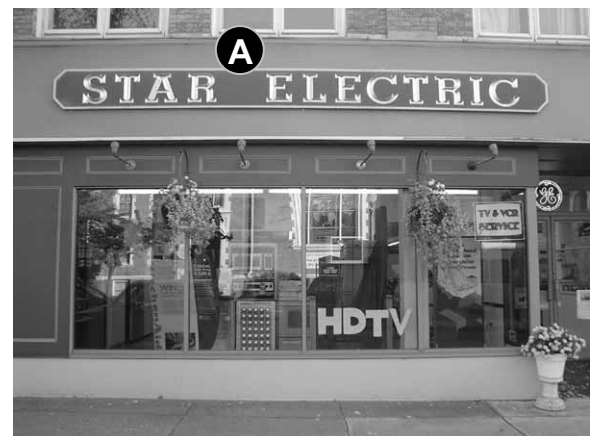


Fig. 5-87: 441 Main St. Example of simple yet effective sign which is in keeping with the historic character.



Fig. 5-88: 471 Main St. Hanging signs like this often are the least obtrusive to the architecture of the original façade.



Fig. 5-84: 332 Main St. Applied lettering framed within the design of the façade is often the cleanest solution.

### Appropriate

- A** Installing new signs which respect the character of existing buildings, in conformance with the basic guidelines and the Town's sign ordinance.
- B** Maintaining existing signs which add to character because of their age or design quality.

### Not Appropriate

- 1** Removing existing signs which add to character.
- 2** Installing new signs which cover or obscure existing features.
- 3** Installing new signs which are incompatible in architectural style, scale, location, materials or color, or which do not comply with the Town's sign ordinance.
- 4** Installing new signs which imitate historic signage to such a degree that they may be confused with actual old signs.

The examples on the following pages illustrate some problems and solutions relating to commercial signage design in historic districts. The photographs, drawings and commentary are taken from *Main Street Guidelines, Signs for Main Street*, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. See the Information Sources section for more complete references to this and other related publications.

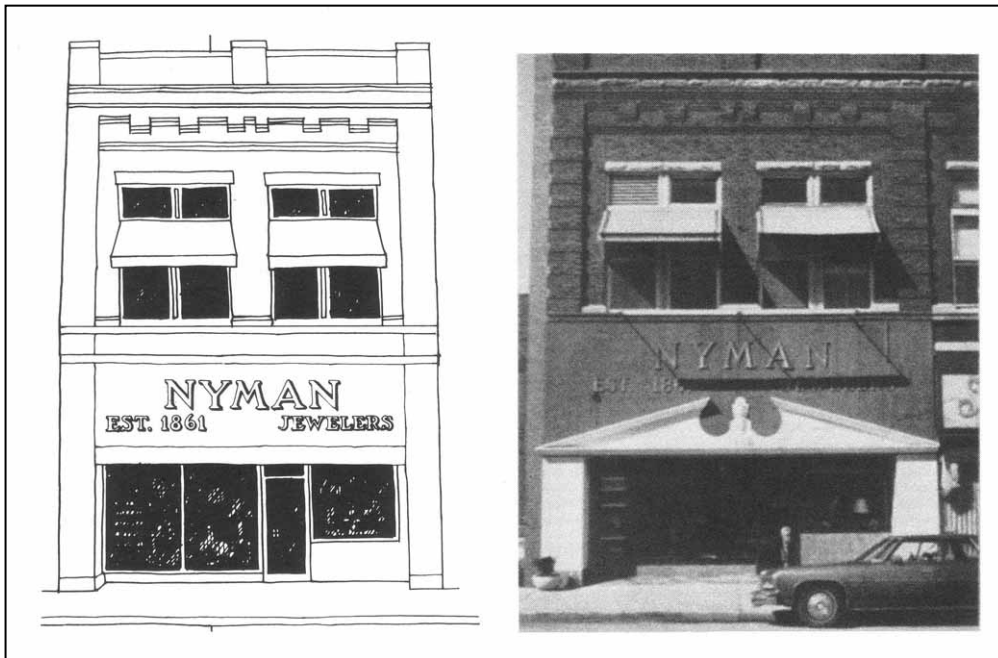


Fig. 5-85: On this storefront, the existing sign is too large, overpowering the building and its neighbors. The large colonial pediment detracts from the store name and is inconsistent with the building's architectural style. Removing this element and the paneling that extends to the second-story windows reveals more of the building fabric. A better proportioned sign that reuses the individual letters from the earlier sign can be placed in this space.

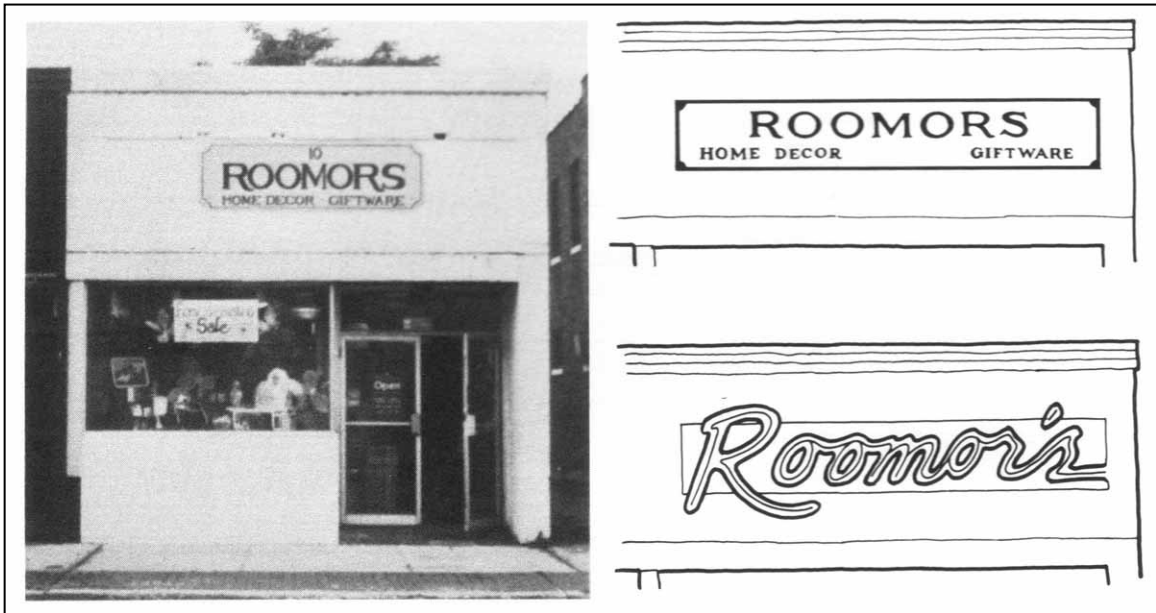


Fig. 5-86: Proper proportioning of a sign and its lettering can add distinction to a building of modest design. This brick facade has a recessed panel above the storefront that creates a natural area for sign placement. The same type of sign shown in the photograph becomes more impressive and relates better to the building when the sign board fills this area and the spacing and proportioning of its letters are corrected to project a different image of the business, neon or channel letters could be used in the same area.

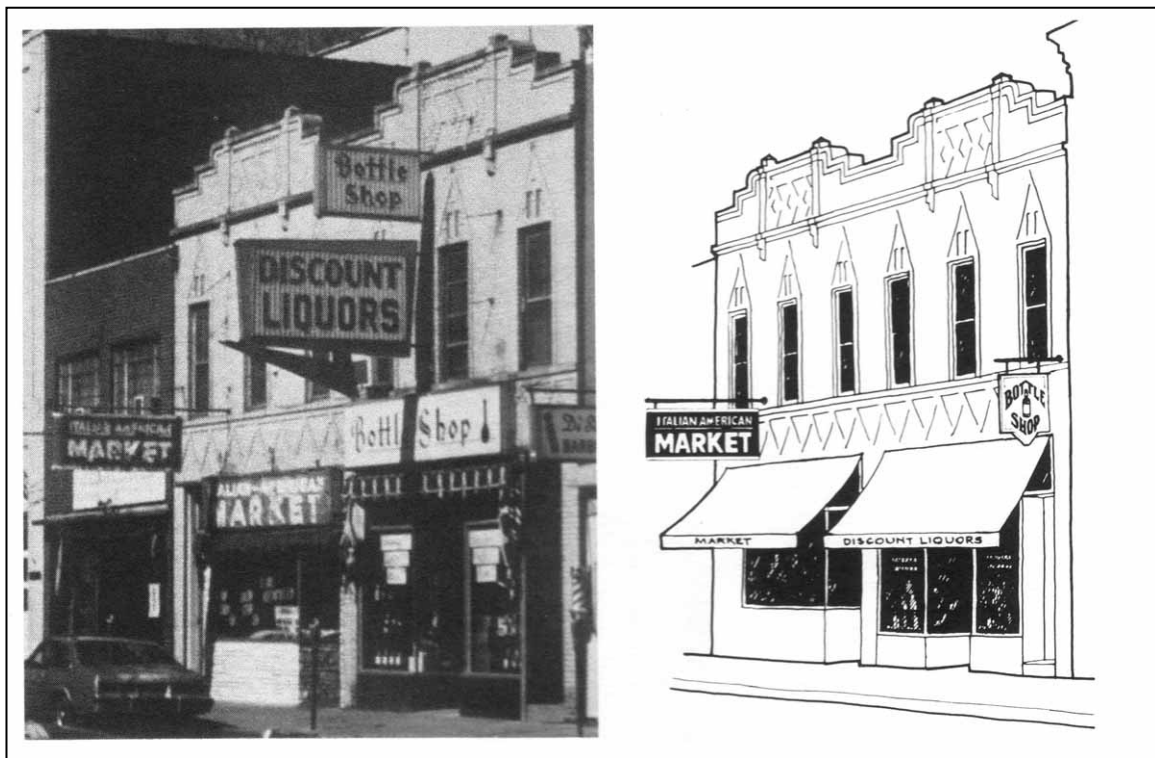
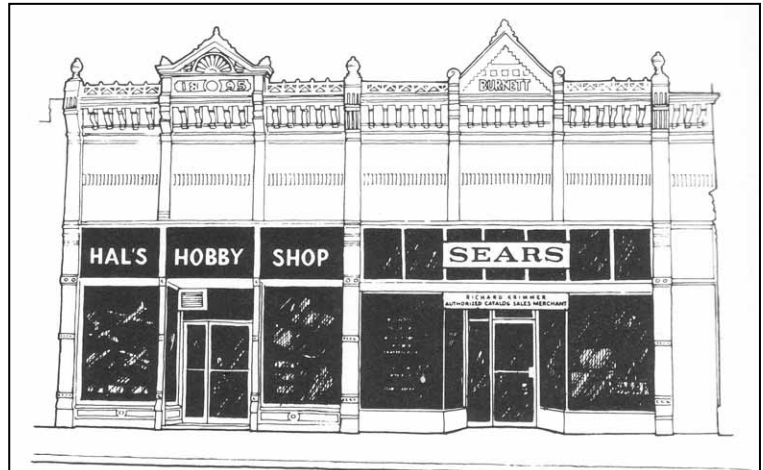


Fig. 5-87: If too numerous or too large, signs hung at right angles can easily overwhelm the proportions of a building, obscure its details and create a cluttered appearance along the street. In this illustration, the neon market sign has been moved closer the facade, the overscaled liquor signs have been removed and replaced by a smaller projecting sign and secondary information has been placed on awnings for both stores.

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Fig. 5-88: This drawing illustrates two solutions to covered transom areas. On the right, the corrugated aluminum has been removed, revealing transom windows. A sign that covers a minimum of the transom area has been installed. Additional information is placed on a sign over the entryway. On the left the metal paneling was removed, exposing an interior dropped ceiling. To disguise this, smooth plywood panels (painted dark gray to look like glass) were installed. Glass, painted a dark color on the backside, could also be used. The store name is painted directly on the wood or glass.

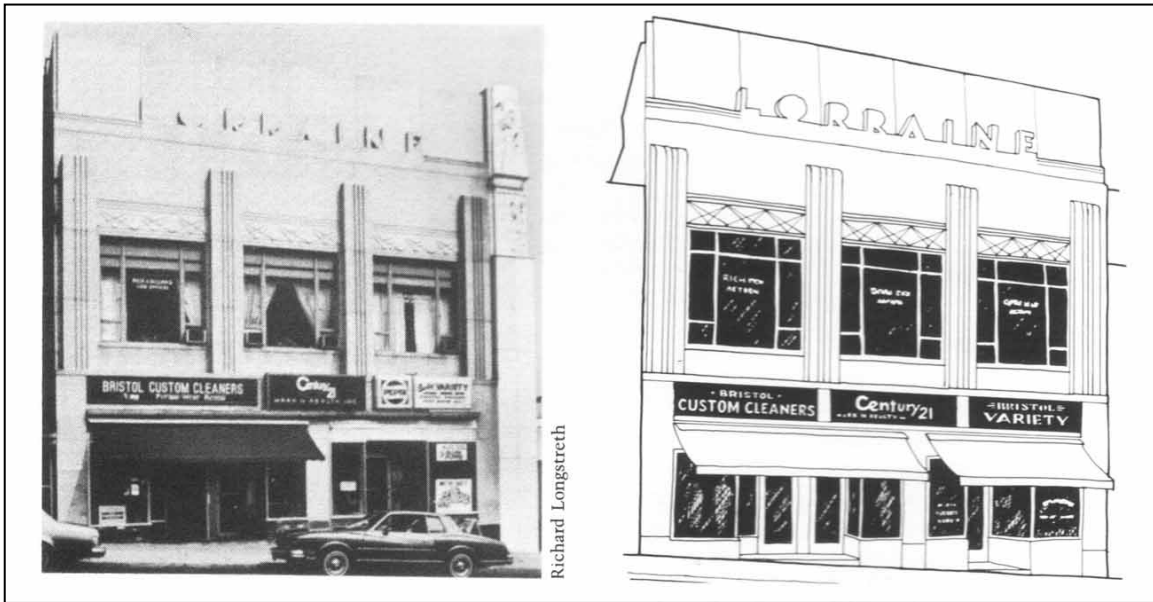


Richard Wagner

Fig. 5-89: When a business expands into one or more adjoining buildings, the owner will often hang a sign that spans them all. Such an oversized sign visually cuts buildings in half and diminishes the distinctive architectural features that differentiate them. As the drawing below illustrates, one solution is to install two smaller signs that expose the building piers, restoring proper verticality and scale in both facades.



Richard Longstreth



Richard Longstreth

Fig. 5-90: When a large building contains more than one storefront and each houses a different business, the signs should relate well to each other in terms of height, proportion, color and background value. Maintaining uniformity among these characteristics reinforces the building's facade composition while still retaining each business's identity.



Harvey Kaplan

Fig. 5-91: Signs with too much information can be confusing: Keep the message clear and direct so that the name is easy to read. In the drawing, the shop name is the only message on the sign, and its lettering has been clarified, particularly the "G" in Gold. Secondary information appears in the lower third of the window, filling a void created by the raised window display. Other places for secondary signs include doors, awning valances, bulkheads and inside display windows.