

Restoration



Primer

by Patricia Poore

Old-house rehabilitation creates many more difficult choices than either a pure restoration or total preservation. That's because there is an infinite range of possibilities during rehabilitation.

The only absolute requirement is that a rehabilitation should leave the building functional. After that, the design and aesthetic choices are totally up to you.

Several years ago, however, the U. S. Department of Interior issued a set of standards designed to foster rehabilitation that respects the design and character of original buildings, whether residential or commercial. They are somewhat general,

because they apply to both residential and commercial buildings.

Nonetheless, they provide an excellent starting point for the well-intentioned person seeking advice amid the forest of often-misleading information about "good" and "bad" rehabilitation.

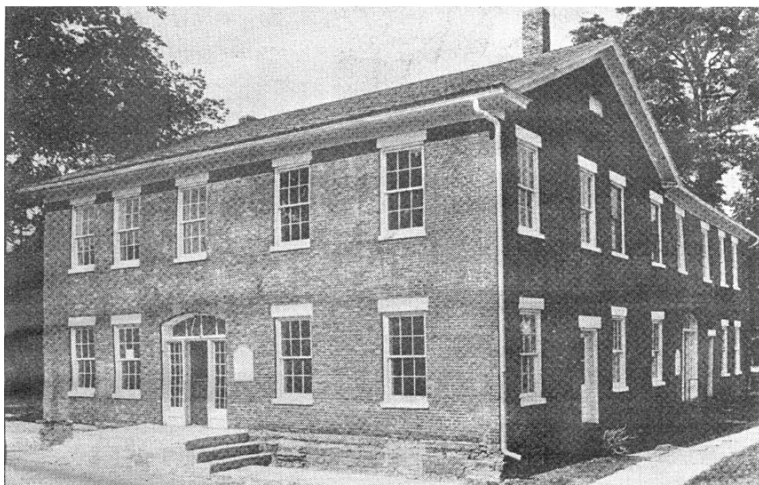
The standards are divided into 10 basic principles and supplemented by 121 specific "dos and don'ts." This article presents the 10 principles (which appear in bold-face type), along with a layperson's interpretation of each one as it relates to the photos presented here.

To obtain a complete copy of "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation," contact your state historic-preservation office.

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.

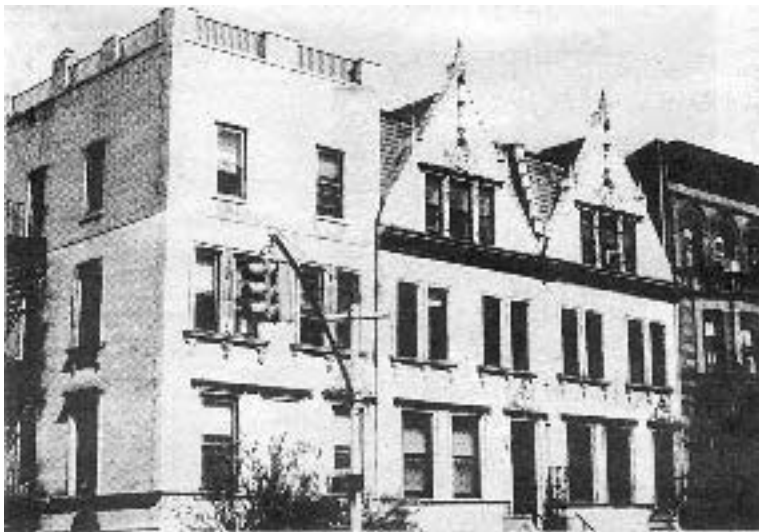
It's always best when an old building can be used for its intended purpose. This building, in Marshall, Wis., started life in 1835 as an inn. Later it was converted into a factory, and then into flats.

In 1976 the building changed hands once more—and was converted back to an inn. While extensive reconstruction was required inside, careful restoration of the exterior preserved much of its original look. Thus, an important visual anchor was retained for the community.



2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.

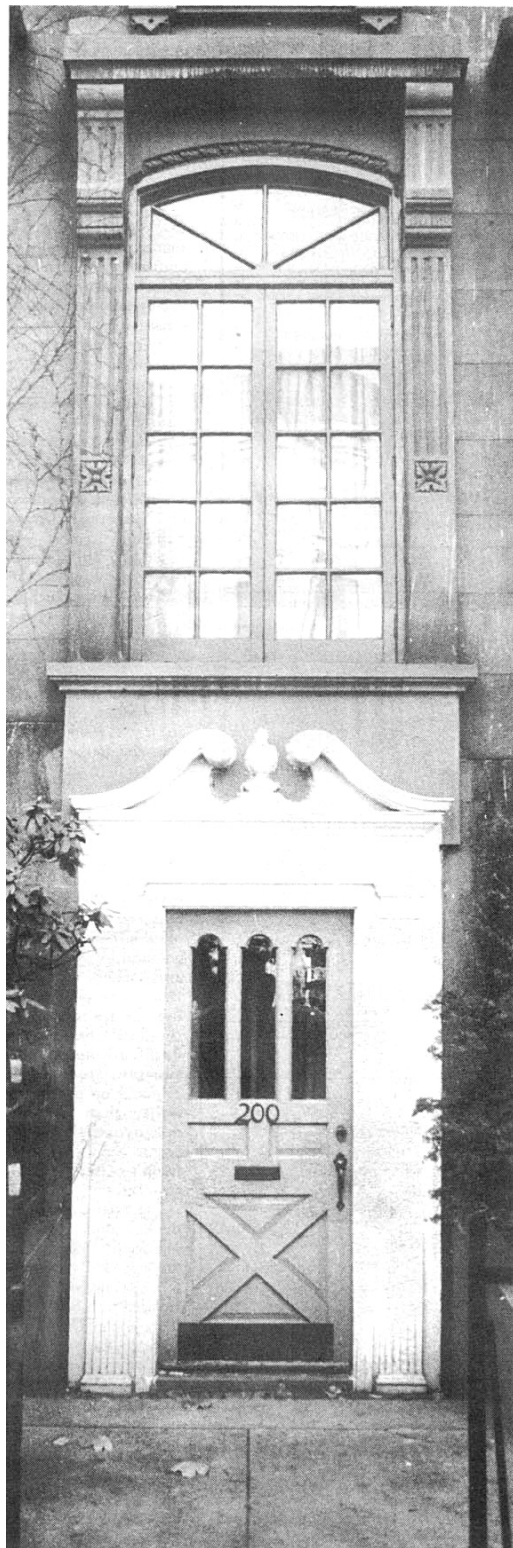
These three townhouses were once identical. When the owner of the corner building wanted to add space to the top floor, he did it in a way that destroyed the cornice, gable and distinctive roofing tile. By obliterating the major stylistic features, the owner radically altered the look of the building—and removed some of the beauty and harmony from the streetscape.



3. All buildings, structures and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.

When the original entrance was removed from this late Victorian brownstone, the owner attempted to "early up" the building by adding a Colonial doorway.

While the entrance is of better design and materials than much "phoney coloney," it nonetheless is a discordant element. It's much like a 10-year-old girl dressing in her mother's high heels to affect greater age and sophistication.



4. Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.

This rambling farmhouse represents a stern test of this principle. Much of the architectural merit is concentrated in the Greek Revival wing on the left. The gabled wing on the right has its own rustic charm.

The middle section, however, cannot be called a triumph of architectural design. Nevertheless, it does have a claim on our sympathy in its role as a cultural artifact. Because it embodies the aspirations and workmanship of past generations, it merits thoughtful treatment. And on a purely practical level, the middle addition provides useful living space.

5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure or site shall be treated with sensitivity.

Houses with elaborate exterior woodwork, for example, often fall prey to "quick fix" contractors. The net result is usually the loss of distinctive stylistic features and examples of skilled craftsmanship.

In the photo right, for example, the exterior wood—especially on the porch—is in bad repair. The typical recommendation of many home-improvement contractors would be: "Rip off the porch and cover the rest in vinyl siding."

Removing the porch would rob the house of much of its visual interest, to say nothing of its historic appearance. When covered in vinyl siding, the facade would lose the distinctive character imparted by the shingles, large cornerboards and framing elements around windows and doors.

6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced whenever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

These rotted wood balusters are the kind of deteriorated architectural feature that often winds up in the junk pile. But if they were scrapped, it's unlikely that they would be replaced with balusters of similar shape and quality. And if this loss occurred, the exterior would suffer a serious visual loss.

In this case, the balusters could be repaired fairly easily simply by replacing the square elements at the base, where most of the rot is concentrated. The baluster on the left also is missing some turned work. If it isn't possible to turn up a small replacement element, it could be built up with epoxy putty (or auto-body putty) and carved.



7. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.

This section of brick wall recently was cleaned by sandblasting. Fortunately, the contractor left a piece of electrical conduit on the wall while blasting. Because the conduit was subsequently removed, we can get a very clear "before" and "after" look at the brick wall.

Where the bricks were protected by the conduit, they still have their smooth, hard surface and small, neat, concave mortar joints. The blasted bricks are badly pitted, having lost about 1/8 inch of their surface, and the mortar joints (after a sloppy repointing job) are about twice the width of the original joints.



8. Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to, any project.

The ground around old buildings often is the resting place for significant historical artifacts. If major excavation (such as for foundation waterproofing) is conducted without professional advice, priceless artifacts may be lost forever, or at the very least their historical context will be hopelessly jumbled.

This photo shows an archeologist carefully sifting the ground around Drayton Hall, a National Trust, property.



9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.

Additions to old buildings need not mimic historical styles. New construction can (and some would say, *should*) reflect the design philosophy of its time. The only requirement is that the new construction should blend harmoniously with the older section. In this photo, the contemporary building relates comfortably to adjacent old buildings, even though it is designed in a frankly modern idiom.



10. Whenever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.

Ideally, any work to old buildings should be reversible. That is, at some point in the future, it should be possible to remove the work and leave the original building intact.

In this photo, the commercial addition added to this old mansion basically was just tacked onto the original building. The addition could be removed and the house restored to original appearance with some relatively minor patching of the stucco wall. •

