

## 6 Chapter Six The Exterior of the Store



### 6.1 AFTER YOU HAVE READ THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DISCUSS

- ◆ key exterior items that impact store image
- ◆ how banners can be tied in with seasons and store promotional events
- ◆ advantages and disadvantages of the four major windows used in storefront design
- ◆ variations in storefront design often found in malls and shopping centers

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How and where we display depends largely on the architecture and **fenestration** (window placement) of the structure, the physical layout of space, and the fixtures inside the building. First, let us consider the façade of the building and the arrangement of the display windows in the storefront design. We will follow with an in-depth survey of the various types of display windows used in retail operations and the advantages and limitations inherent in each type of window.

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### 6.2 Signs

The store's **sign**, on the outside of the building, makes the first impression on the shopper. It sets the look and image of the store. How the sign is lettered, the materials used, the style of the lettering, the color—all are important. Its size and scale, in proportion to the store's façade, the size of the building, and the signs around it, can make points for or against the store's image. Unlit or missing light bulbs are definitely minus points. Flaking paint; cracked and peeling backgrounds; and outrageous, highly luminous colors can also be minuses. The sign should be the store's “signature”—personal, original, and recognizable. It should make a statement. (See [Figure 6.1](#).)

### 6.3 Marquees

Some older stores as well as some of the very newest have **marquees**, or architectural canopies, extending out over their entrances. The marquee, a permanent awning for protection from the elements, is an integral part of the building façade. It is often cantilevered out over the street, in front of the main entrance to the store. It is similar to the porte cochere (a porch at the door of a building for sheltering persons entering and leaving carriages) of the last century or the big signboards with running lights that used to identify movie houses and theaters in the 1940s and 1950s.

The marquee can be an exciting place to start the display of a storewide event or promotion. A change of seasons can be announced here. That the marquee protrudes from the building line offers the advantage of increased visibility and greater prominence compared with all the other store signs from the surrounding operations. If the marquee is so designed, it could have changeable announcements (like the change of movie titles). A flat-topped marquee is an excellent place for the grouping of seasonal plants and foliage as well as larger-than-life-sized props. It is a perfect location for a giant Santa or even his sleigh and eight clamoring reindeer.

Figure 6.1 The bright backlit windows on the second floor serve as a white background for the store's name and logo, which are again repeated on the black band over the open entrance into the boutique. The store name stands out, as does the logo, which are repeated again on the back wall of the shop.



*Grand Soeur, Tokyo. Design: Nishiwaki Design Studio, Tokyo.*

## 6.4 Outdoor Lighting

There is a whole industry involved in creating and installing [outdoor lighting](#) displays. The use of hundreds and hundreds of lights on building façades and canopies can be most effective for holidays and store events. The lights can be swagged or draped, or wired to frames to form recognizable symbols or letters. However, this type of display does require an extra expenditure of electrical energy, and the effect of the lighting is limited to the twilight and evening hours, when the store may not be open for business. But for suburban operations, with their later operating hours, the use of lights in the evening may be especially worthwhile. Very often, the strings of lights or the framed light units are wrapped or covered with tinselly, shimmering materials that reflect light during the daylight hours. This provides some degree of decoration to the store exterior during those hours when the lights are not on or when they are barely visible. 64  
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## 6.5 Banners

Outdoor fabric [banners](#) are inexpensive and expendable, but they are colorful, eye-catching, and eye-filling devices that flutter and flap in the wind. They can be and should be changed with the seasons or the store events. A few holes, worked into the design, will allow the wind to sweep through without tearing the fabric. The banners can be hung from flagpoles, projected from the building, or hung flat against it. The same banner design, reduced in size and scale, could be hung from the marquee, between the display windows, or projecting from the columns inside the store. To be truly effective, however, the idea should not be overused. If there is always a banner flapping overhead, after a while, the shopper won't even look up. He or she will just assume it is the same “old” banner that was flapping there the week before. When a banner is used, it should be different in color, size, or shape from the one previously flown, and it should be introduced only after a decent interval has passed, for example, another season, or after a new promotion or a sale event.

Because logos and graphics are so important in today's scheme of image and identification, the designs used for the banners could be based on the special wrap or store bag design that was created for the season or promotion. The store's window displays could, in color and concept, reiterate the same graphic theme—but with a difference. If, for example, at Christmas, a store used an irregular gold star on a cerise-and-white peppermint-striped background, the same theme could be carried to the display window, filled with dozens of cascading gold stars of assorted sizes, invisibly suspended. All through this text, we will constantly refer to the advantages of displays that tie in with, and enhance, what is going on inside the store, in the newspaper ads, on television and radio, and in the store mailings. For it to work, display should not only attract and excite; it should also reinforce an idea and present dimensionally what was, until then, a flat representation. (See [Figure 6.2](#).)

## 6.6 Planters

[Planters](#), flower boxes, and plants outside a store add to the general ambiance of the store, especially if the store is on a “concrete-and-glass” Main Street, with neither a leaf nor blade of grass in sight. This is a social amenity, a way the store can show its good neighborliness, its friendliness, its being part of a community.

The planters can become a part of the display scheme, with changes in the varieties and colors of the plants to go with promotions or seasons. Red geraniums could call attention to a “country-casual” display or add color to a “red” promotion—anything from fashion to housewares—or even a spring-into-summer story. White flowers would certainly enhance any bridal setting, and mums and asters speak colorfully for fall and back to school.

Planters, set below and in front of a display window, actually dramatize the window presentation by adding greater depth to the setting. Artificial flowers and plants will do, but the real thing is so much nicer. (See [Figure 6.3](#).)

## 6.7 Awnings

**Awnings** add another gracious touch to the exterior of the store. Not only do they supply shelter for the shopper during inclement weather, but they also make viewing a window display more pleasant during the heat of the day. Some display persons use the awning as a device to cut down on the glare and reflection that turn show windows into giant mirrors.

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Awnings may also reduce the effects of the sunlight on merchandise, and they provide some shadowed area that allows spotlighting to be more effective. However, many awning users are now relying on them to add color and eye appeal to the storefront. The awning can become part of a seasonal display or announce a storewide promotion. The use of awnings is also discussed in [Chapter 7](#). (See [Figure 6.4](#).)

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Figure 6.2 For its big India promotion, the design team placed a gigantic papier mâché Ganesha (the elephant-headed Hindu god of beginnings) on the store's marquee, which projected out over the main entrance. A six-story tall banner announced the event, and multifoil arches were appliquéd over the store's windows to further the Indian theme.



*Macy's Union Square, San Francisco. James Bellante, senior vice president of visual presentation.*



## 6.8 Windows in Storefront Design

### 6.8.1 STRAIGHT FRONT

**Straight front** windows run parallel to the street. The entrance to the store may be located between a pair or a run of windows or to one side of a single window. The windows themselves may be closed back, open back, or elevated. (See [Figures 6.5](#) and [6.8](#).)

Figure 6.3 Whether it is a single planter to either side of the entrance or an extended flower box beneath a window, shrubs, plants, and flowers not only can add a seasonal touch to the merchandise on display, but also are a gracious and welcoming addition to storefront architecture.



*Dustmann, Helsinki, Finland.*

Figure 6.4 For Christmas the traditional awnings were overlaid with blankets of green foliage entwined with hundreds of flickering red bee lights to create a festive feeling on Yonge Street, in Toronto. While the windows below told different stories and glowed in with color, the awnings tied the storefront together in a single unified look.

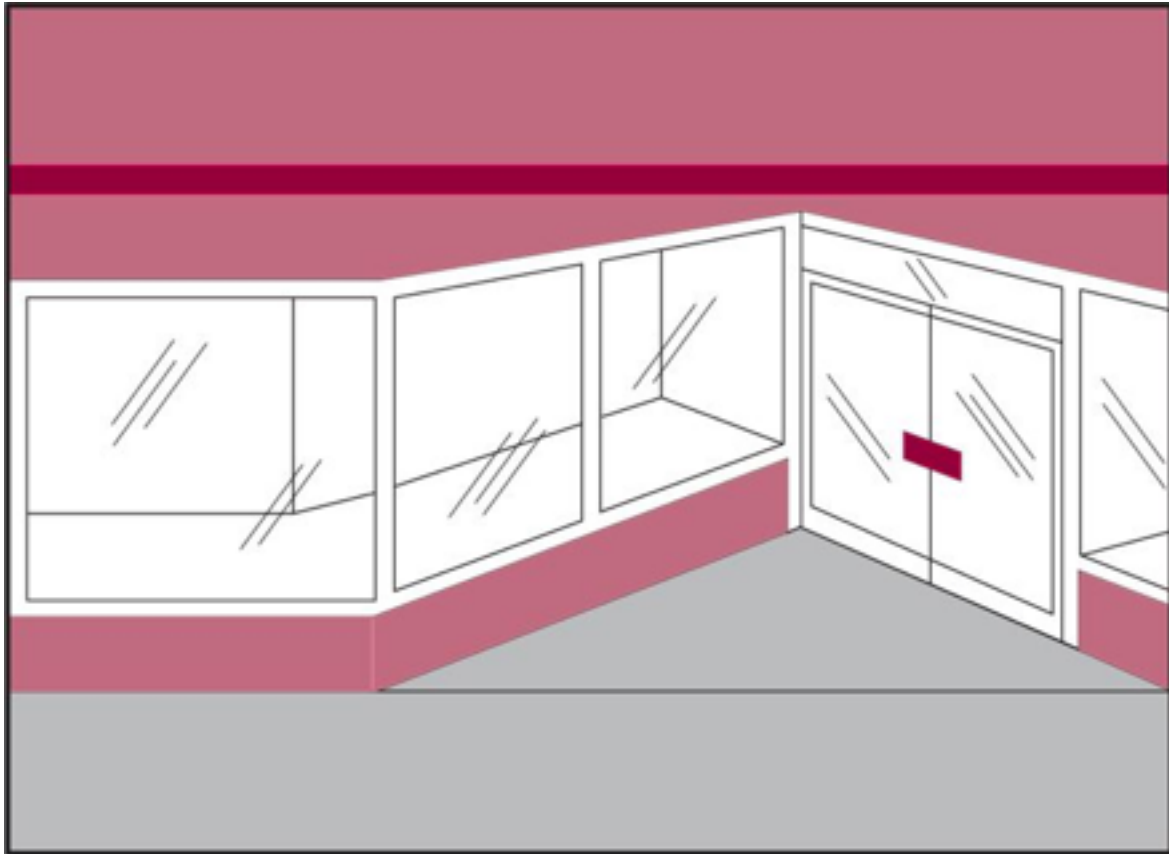


*The Bay, Toronto. Ana Fernandes, window display manager.*

Figure 6.5 This straight storefront consists of the entrance and a bank, or series, of display windows.



Figure 6.6 An angled storefront.



### 6.8.2 ANGLED FRONT

With the [angled front](#) design, the store entrance is recessed from the street, and the display windows lead back from the street to the entrance, creating an aisle for the shopper. The windows may go back at an angle to the entrance, thus becoming wider in the back than they are in the front. The back end of the window is actually on the same wall as the entrance; that wall can be completely closed, partially closed, or open backed. Usually, in an angled front (and the arcade front, which follows), the display windows are under some kind of enclosure, cutting down appreciably on glare. These windows may also be rather shallow to allow an unimpeded entrance into the store and more walk space for shoppers and potential customers. (See [Figure 6.6](#).)

### 6.8.3 ARCADE FRONT

The [arcade front](#) consists of a series of windows with backs and three sides of glass, coming forward from the entrance wall, which is set back from the street. The windows are “peninsulas” of glass attached to the store and are usually under some kind of overhead cover. The shopper enters between protruding display windows. (See [Figure 6.7](#).)

#### 6.8.4 CORNER WINDOW

The **corner window** faces two streets that are perpendicular to each other. It is a window with a double exposure and double traffic. The corner window may be the sole display showcase for a store with an entrance near the corner of a street, or it may be the end of a run of windows.

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Figure 6.7 An arcaded storefront.

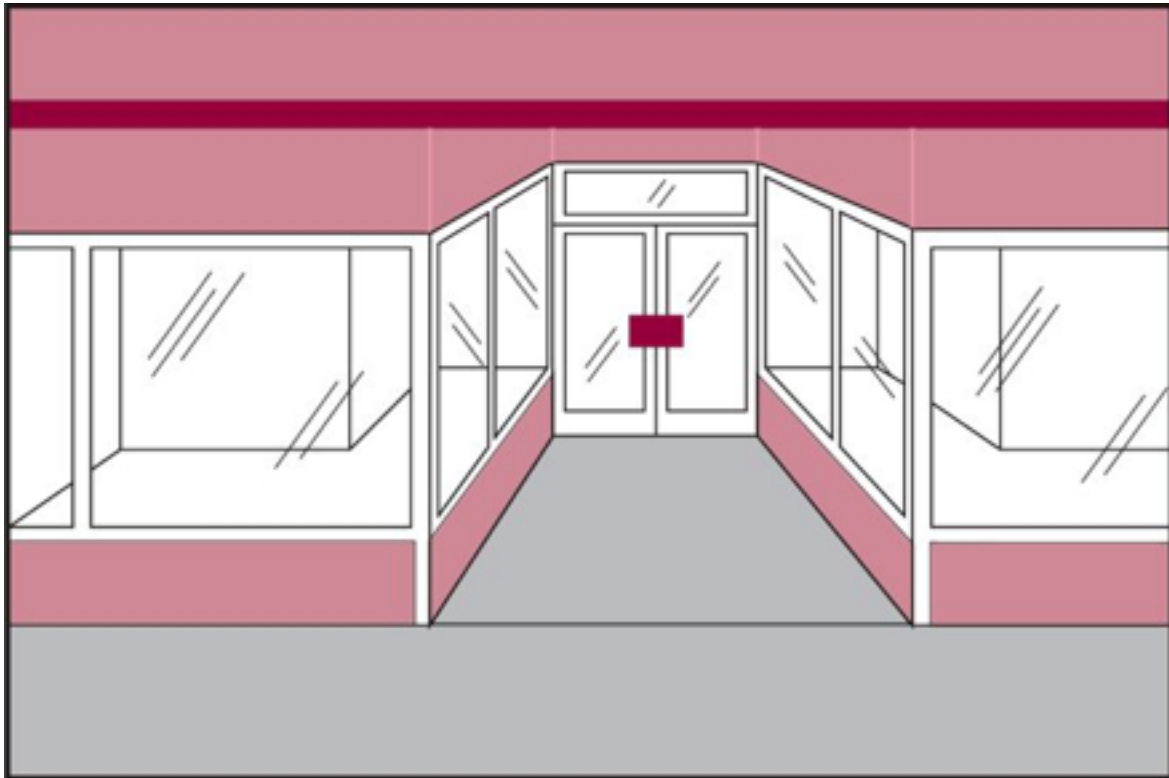




Figure 6.8 A typical straight front façade with display windows flanking the entrance to either side. Also, this is a rather typical mall shop front, with an all-glass façade, floor-to-ceiling glass panels, and no bulkhead. Merchandise needs to be raised up off the floor with risers or on platforms.



*Profil Optik, Aarhus, Denmark. Design: Riis Retail, Denmark.*

Figure 6.9 A corner window.



Usually, this window will have two adjacent panes of glass meeting at right angles. The back may be open or closed. Most stores convert this type of window into a triangular plan. The two glass fronts are the “legs” of the triangle, and the long back wall is the “hypotenuse.” The space that is cut off from view becomes valuable storage space. Because the two windows are at right angles to each other, the viewer can almost always see the overhead and side lighting—as well as a view of other stores and signs beyond the display area. Customers can find themselves distracted by viewers looking in from the other side of the window and by mirrored backgrounds that reflect traffic lights and the signs from other stores. (See [Figures 6.9](#) and [6.10](#).)

## 6.9 Mall Storefronts

With malls and shopping centers replacing Main Street in many towns and cities, the architecture of the façades, or shop fronts, in some ways is changing as well. The examples shown previously in this chapter are still used, but with variations, and in many cases the mall or shopping center may dictate the type of storefront the retailer may have. Mostly, the fronts are straight fronts—usually with a central opening and windows to either side or an entrance to one side and a window to the right or left of the opening. There can be exceptions, however.

### 6.9.1 OPEN FAÇADE

Except for the threshold, with the [open façade](#) there is no visible barrier, or separation, between the shopper on the mall aisle and the store, unless there is a change of flooring material. Security gates, used to close up the shop after hours, are usually invisible, rolled up into a space over the entry and slipped into pockets on either side of the opening. There are no display windows and no door—just a wide open expanse and an invitation to see the whole store. Sometimes, the displays come out to meet the shopper or will appear on a runway that starts up near the entrance. (See [Figure 6.11](#).)

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**Figure 6.10** The corner window can be viewed from either of two trafficked streets or from aisles in a mall. In a way, the window is like “theater in the round”—the mannequins and the merchandise have to be viewable from many angles, and there is no real “back,” where garments can be bunched and pinned. As shown here, the triangular window has a long back wall (the hypotenuse of the triangle), and the mannequins are arranged to be viewed from either window.



*The Bay, Toronto. Ana Fernandes, window display manager.*

Figure 6.11 The open façade is like the old-fashioned garage sale which invited people to come in and browse and shop. With no barrier between the mall aisle and the shop, these young realistic mannequins, casually arranged on platforms and risers, literally come out to greet shoppers as a welcoming display committee.



*Kickers, Gateshead, United Kingdom. Design: Dalziel & Pow, London.*

## 6.9.2 GLASS FAÇADE

A [glass façade](#) has display windows to one or either side of the glass doors that are usually open during business hours. The glass panels of the windows extend from floor to ceiling, and there are usually no raised floors in the windows. Mannequins often stand on the floor—eye to eye with the shoppers or elevated on platforms or risers. These elevations are especially needed to show off smaller products, like shoes, handbags, cosmetics, electronic equipment, and so on. The store interior can be viewed through the glazed façade, and if the mall has an open or glass-enclosed atrium, daylight streams in and can add a decided glare to the windows at certain times of the day.

Figure 6.12 The feeling of being special and belonging, or having the “open sesame” to get in, seems to be a new approach for some retail operations. Here, only the entrance is evident, and the tunnel-like, rugged, stony opening suggests a way to a rugby or soccer field or the locker rooms. This closed opening appeals to young shoppers, sports fans, and those looking for exclusivity.



*Red Bull, Salzburg. Design: Gruschwitz GmbH, Munich.*

### 6.9.3 CLOSED FAÇADE

The **closed façade** is an oxymoron sort of façade development: a closed opening. The windows are completely blocked off, painted out, wallpapered over, or wrapped in graphics, and only the entrance to the store is visible. For certain types of operations, this “secretive,” “private club,” exclusive feeling might work very well. It appeals to teens and tweens as well as to very upscale, boutique shoppers. It suggests something special and a sense of belonging to a certain group of shoppers. (See [Figure 6.12.](#))

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#### 6.9.3.1 The Exterior of the Store: Trade Talk

angled front

arcade front

awnings

banners

closed façade

corner window

fenestration

glass façade

marquees

open façade

outdoor lighting

planters

signs

straight front

#### 6.9.3.2 The Exterior of the Store: A Recap

◆ Display depends largely on the architecture and fenestration (window placement) of the structure.



- ◆ The store's sign makes the first impression on the shopper.
- ◆ Stores with marquees, or architectural canopies, can use them for announcements. A flat marquee can be used for a prop display.
- ◆ Outdoor displays include lighting, banners, planters, and awnings. Strings of lights can be draped or swagged, or wired to frames to form recognizable symbols or letters.
- ◆ Banners are inexpensive and expendable, but they are colorful and eye-catching and can be changed with the seasons or store events.
- ◆ Planters, flower boxes, or plants add to a store's ambiance. Set below and in front of a display, they dramatize the window setting. If possible, the plants should be part of the display scheme, and the color of the plants can be changed according to the season or the promotion.
- ◆ Awnings add a gracious touch to a store's exterior while providing shelter from inclement weather and shade during the heat of the day. They also cut down glare and reflection.
- ◆ Straight front windows run parallel to the store.
- ◆ An angled front window is recessed from the street, and the display windows may go back from the street to the entrance, creating an “aisle” for the shopper.
- ◆ An arcade window consists of a series of windows with backs and three sides of glass, coming forward from the entrance wall, which is set back from the street.
- ◆ A corner window faces two streets that are perpendicular to each other. Usually it will have two adjacent panes of glass meeting at right angles.
- ◆ The open façade, glass façade, and closed façade are variations in storefront design that may be found in malls and shopping centers.

### 6.9.3.3 Questions for Review and Discussion

1. Describe how window display and the store exterior convey a store's character and image.
2. Comment on the concept of the exterior sign being a store's “signature.”
3. What is a marquee, and how can it be used in visual merchandising?
4. Give an example of a theme, and explain how that theme could be promoted in the media and reinforced through elements of the store exterior.
5. Explain the difference between awnings and marquees.
6. List the four major types of exterior store windows, and provide an advantage and a disadvantage of each type.