



AWNINGS

MAIN STREET IOWA TECHNOTES

Fabric awnings are a traditional element of downtown storefront design. They are relatively inexpensive and can be a highly visible improvement to the overall appearance of your building and the entire downtown. Awnings help to create a pleasant and stimulating shopping environment by adding color and providing shelter.

Typically, awnings are used for shade and sun control by buildings facing south, east or west. In addition, they can provide a good location for signs and graphics and serve as a source of color. Fabric awnings are also a historically sensitive approach to disguising previous inappropriate alterations to the upper storefront area.

Traditional awnings come in two basic framing styles, operable and fixed. Operable, or roll out awnings, are good for sun control and are especially useful on buildings facing

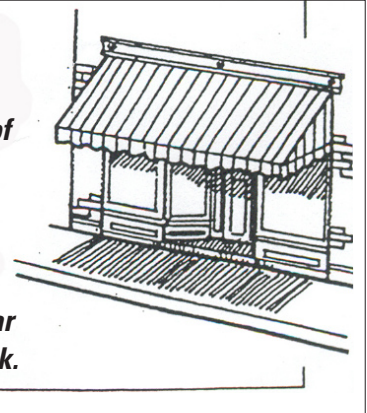
east or west. They can be unrolled for shade, and rolled up to allow natural light into the store. If the operable framework still exists it should be repaired and re-covered with new fabric. This is usually less expensive than buying both a frame and fabric cover.

Fixed frame awnings typically have a welded tubular framework to support the awning fabric. The framework is attached to the building structure. Fixed frame awnings are permanently open.

Awnings should be the same shape as the opening they are used to cover. A rectangular opening should have a traditional sloped shape awning. Rounded front awnings will also fit in the same space, but have a more trendy image compared to the

Be sure that the awning doesn't cover too much of the storefront vertically...

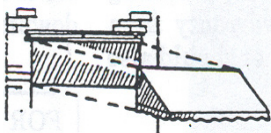
...or extend too far over the sidewalk.



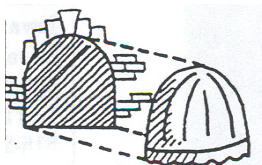
traditional appearance of the sloped shape. Rounded front awnings with a substantial projection also usually appear larger (and more out of scale) than a slope shaped awning of the same size. An arched window should have a barrel awning.

Care should also be taken with the frame of the awning in relationship to the storefront. Be careful to avoid having framing cut across windows or door openings. The frame should be designed to blend with the elements of the storefront to be less noticeable.

Awnings should be the same shape as the openings they cover.



A rectangular opening should have a traditional sloped shape awning.



An arched opening should have a barrel shaped awning.





Design and fabrication details can make an awning very traditional or much more contemporary. A straight valance, or no valance at all creates a more contemporary feel. Omitting side panels and unique framing also adds contemporary details.

The overall size of the awning is very important. Be sure that the height of the awning doesn't cover too much of the storefront or extend too far over the sidewalk. The width of the awning will need to extend only slightly beyond the storefront to allow for adequate anchoring of the frame. Any columns on the edge of the building should not be covered but left exposed to continue uninterrupted into the upper facade. Look at other buildings in your community with awnings to get a feeling of overall proportion and design.

Awnings are a good location for signs. The valance, or bottom edge, is the most common location for simple signs. Logos or graphics can be placed on the slope of the awning if desired.

There are many colors and styles of awning fabrics, from solid to multi-colored stripes. Custom made color combinations are also possible. To determine what color to use for an awning, look at your building and its neighbors. Colors should create a harmonious blend throughout the downtown. Also use colors that

coordinate with the overall color scheme for the building, including any brickwork. A highly detailed color scheme might look better with a solid awning. A simple color scheme

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may need a stronger pattern

The awning fabrics of today have come a long way from the simple canvas originally used. Modern acrylic fabrics resist mildew and retain color extremely well. Vinyl fabrics are also becoming popular. However, the texture and appearance of these types of awnings is gener-

ally not recommended for traditional buildings downtown.

Be certain that any awning fabric includes a warranty from the mill. The supplier should also guarantee in writing the installation.

An awning cannot fix every storefront design problem. But, a well designed awning will add a strong color splash and identity for the individual store, and it will also enhance the original character of the building and the entire downtown.



For more information:

*Design Consultant
Main Street Iowa
Iowa Dept of Economic Development
200 East Grand, Des Moines, IA 50309
515-242-4762
515-242-4792*

Additional Reading:

*“Awnings and Canopies on Main Street”
National Trust for Historic Preservation
Washington D.C., Copyright 1987.*

*“Building Improvement File”
National Trust Main Street Center
Washington D.C.*

*“The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings” Preservation Brief #44
U.S. Department of the Interior*