TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories
Commercial and Civic Architecture
Commercial Architecture
Reference Materials

by Richard Longstreth
Commercial Architecture
Commercial Architecture
Compositional Types

- One-part Commercial Block
- Two-part Commercial Block
- Enframed Window Wall
- Stacked Vertical Block
- Two-part Vertical Block
- Three-part Vertical Block
- Temple Front
- Vault
- Enframed Block
- Central Block with Wings
- Arcaded Block
One-part Commercial Block

Parapet

Display windows
Two-part Commercial Block

Two to four stories in height

Belt course

Display windows

Private zone

Public zone
Enframed Window Wall

Decorative elements tend to be modest, often abstract

Simple surround

Little or no separation between ground floor and upper floor(s)

Large glazed display area
Stacked Vertical Block

Five or more stories in height

Varied treatments for each layer

Series of layers, rather than coherent whole

Similar emphasis for each layer

Photo courtesy of Steve Clicque
Two-part Vertical Block

At least four stories in height

Vertical emphasis shown by use of pilasters, engaged columns, piers, or smooth wall surface rising between windows

Two parts:

Upper zone: emphasis is on the “shaft” and has sense of verticality

Lower zone: the “base” is one to two stories in height
Three-part Vertical Block

Three parts:
- Base
- Shaft
- Capital

Identical to two-part vertical block except has distinct upper zone of generally 1 to 3 stories
Temple Front

One compositional unit

Usually two to three stories in height

Two types:
- Portico across front
- Recessed entrance with twin columns
Vault

Typically two to three stories

Tall and comparatively narrow center opening

Massiveness and enclosure emphasized
Enframed Block

Typically two to three stories high

Façade punctured by columns, pilasters, arcades or treatment suggestive of classical elements

Main section is bracketed by narrower end bays to form continuous wall plane
Central Block with Wings

Typically two to four stories

Projecting center section and subordinate flanking units

All three parts may read as single mass or as three related masses
Arcaded Block

Characterized by series of tall, evenly spaced, round-arched openings

Typically two to three stories
Stylistic Influences
Contact Information

Texas Historical Commission
www.thc.state.tx.us

• Historic Resources Survey
  • Historic Resources Survey Coordinator: Leslie Wolfenden
  • 512.463.3386
  • leslie.wolfenden@thc.state.tx.us