Identify patterns around your home

One of the first and most important steps in remodeling or expanding an existing home in an established neighborhood is to look around, learn, and understand the existing patterns and character traits that can offer design cues for your project. You are responsible for the future of your own neighborhood. Developing a detailed awareness of the neighborhood, the block, and the adjacent homes surrounding your site will allow you to better understand how to address the conditions and challenges that you may encounter.

Each city has its own zoning ordinances that regulate what and how owners might remodel or build on their property. Within these zoning ordinances, common building setback criteria are usually established that regulate how close to any property line a building might be. Consistent setbacks, roof pitches (the slope of the roof), eave heights, and building materials are a few of the qualities that give a neighborhood a cohesive character and create a visual appeal from the public streets and sidewalks for all to enjoy.

**NEIGHBORHOOD**

- What are the current zoning limitations?
- Do the existing homes follow the current zoning setbacks?
- What are the overall lot characteristics?
- What is the predominant facade material facing the street?
- What is the predominant roof pitch, type and material?

**BLOCK**

- How are homes set on their lots?
- Is there an obvious pattern formed by heights of existing homes on the block?
- Are there dominant architectural features?
- Are the garages attached? Detached? Is there an alley?
- What are the dominant landscape features? Where are the street trees located?

**ADJACENT HOMES**

- Home types:
  - Ranch
  - Two Story
  - Cape Cod
  - Split Level
- What are the approximate roof pitches?
- Where are the adjacent homes’ garages and driveways situated?
- What is the dominant lot orientation?
- How are the homes situated on their lots? Close to the street? On or near the lot setbacks?
- Are the views open to the backyard?
- What are the landscape features?
- What are the building materials used on adjacent homes?
- What types of roof lines do the homes have?

**SITE**

- What is the width and depth of the lot?
- Where does the property sit on the block?
- Is there alley access?
- What are the unique features of the property?
- Are there any site conditions that affect the project’s height, setback lines, garage and driveway placement?
- Are there landscaping challenges?
once an understanding of the neighborhood, the existing site and the home is attained, the most fundamental aspect of adding on to an existing home is the massing of the addition relative to the existing home, its site and its neighborhood. Although zoning ordinances may only regulate building setbacks from the property lines, building to all the setback lines usually results in a structure that is too big for the site, creates many rooms without exterior windows, and leaves little open space for rear and side yards in particular. Even though many additions cannot be seen from the front (more specifically, the street and sidewalk) it is important to be mindful of what your adjacent neighbors look at either through their side windows or back door, and how daylight and fresh air flow through their yards as well as yours.

Tips for all remodeling projects:

1. **Match slope of existing roof**
   - Gabled roof front stoop (6’ deep x 8’ wide)
   - One-story rear yard addition
   - Addition no longer than the existing house is deep
   - Addition less than half the depth of the existing home

2. **Match eave line**
   - Gabled roof front stoop (8’ deep x 18’ wide)
   - Tandem garage and room addition
   - Addition no longer than the existing house is deep
   - Match existing height

3. **Match existing size, shape and proportion of windows**
   - Shed roof front porch (8’ x 16’)
   - Two-story bedroom addition
   - One-story rear addition
   - Addition no longer than the width of the existing house
   - Addition less than half the depth of the existing home
   - Addition half as long as existing is deep
Tips for all remodeling projects:

1. Match slope of existing roof
   - Gabled roof front stoop (6’ x 8’)
   - Rear-yard addition
   - Add light wells

2. Match eave line
   - Shed roof front porch (16’ x 23’)
   - Tandem garage and living space addition
   - Add light wells

3. Match existing size, shape and proportion of windows
   - Combination gables/shed front porch (6’ x 23’)
   - One-and-a-half story rear-yard addition
   - Add light wells

Massing, Proportion and Scale

Working from the top down (that is, the roof), these simple guidelines will allow you to create a massing for additions that will respect your neighbors while maximizing the opportunities for windows and daylight. The lot size and shape shown in these examples are fairly common to these house types—leading to the assumption that there is no room for additions in the side yards, and that current zoning regulations would not allow an encroachment into the front yard setback except for an open air porch or stoop.
Once the massing of the addition is determined and floor plans laid out, it is important to review the design cues from your neighborhood and the existing home to create building elements that are not only compatible but also enhance the appearance found in the hidden qualities of its structure. Much of this has to do with how the new addition(s) relate to the existing house in terms of height and shape, and then the size and placement of doors and windows. For instance, columns should look like columns — not fence posts or a pole barn — using at a minimum size of 6’ x 6’s instead of 4’ x 4’s).

The goal can be simply stated: “Make it look like it’s always been there and enhance the inherent qualities of the existing house with quality materials and details.”

As part of replacing exterior materials, consider the longevity and durability of the existing materials as well as possible replacement materials. One of the valuable qualities of post-WWII housing is that much of it contains high-quality materials such as brick, hardwood floors and cedar siding.

Retaining these original high-quality materials rather than replacing them with substandard materials will reduce the long-term maintenance of your home and increase its long-term value.

On the other hand there are also some post-WWII materials which have not withstood the test of time and need to be replaced as part of the renovation process. In choosing replacement materials consider short-term and long-term maintenance issues along with cost. A good approach is to think of using high-quality, durable materials as an investment in the future. You will be able to recapture your investment either through reduced maintenance costs or in a higher resale value.

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**EXTERIOR APPEARANCE**

**CAPE COD**

- Add gabled front porch
- Add sidelight to front door
- Widen front gabled dormers
- Add new windows, trim

**Preferred**

- Rear gabled dormer which matches front with shed roof in between

**Acceptable**

- Rear shed dormer (line up with front dormer)

**Less desirable**

- Rear shed addition (keep back from end wall same distance as front dormer)

**SPLIT LEVEL**

- Add shed front porch (with or without railing)
- Add double sidelight to front door
- Widen front gabled dormers

- Line up eaves
- Add brackets
- Light wells and taller windows
- Match existing roof slope
- Add windows on "garage" side for light and appearance
- Match existing windows scale, size, and proportion
- Add a tandem garage with roof-top garden above
- Expand garage attic for living space above

- Preferred

- Rear shed addition (keep back from end wall same distance as front dormer)

- Less desirable

- Rear shed dormer which matches front with shed roof in between

- Match existing roof slope
- Add a decorative window
- Align windows
- Match existing roof slope
- Add a third story
- Add a gabled front porch
One of the most important elements in improving these post-WWII homes is getting the details right. Whether the existing home has window trim and mouldings, or the traditional styles found on some Cape Cods, respecting the qualities of existing styles or enhancing them with new windows and trim consistent with the original patterns of the house is important. What follows are a few simple guidelines on how to develop windows and doors of consistent size, shape, and pattern to fit within the character and style of the existing house and neighborhood.

When developing window sizes and shapes for bedrooms, be mindful of widths and heights required by building codes to provide emergency fire exits.

**USE SAME WINDOW & WINDOW PANE PROPORTION**
(Diagonal lines are same angle, or height/width = the same number)

**USE SAME WINDOW PANE SIZE; VARY NUMBER OF PANES HORIZONTALLY**

**TYPICAL TRADITIONAL Paneled Doors**
(Style and rail with or without glass)

**TYPICAL “CONTEMPORARY TRADITIONAL” Paneled Doors**
(Style and rail with or without glass)
ADDRESSING TWO-CAR GARAGE ISSUES

A common problem with the post-WWII house types is the modern expectation of a two- or three-car garage. Many were built with one-car garages, if any, and little or no room on the side to add a second "side-by-side" stall. Several solutions address that problem in varying ways to meet your needs.

Garage additions should comply with zoning setback requirements, be appropriate to your own house and backyard, and be respectful to the neighborhood.

Garage doors should be set back from the main house façade, where possible, and should be proportionate to the existing house. In many cases, using two single-doors with exterior trim or siding between them, instead of one double door is recommended. Three-car garages are most likely disproportionately large to the rest of the house, rear yards, and adjacent lots.