



Transformation Beyond Heritage Preservation

A Critique and Proposal of Heritage Preservation and Adaptation for Queen West Heritage Conservation District

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“With weak heritage laws, lack of public resources devoted to preservation, and lack of financial support for owners of heritage property, it is very difficult to keep the pact. Many fine buildings are buried under unsympathetic alterations and garish signage. Often we are unable to preserve buildings whole and are left with facades grafted onto buildings designed for a shorter life than the original.”

- Eric Ross Arthur, and Stephen A. Otto. No Mean City. (1986).

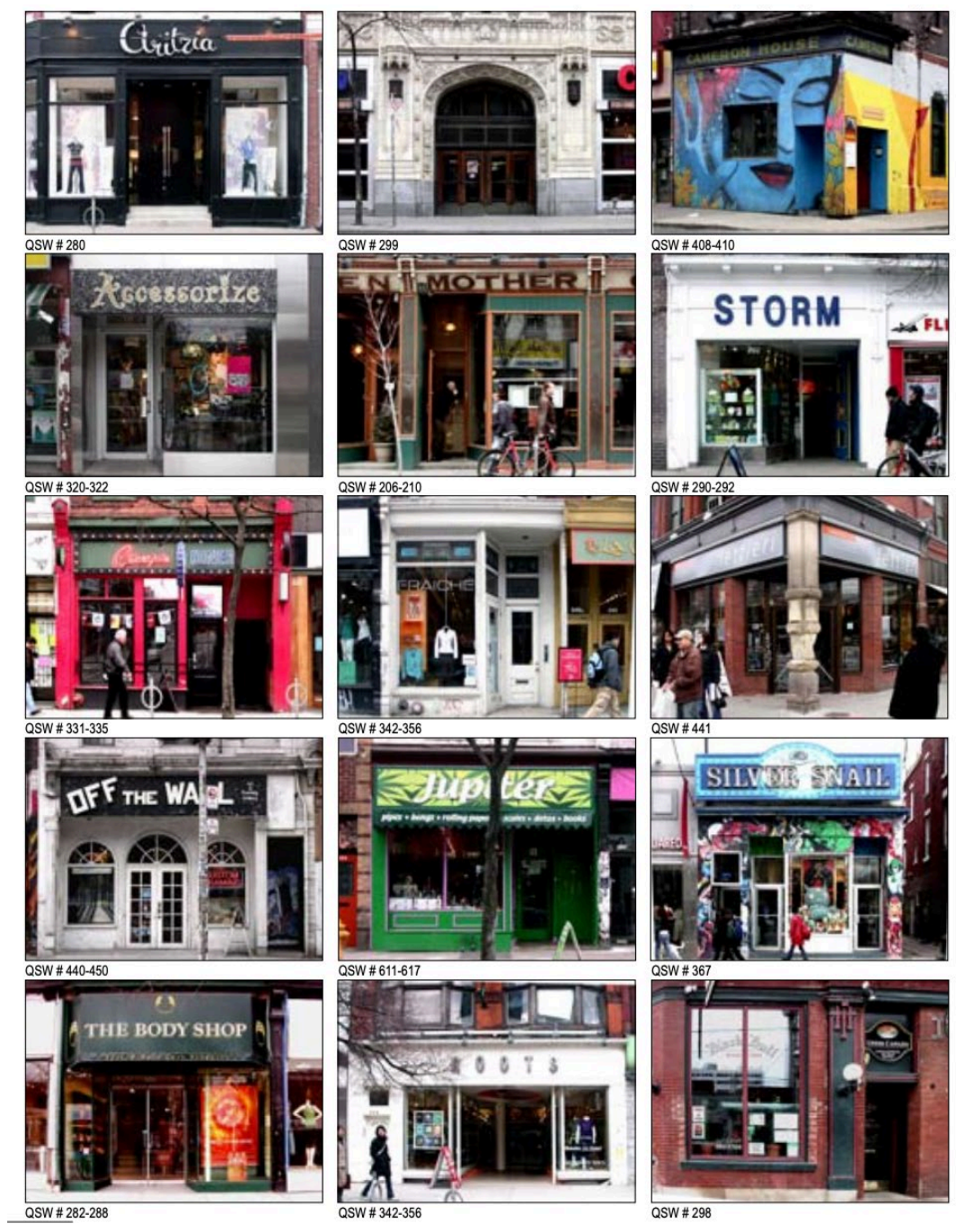
Transformation Beyond Preservation

This report provides an analysis and critique of current preservation tactics outlined for the Queen West Heritage Conservation District (HCD). In a heritage evaluation of the district by the Office for Urbanism, the architectural facade is the main determinator of tangible heritage. This is often complemented by the building’s social history of associated significant figures/events. Thus, heritage conservation manifests as a checklist that restricts future development of Queen West, despite its historical nature as a rapidly changing commercial and cultural district. The objective of this study is to illustrate effects of Queen West’s HCD designation on future development through maps and an examination of specific heritage structures.

Heritage planners under the Ontario Heritage Association have a great amount of discretion to determine where preservation rules will be abided at the building and city scale. The checklist of ‘worthy’ aspects of preservation prioritizes buildings with brick and architectural detailing, focusing on the aesthetic character of the street. This blurry quasi-heritage approach has reduced further development of the district to a fragmented halt. As a result, conservation practices have been piecemeal and image-driven, often completely renovating interiors and displacing existing residents for more affluent tenants. In the circle of private developers, city politicians, and the demand for economic densification, conservation policies have become a matter of compromise, thus leaving behind a palimpsestic and anachronistic facade.

This research examines how certain buildings have contributed to the cultural and architectural heritage of the district. The following catalog compares archival with current photographs to analyze their contribution towards heritage preservation at Queen West and within the City of Toronto heritage policies and preservation laws. Sara Gwendolyn Ross discusses the legal framework of cultural heritage protection that balances public and private interests towards a heritage easement agreement for Canada. The spatial pattern of ownership, deriving from Toronto’s underlying concession grid and process of land subdivision, is preserved in the city’s built fabric. This morphology, theorized George Baird and Barton Myers’ article “Vacant Lottery”, reveals the relationship between the city’s colonial grid and its local architectural typology. The system continues to regulate the commercial nature of Queen West, both spatially and economically. This study lends to a critique of facadism where the building is an object that has greater exchange value than functional use.

By analysing the HCD’s resultant consequences towards heritage conservation, further speculation on how adaptive reuse can be imagined within the confines of this framework. A greater understanding of heritage value by community users and residents is required to integrate growth and adaptation. In Part 2, this research proposes architectural and policy changes to allow for future transformation and adaptation that better reflects the dynamic nature of Queen West.



The storefronts of Queen West Remain the most dynamic and evolving aspect of the HCD. The ground level retail reflects changes in use and allows for new alterations and occupations of the buildings

Source: Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District Plan. City of Toronto Heritage Preservation Services. 2006

Urban Morphology of Queen Street West

This series of maps presents a microanalysis of building footprint along Queen West to understand the physical transformation of the district over the years. From 1880-1924, the area underwent a wide variety of changes that led to the unique character of Queen Street West, which is dynamic and commercial in nature with local and family owned stores. These shops reflect the needs of the local community, enabling residents to shop by walking to the nearest store, rather than drive or take the streetcar.

However, there have been very minimal changes from 2008-2022, after Queen West’s designation as a Heritage Conservation District in 2007. This lack of change can be attributed to HCD guidelines restricting organic evolution of the area. This designation has set the premise for facadism, a subject that has been of contentious debate in heritage preservation. By constructing a timeline of archival photos and architectural drawings, this research will further explore the limitations of preservation initiatives—manifesting as a pick-and-choose method—that are implemented by the city.



#342 to 354 Queen Street West. 2010s.



South side Queen Street West #217 to 233, August 23, 1931.



141-47 Queen Street West, Jan 12, 1953.



#485-87, Queen Street West from, Dec 1941.



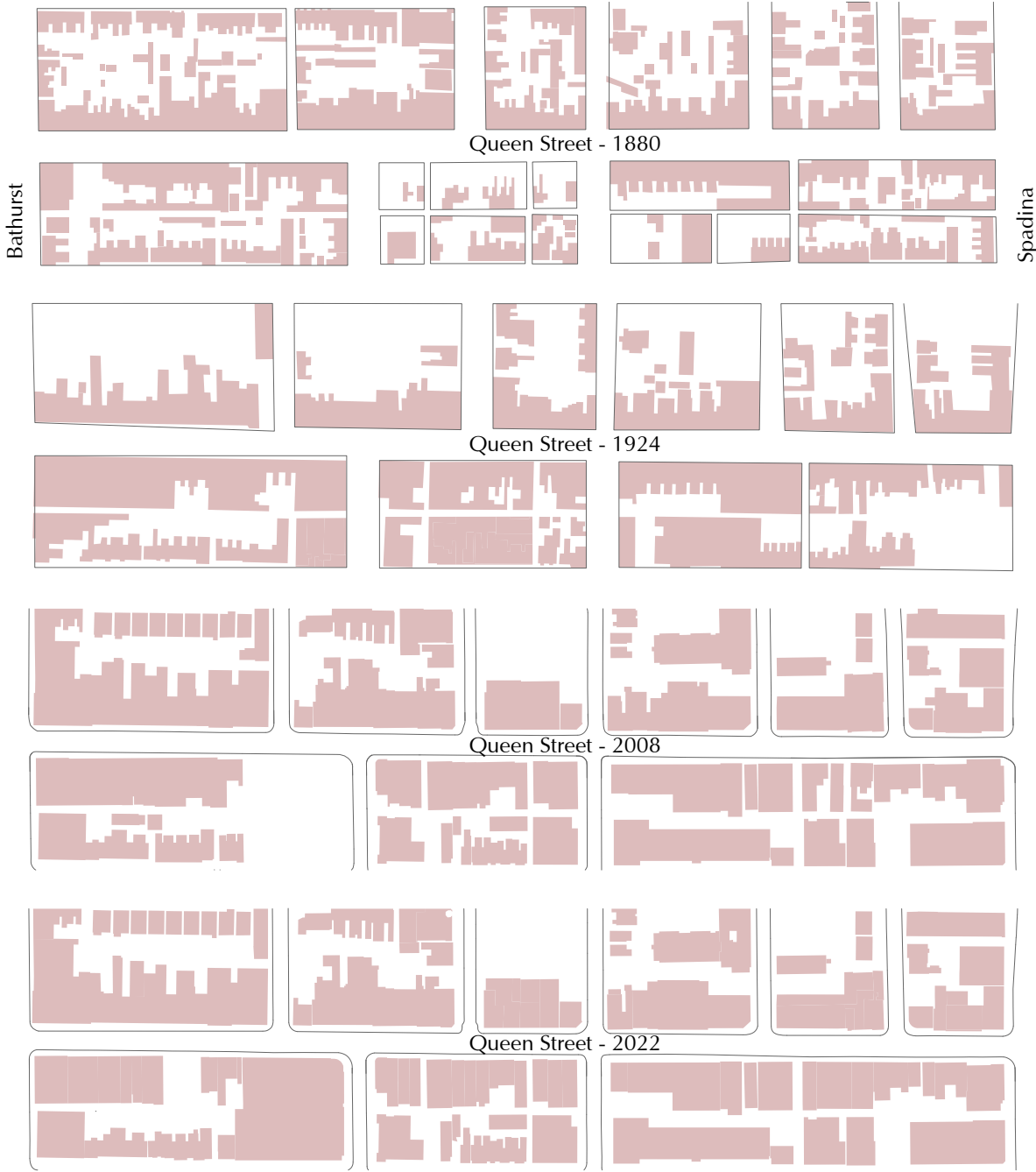
South side Queen Street West from #387, June 1959.



#270-280 Queen West. 1970s



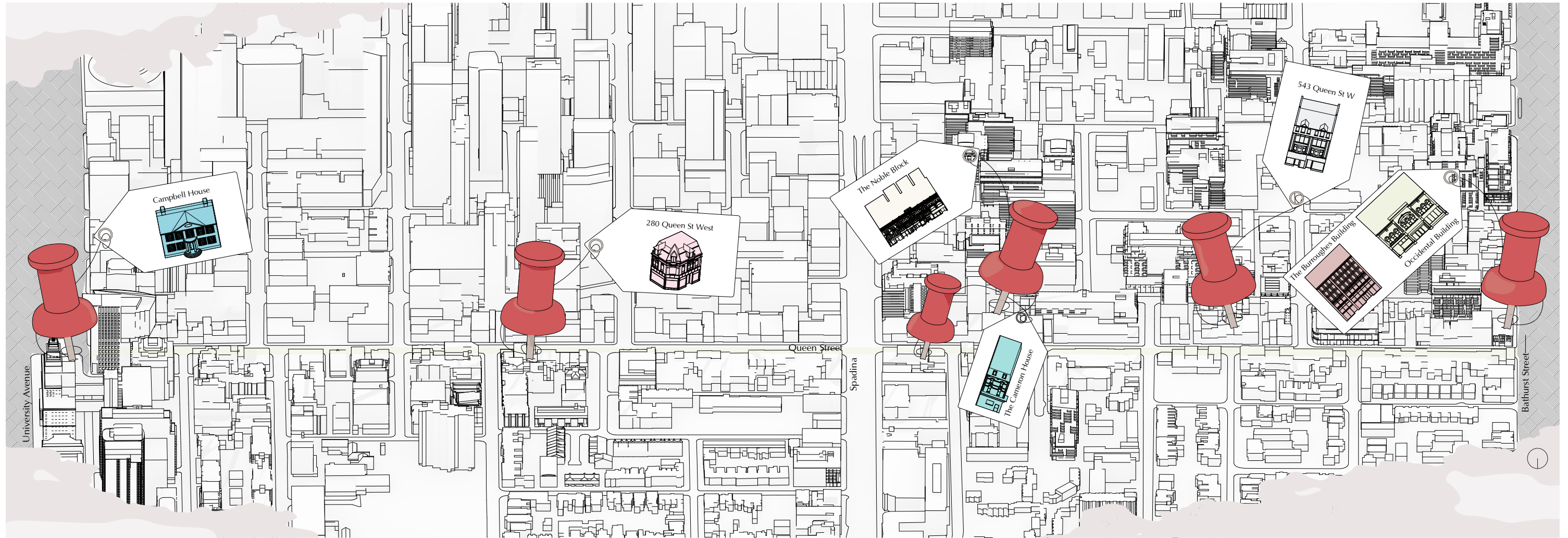
#425 Queen Street West. Looking east 1990s



Heritage buildings along Queen Street West

This research selects a variety of buildings with rich cultural and architectural importance that are esteemed both within and beyond the community of Queen Street West. Six case study buildings or blocks are used to examine which structures should be deemed as “heritage” to determine what should be preserved when inevitable changes must occur.

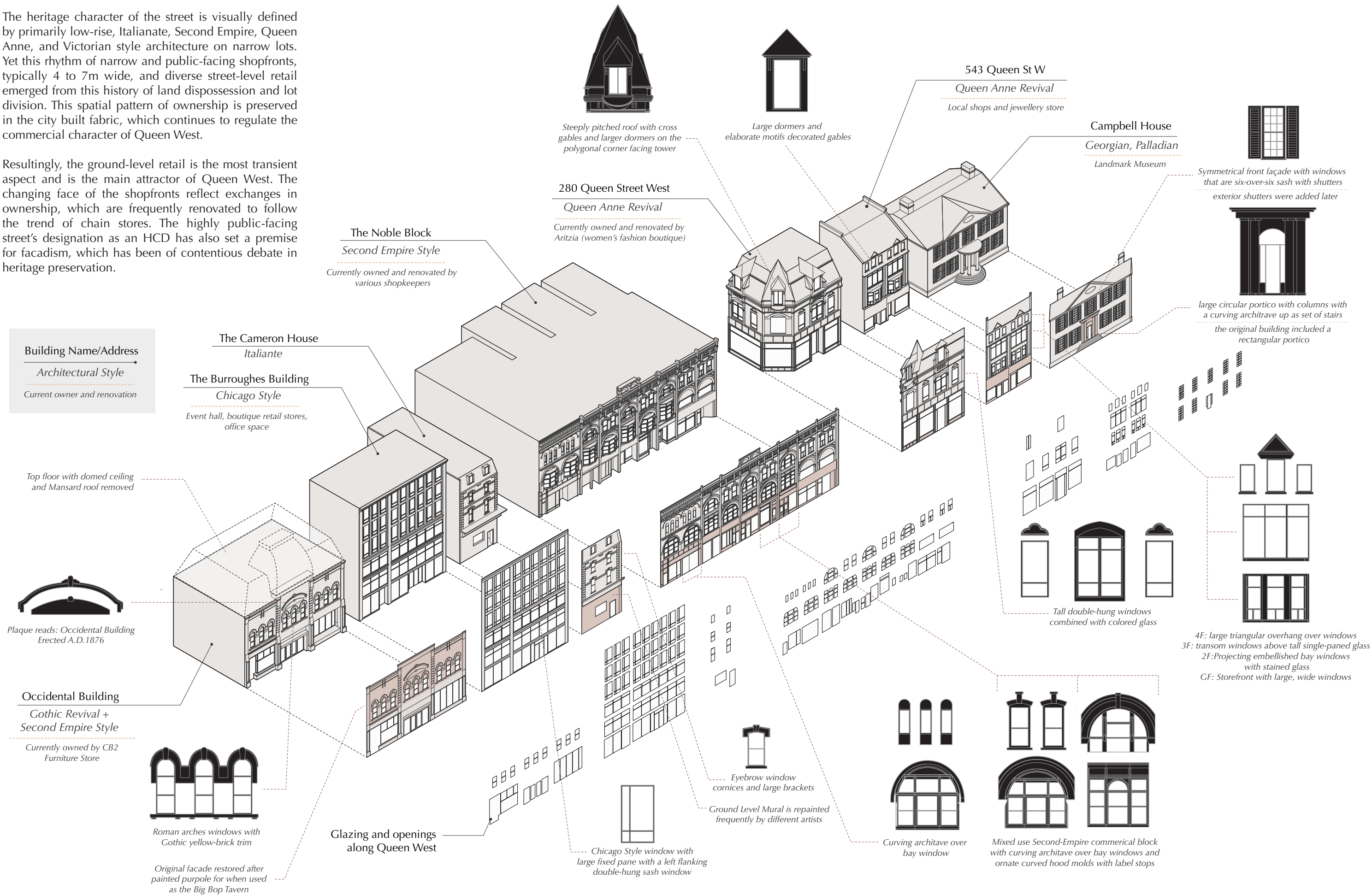
The idea of architectural evolution is reinforced in “Unchanging Architecture and the Case for Alteration,” where Fred Scott writes, “[For a building to] remain unchanged results in the eventual loss of occupation, alteration is the entropic skid, the promise of demolition is of a new building.” Scott, in turn, proposes for alteration to extend the lifespan of a building beyond its original intention and physical state. Adaptation becomes an act of transition or translation, from the past into the future. In this sense, architecture and public life are entangled. Social values that are implanted into buildings to generate new cultural meaning.

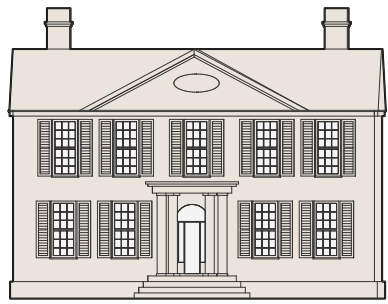


Catalogue of Architectural Styles, Preservation and Adaptation Techniques

The heritage character of the street is visually defined by primarily low-rise, Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, and Victorian style architecture on narrow lots. Yet this rhythm of narrow and public-facing shopfronts, typically 4 to 7m wide, and diverse street-level retail emerged from this history of land dispossession and lot division. This spatial pattern of ownership is preserved in the city built fabric, which continues to regulate the commercial character of Queen West.

Resultingly, the ground-level retail is the most transient aspect and is the main attractor of Queen West. The changing face of the shopfronts reflect exchanges in ownership, which are frequently renovated to follow the trend of chain stores. The highly public-facing street's designation as an HCD has also set a premise for facadism, which has been of contentious debate in heritage preservation.





*Campbell House - 160 Queen Street West
(relocated from 64 Duke Street, now Adelaide Street)*

Timeline of Use:

- Built in 1822 for Upper Canada Chief Justice Sir William Campbell and his wife Hannah.
- Housed various prominent citizens, including Hon. James Gordon, Terence O'Neil, John Strathy and John Fensom.
- Used by several businesses as office space and a factory: including Hobbs Glass Company, Capewell Horse Nail Company, Masco Elevator Company, and Coutts-Hallmark Greeting Cards Company

Current Use: Historic house museum and a former club for the members of the Advocates Society

Historical Architectural Features: Campbell House is the oldest remaining house from the original site of the Town of York and considered a landmark of Georgian architecture (Palladian style).

Influence on heritage preservation in Toronto:

The preservation of Campbell House was a defining moment of architectural preservation in Toronto. During the 1950s and 1960s, 19th-century homes were demolished at a rapid rate to make way for new construction. In his 1967 book, *No Mean City*, architect Eric Arthur predicted that there may be no 19th-century buildings left in the city by 2000. To avoid demolition, the house was relocated from its original location at Frederick/Adelaide to a site at the northwest corner of Queen/University. The spectacle of the physical move is considered a preservation achievement, which became a catalyst for Torontonians to save other local landmarks when they became threatened.

The project also inspired the creation of a permanent exhibit, *Lost and Found*, at the Campbell House garden, which showcases salvaged fragments of heritage buildings. Converted into a museum and restored to a pre-existing state, this strategy preserves history as a physical artifact, effectively freezing the past as to be translated into the present. In this context, heritage is given an exchange value as a tangible object rather than extends past its function.



1920s, the building was used by the Capewell Horse Nail Company



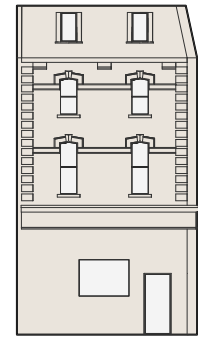
Campbell House is used by the Masco Elevator Company



The building was relocated to Queen/University on 1972.



Campbell House officially opened as a museum in 1974.



The Cameron House - 408 Queen Street West

Timeline of Use:

- Constructed in 1880, Angus Cameron opened a dry goods store on the premise of then #398 Queen Street
- 1888, the shop became the "Ryan and Sullivan Tailor Shop."
- 1890: vacant
- 1891: furnishings shop opened by E. Hodd
- 1895: John Burns Hotel
- 1896: Became the "Cameron House"
- 1920s: Opened as a working hotel
- 1981: Launched by Paul Sannella, Anne Marie Ferraro, and Herb Tookey, the Cameron became a community-based space for music, performance, and visual art

Current Use: Bar, live music venue, informal cultural centre with a barber shop

Historical Architectural Features: Italianate Style

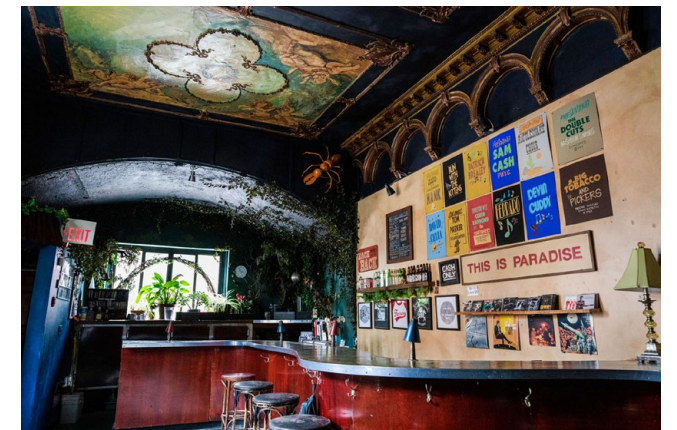
Influence on heritage preservation on Queen West:

Today, the building is a staple of the Toronto music scene, hosting local bands and artists since 1981. It is described as a bohemian Toronto crossover of CBGB's and The Chelsea Hotel in New York. It remains a cultural hub on Queen West, providing musicians a space to perform, meet, drink, live and work. The ground level facade of the Cameron House exemplifies the transient nature of Queen West, featuring colourful murals that are repeated repainted by different artists. While the original building had an ordinary function as a dry good storefront, the Cameron House gradually became a community-based space for music and performance. It was one of the main hubs for the Queen Street music scene in the 80s and 90s, featuring experimental music and local bands.

Recently, a barber shop opened at the Cameron House, again extending its use as a social gathering space. The alterations on the facade and interior reflect its transformation from a storefront to a music venue while retaining the original ornamentation



2007 photograph of the Cameron House. The ground level mural is repeated repainted by different artists over time.



2021 interior photographs of the bar and stage that retains the original ornamentation and atmosphere of the space.



The Noble Block - 342 to 354 Queen Street West

Timeline of Use:

- 1790s: Park Lot #15 granted to William Wilcox by Lieutenant Governor Simcoe.
- 1802: Peter Russell purchased Park Lot #15, with rowhouses known as the Petersfield Row
- Constructed in 1888: Named the Noble Block after Emma Noble who owned the land, and constructed from money inherited from her father, William Noble, a retired farmer.

1888: (Source: Toronto Directories
Buildings to the west of the Noble Block
#358, Albert Harvard, drugs
#356, Mr. N. Olives, fruits
Noble Block

#354, Fawcett and Peterman, tailors
#352, Pearson and Company, hats
#350, John W. Clark, barber
#348, Archibald Loughrey, cigars
#346, Toronto Musical Instrument Company
#344-342, Fleming and Company, furniture store

Current Use:

Ground level shopfronts:

- #358-356, Fjällräven Toronto, equipment/clothing store
- #354, Buono Italian restaurant
- #352, Coco Fresh Tea & Juice
- #350, bluboho Jewelry store
- #348, Fraiche Boutique (open to lease)
- #346, Geologic Rock Shop
- #344-342, Casper mattress store

Upper levels: Residential apartments and offices.

Architects: James Smith and William Gimmell

Historical Architectural Features: Second Empire Style and Romanesque Revival. Overall symmetrical facade. Some windows include blue and green stained glass in the top sections and window frames are detailed by hand-tooled wood trim for ornamentation.

Influence on heritage preservation on Queen West:

Before the Noble Block, the Petersfield Row occupied this section of the street, from Spadina to Soho, during the 19th century. However, due to the city's rapid growth and as a commercial centre of the community, land prices along Queen Street were increasing rapidly. The original working-class rowhouses were demolished and replaced with higher structures that extended further back from the street, resulting in taller buildings on narrow lots.

The Noble Block has retained its commercial and transient character or conversely, have been severely altered and modernized. Colourful storefronts and signage reflecting changes in ownership. Alterations, such as the (re-) painting and striping of the facade, window furnishings, and most significantly, the shopfronts and entrances on the ground level.

The two buildings to the immediate west of the Noble Block are not part of the original 7 structures and were constructed until several years later. However, they visually complement the Noble Block by using the similarly-coloured ornate brickwork, arched bay windows, and cornice detailing that follows the architectural rhythm of Queen West. While situated in the past, this approach responds to the existing context of the surrounding buildings. It starts to set a precedent of how future additions to the street can reflect the architectural heritage of Queen West while undergoing transformation.



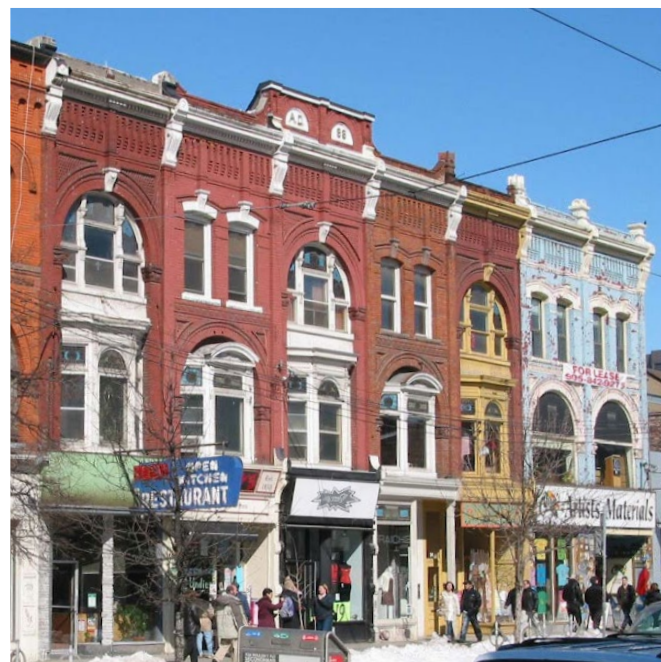
City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1526, File 70, Item 52

1971 photograph of the Noble Block facing northeast



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1526, File 70, Item 53

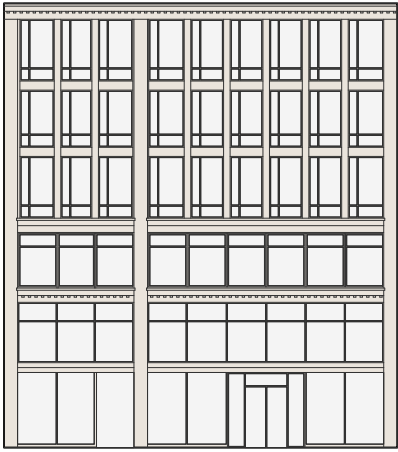
1981 photograph of the Noble Block facing northwest



The two east-most properties are painted in a light blue colour, #346 painted the window frames yellow.



The current facade of the Noble Block has been restored to its original brick and various window frames have been replaced. The most striking changes are at the ground level shopfronts.



Burroughes Building - 639 Queen Street West

Timeline of Use:

- Constructed in 1907 by F.C. Burroughes Furniture Company as its flagship retail department store.
- 1949-2002: King Sol, sporting and camping gear retailer
- 2006: Queen Street Partners acquired the building and undertook an extensive renovation to restore the original structure and install tastemakers, creative trailblazers and community activists as its tenants.

Current Use: Event space, gallery and exhibition venue, office suites and flagship boutique retail shops.

Historical Architectural Features: Chicago Style architecture: Distinguishing features include steel-frame buildings with masonry cladding and limited exterior ornamentation. Large plate-glass windows with narrow double-hung sashes are sized to fill a structural bay. The building includes wood floors, exposed brick walls, high ceilings with skyline views from the rooftop terrace.

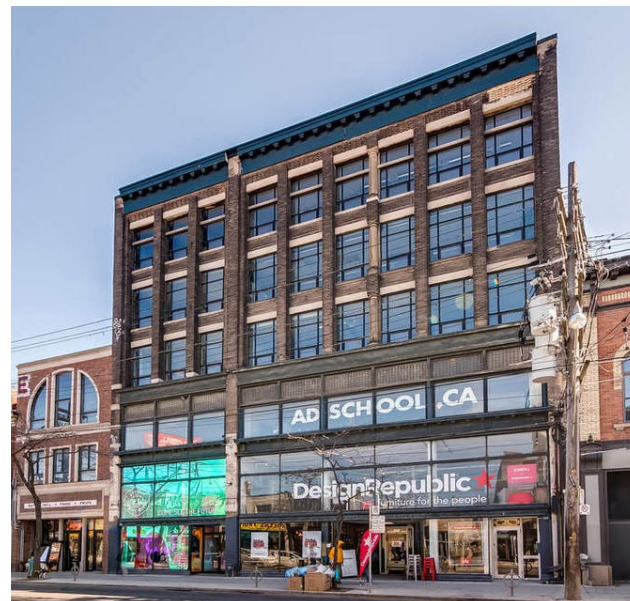
Influence on heritage preservation on Queen West:

Designed in the Chicago style and standing at 6 storeys, the Burroughes Building is one of the newer heritage structures on Queen West and one of the tallest on the strip. Described as luxurious and vintage, the property has been renovated to preserve its heritage character features and now serves as an event space to host high profile events in Toronto, such as functioning as a wedding venue.

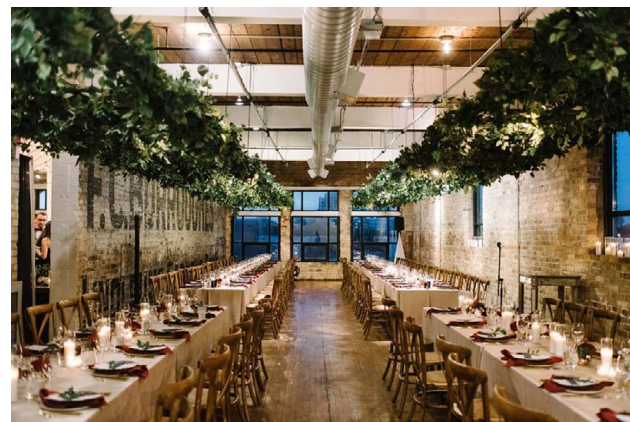
While the building a modest origin, the Burroughes Building gradually became destination site when it was bought and renovated by Queen Street Partners. Architectural features, such as high ceilings, exposed brick wall, rooftop terraces, and large windows, made the building an ideal location to be adapted and reused as a social gathering space.



1907 News article announcing the opening of the Burroughes Building as a furniture department store



The Burroughes Building has a strong presence as one of the tallest buildings on the Queen West commercial strip.



The Burroughes is currently used as an event space for weddings.



The Occidental Building

Timeline of Use:

- Constructed in 1876 for the Toronto Masons, including the Occident and St. George's Chapters with a grand hall rented out for various functions.
- 1948: Holiday Tavern, the top floor containing the Blue Room and the Mansard roof were removed.
- The reduced building served as a venue for stage shows, jazz and R&B musicians, and as a place to enjoy a beer and watch strippers.
- 1980: the Ballinger brothers leased and reopened the premises as the Big Bop Night Club and Concert Hall. The red-brick facades were covered over with tile-work and cement and the windows were bricked in. The second floor was painted a purple.

After new occupants bought the building, it required around 3 million dollars to complete the restoration. The interior was gutted and the pine support-pillars were replaced with steel girders and an open-style steel staircase was inserted. However, the present-day owners have preserved the original facades.

Original architect: E. J. Lennox

Current Use: CB2 Furniture Store

Historical Architectural Features: Second Empire style, with a Mansard roof and numerous gables. Second floor windows were topped with Roman arches with Gothic yellow-brick trim.

Influence on heritage preservation on Queen West:

The red-brick building was one of Lennox's earliest commissions, thus deemed worthy of restoration, though only a portion of the original structure has survived. The grand hall that had been a distinguishing feature of the building was removed during multiple changes in ownership. Thus, while previously used as an important event and gathering space, the building has been now converted into a furniture shop. This lends questions to whether the value of the building is reduced.



1928 photograph of the Occidental Building with its original Mansard Roof



City of Toronto Archives, Series 1465, File 51, Item 79

The facade was painted in a colourful mural during the 1990s



The facade was painted purple when used for the Big Bop Club



The current owners restored the original brick facade



280 Queen Street West

Timeline of Use:

- Built in 1888
- First owner: B. Homer Dixon
- First tenant: William Mara, grocers
- 1970s: Bookstore
- 1982: Application for designation as a property of architectural value and interest under the Ontario Heritage Act based on architectural features:.

Historical Architectural Features: Queen Anne Revival and Second Empire styles: patterned brickwork and stone dressings, detailed cornice brackets, woodwork details to enhance hipped roof dormers in a slate mansard roof and a steeply pitched pyramidal roof of the corner tower.

Current Use: Artizia (women's fashion boutique)

Influence on heritage preservation on Queen West:

280 Queen Street West was recommended for heritage designation for architectural reasons as a richly decorative example of late Victorian architecture. The structure was built where Queen Street West widens, spatially serving as a neighbourhood landmark building with a prominent corner and described to be "terminating a vista and and presenting a facade to both west and south" in a Notice of Intention to Designate the building as a heritage structure.

Programmatically, the building was passed through multiple occupants and changes in use, while retaining most of its original facade. However, the interiors were extensively renovated; thus, the highly ornate facade gives the building a heritage and exchange value, that is further driven by its marketable location on Queen West.



280 Queen West during the 1970s



280 Queen West today



541 and 543 Queen Street West

Timeline of Use:

Previous owners:
Leslieville Cheese Market and Lillth (Left)
Janettes Fabrics (Right)

Current Use:

MamaLovesYouVintage (Left)
Hi Beads (Right)

Historical Architectural Features: Queen Anne Revival: patterned brickwork and stone dressings, detailed cornice brackets, woodwork details to enhance hipped roof dormers in a slate mansard roof. Green and Blue stained glass in upper pane of second and third storey windows.

Influence on heritage preservation on Queen West:

The building was passed through multiple occupants as a storefront, while retaining most of its original facade. The interiors were extensively renovated; thus, the highly ornate facade gives the building a heritage and exchange value, that is further driven by its marketable location on Queen West.



541 and 543 Queen West owned by Lillth and Janettes Fabrics



541 and 543 Queen West owned by MamaLovesYouVintage and Hi Beads in 2022

Part 2: Proposal for Architectural Alteration of Queen West

“Remaining unchanged results in the eventual loss of occupation, alteration is the entropic skid, the promise of demolition is of a new building.”

- Fred Scott, *Unchanging Architecture and the Case for Alteration*. (2007)

“How do we choose what to preserve or demolish - an outdated and ruined structure? A symbol? And of what?”

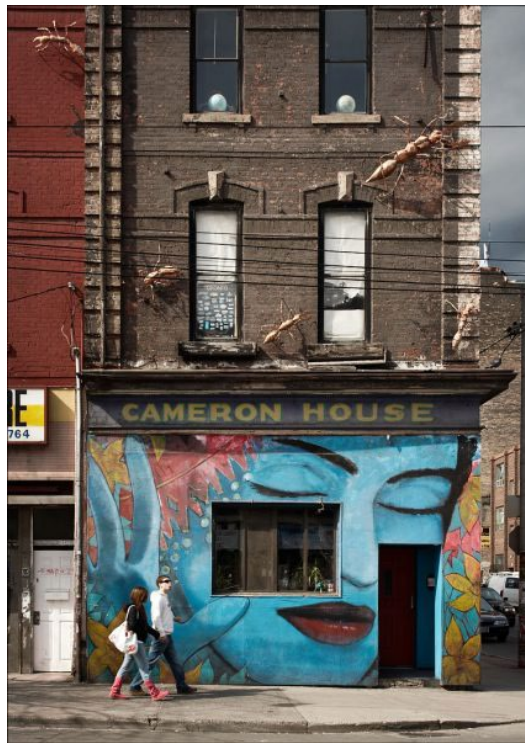
- Jorge Otero Palios, *Experimental Preservation*. (2016)

Experimental Preservation and Heritage Adaptation

As a response to the critique of preservation within Queen West HCD, this research proposes revisions to current heritage policies and guidelines. This approach re-establishes the continual evolution of Queen West as a dynamic commercial strip and repositioning its future into the responsibility of its residents and users, such as by enacting a Community Land Trust. Founder of the journal *Future Anterior*, architect Jorge Otero-Pailos writes about experimental preservation and the active role that the public and buildings have to cultivate their socio-cultural heritage, which in turn drives the transformation of architectural spaces. Heritage buildings are redefined as quasi-objects with the potential to participate, co-produce, and structure human interactions. The building is an “initiator, a catalyst or trigger.” This is the case for the Cameron House and Burroughes Building on Queen West. Previously built as a storefront and a furniture warehouse respectively, these structures were transformed into cultural hubs and event venues by community members. Drawing on Cedric Price’s belief that architecture was a set of processes, not objects, and should accommodate for adaptability, flexibility, learning, and change. Speculating on the future of Queen West’s cultural and architectural heritage, who decides the value and the potential of heritage structures? Rather than safeguarding buildings as monuments to a contentious past, this proposal presents how Queen West can evolve by intervening in the existing historical fabric to allow changes in ownership and use.

Comparing the Campbell House Museum and the Cameron House, preservation of the Campbell House has frozen the building in time to become an archive of a singular past. Whereas the ongoing usage of the Cameron House has allowed the building to evolve into an important local music venue. This approach exemplifies experimental preservation where the community is part of the cultural production of space. By actively repainting the facade mural and allowing for shifts in use, the Cameron House merges intangible and tangible heritage, storing collective memory within the built structure.

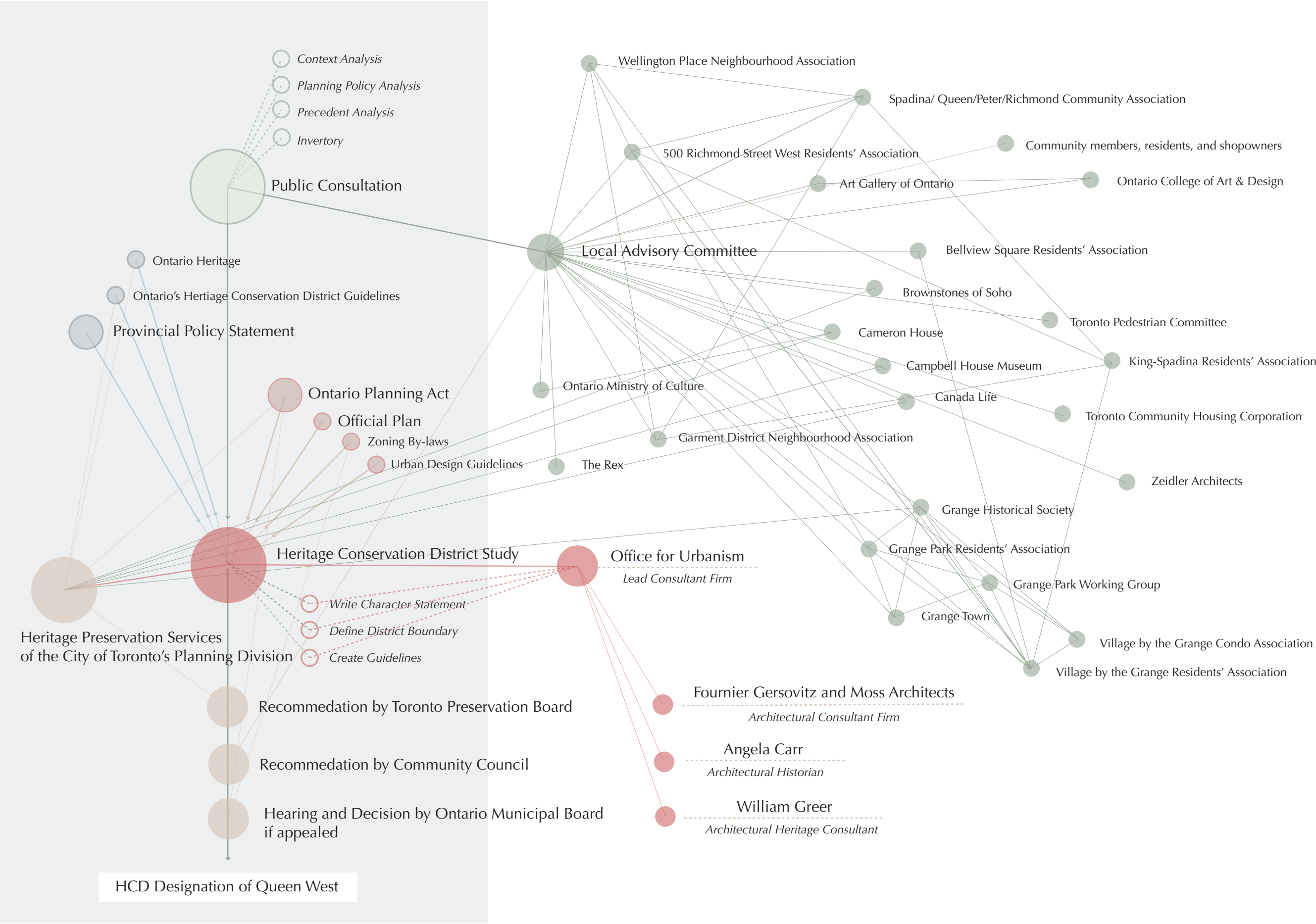
Otero-Pailos questions what should be preserved and what is considered waste and elaborates how there needs to be collective agreement on what a heritage building represents before determining whether to tear it down or to rebuild. Similarly, Fred Scott makes a case for alteration; the intervention of a historical building is a collective undertaking; a practice is held across generations by continually altering the form and changing its usage over time. Alteration is about a response, to harmonise between the old and the new. Framing this process as a dialogue between the original architect and the present designer, Scott poses the question, “How much can I change the building that I’m working on?” This understanding recalls the process of how a HCD is designated, which involves a local advisory committee made of community groups and existing residents. To avoid demolition, 280 Queen West was designated as a building of architectural importance, yet the structure is currently occupied and renovated by Aritzia, a women’s fashion boutique, thus indicating its potential and need for alteration.

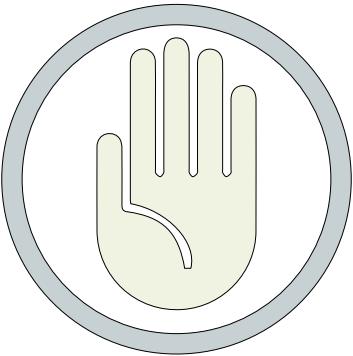


Left: The changing facade of Cameron House repainted by various artists year after year and currently serving as a cultural hub on Queen West.

Above: Campbell House on the move on March 31, 1972, taking 6 hours to move the house nearly 1.5 km on a flatbed truck. Campbell House was opened as a museum by the Queen in 1974.

Actor Network Diagram: How Queen West became a Heritage Conservation District

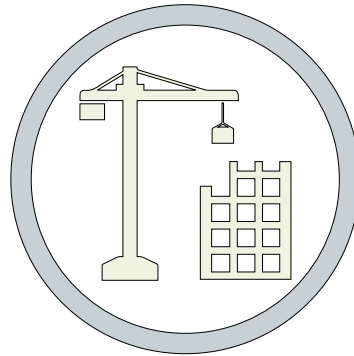




1. Holding Provision



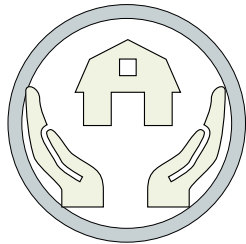
2. Pausing For New Development



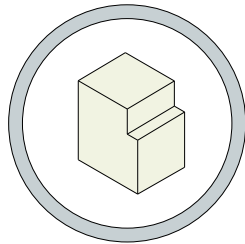
3. Loosening Zoning For Small Building Development



Heritage Preservation
Implementing heritage by-laws prevents the redevelopment of community built housing.



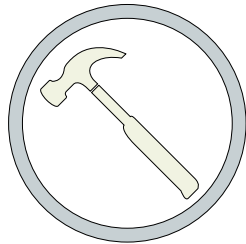
Preserve
Community animators discuss important buildings to preserve.



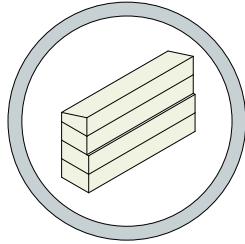
Setback & Height
Reducing requirements allows for reasonable sized units and increased density.



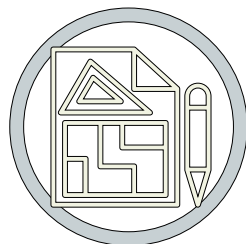
Neighbourhood Improvement Area
Designates Queen Street W as a priority neighbourhood.



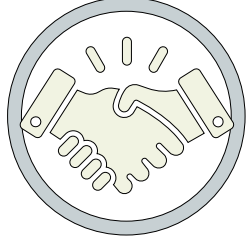
Prioritized Sites of Action
Community decides to what extent these buildings will be re-built.



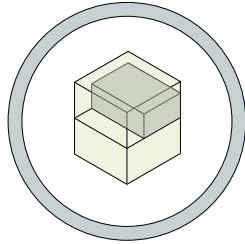
Unrestricted Building Length & Depth
Allows for potentially larger units.



Secondary Plan
Development begins, when community provides city with their plan for development.

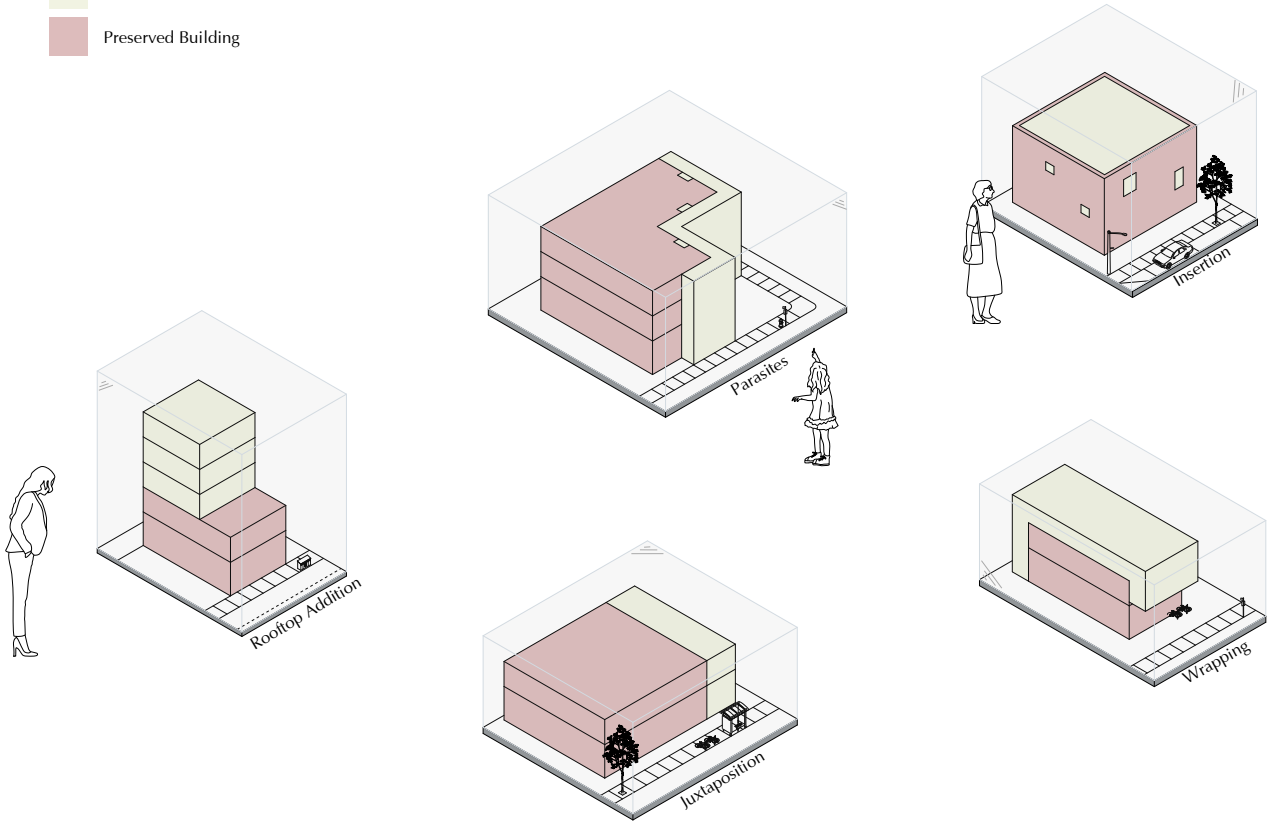


Community Benefits Agreement
Queen Street enters a legal binding agreement with city, which they agree to demands and help fund the community led development.



d2.0
Permits a maximum density of 2.0 times the area of the lot.

Intervention
Preserved Building



Conclusion and Speculation for Heritage Adaptation

Francoise Bollack's terms for adaptations: insertions, juxtapositions, wraps, parasites, and weavings, reveal approaches for the adaptive reuse of historical buildings. In expansion, insertions such as rooftop additions and facade alterations maintain the character of the street frontage while allowing for new occupations and soft evolution of the district. Furthermore, alterations can juxtapose the original structure through new material palettes, including updating window frames and envelope details to improve the building's energy performance. Alterations that introduce a new architectural language—clearly distinguishing the old from the new—serve as contemporary counterpoints to existing heritage structures. This brings up questions, on what is the democratic potential of adaptation? And should the original building be intrinsic to or contradict its alteration?

The building is no longer a built object with some inherent or objectively measured historical significance—it becomes a subject of public discourse where its value is shapeable by the community. The monument becomes a narrative which has agency and fluidity. Otero-Pailos' proposition opens a possible space for genuine participation and for democracy in preservation and transformation of cities and buildings. Scott stated there is a need for alteration to reflect the changes in function, lest they become obsolete. These architectural adaptations are visual cues towards the ongoing transformation of our cities.

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