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CUERO BACKDOOR BEAUTIFICATION

By: Texas Main Street Design Staff

Backdoors and alleyways are often forgotten. To most people, they are a place for storage, trash pick-up and deliveries. Pedestrians and potential customers tend to avoid them, because they are usually unkempt and unattractive. By improving the appearances and developing rear entrances, this back façade can serve for more than just service. A rear entrance can provide direct customer access to your store from parking areas as well as improve circulation between the parking lots and the street. A well maintained rear façade will welcome customers instead of threatening them.



In Cuero, many of the rear building facades are visible from public spaces and parking lots. Some are even prominently visible when you enter downtown. However, with a few simple improvements you can clean up your backdoor and make it a visually attractive asset to your business and downtown as a whole.

Backdoor Beautification Recommendations:

1. Carefully **remove vines and vegetation** from building facades and plants with roots close to walls/foundations as this can cause water retention and damage to masonry.
2. **Fix gutters and downspouts** to prevent unwanted water leaks and pooling.
3. **Clean masonry** and other architectural features to remove dirt and grime.
4. **Repoint mortar joints** when joints are deteriorated to ensure structural integrity.
5. Add a **new coat of paint** to surfaces that have already been painted to fresh appearance. *(**Note – Unpainted masonry may NOT be painted.)*

6. **Repair existing windows and doors.** Reconstruct missing units to match historic appearance.
7. Add visual interest such as **lights, seating, signage, art, planters**, etc. to increase the pedestrian experience.
8. **Preserve and restore ghost signs** to reveal artifacts of downtown's history.
9. **Deter pests** such as bats through exclusion methods.



1. REMOVE VINES AND PLANTS

Vines on a building may look pretty to some, but these plants can be detrimental to the overall health of your building. The roots of vines and other forms of vegetation grow into the mortar joints and can pose many problems, such as holding moisture against the masonry surface, blocking gutters and downspouts, scouring soft wall surfaces, and eroding mortar. Do NOT pull the vines off the wall surface as this can also cause damage. Instead follow this guide provided by the General Services Administration that provides detailed instructions on how to properly remove climbing plants without damaging the masonry underneath. -

<http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/111782>



2. FIX GUTTERS AND WATER DRAINAGE SYSTEMS

Water is a historic buildings biggest enemy. Water can cause mold to grow and rapidly increase the speed at which historic materials deteriorate. An easy way to prevent water infiltration into your buildings is to regularly inspect gutters/downspouts. Make sure that downspouts are intact all the way to the ground and that they are pushing water away from the building so that it does not pool near the foundation. Also, check for blockages, leaks, and damaged components, which can cause water infiltration along the masonry wall. Clean and remove debris when needed.

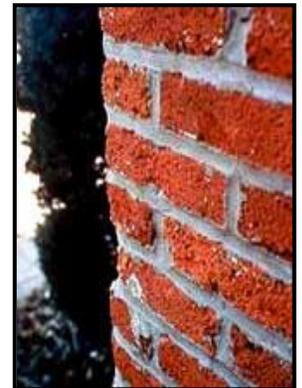
3. CLEAN BRICK

Cleaning your brick and masonry is a simple, low cost step that can have a huge visual impact on the appearance of your building. When cleaning brick, it is important to use the gentlest means possible. First, try removing dirt and grime manually using plain water with a soft bristle brush. If that is not sufficient, then power washing with a mild detergent or chemical cleaner can be considered. Power washing should not exceed 400 PSI (pounds per square inch), because higher pressure could damage the hard exterior of the brick. If the hard exterior surface is damaged, the softer interior of the brick is left exposed and vulnerable to deterioration. **For this reason, brick should NEVER be sandblasted.** See the top image to the right.

The unpainted masonry should never be painted. Paint significantly decreases the brick's breathability. When brick is painted, water can get trapped in the material leading to significant damage. As water freezes it expands, which can cause stress cracks and spalling in the brick, and ultimately failure. See the bottom image on the right. Painted brick can also lead to condensation and mold issues on the interior of the building. In unpainted brick buildings, the porous brick absorbs water and allows the water to evaporate, leaving the brick intact even with years of exposure.

The following National Park Service Preservation Brief and General Service Administration Technical Procedures provide guidance on how to clean the brick:

- Assessing, Cleaning, and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings – <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/1-cleaning-water-repellent.htm>
- General Cleaning of Exterior Brick Masonry - <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/112842>



Sandblasting may NOT be used since it permanently damages the brick.



Painting brick can lead to trapped water and deterioration.

4. REPOINT MORTAR JOINTS

Repoint your mortar joints where the historic mortar is missing. Mortar is essential in keeping a brick wall together and for the overall structural stability of a building. The mortar allows for contraction and expansion of the masonry wall during different weather conditions. This is why the appropriate mortar type is very important. To determine if you need to repoint your masonry, first investigate the back of your building for deteriorated and empty mortar joints. If deteriorated joints are present, follow the instructions below to appropriately restore your mortar.

Repointing is the process of removing deteriorated mortar from the joints of a masonry wall and replacing it with new mortar. Properly done, repointing restores the visual and physical integrity of the masonry. A heavily concentrated Portland

cement mortar is typically too hard for historic bricks and can cause the bricks to break apart, because it does not allow for movement during expansion and contraction. A mortar with more lime is generally the preferred route. The recommended component ratio is as follows:

- 9 Parts Sand
- 2 Parts Lime
- 1 Part White Portland Cement
- To match original mortar color, look for matching sand color. Ideally, old mortar should be analyzed and matched. This formula is a general guide.

The General Services Administration and National Park Service provide further guidance:

- Preparing Lime Mortar for Repointing Masonry - <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/111682>
- Preservation Brief #2 – Repointing Mortar Joints - <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/2-repoint-mortar-joints.htm#type>



The mortar on this brick wall needs to be replaced to prevent collapse.

5. PAINT AND COLOR SCHEME

A fresh coat of paint can go a long way to improve the appearance of your back door. Storage buildings and backdoor features are a great opportunity to add color and unique features using paint. The most important thing to remember before painting your building is that historic brick is meant to breath. Therefore, it should not be painted as this can trap moisture inside the wall and cause further damage. For this reason, do not painted unpainted masonry. Repainting already painted masonry is acceptable, but investigation into paint removal of already painted surfaces is always encouraged. Not all paint removal is successful due poor conditions of the material underneath and repainting may be the needed course of action. Follow this tech sheet for removing paint:

<https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/111814>

Consider the following when painting any part of your building:

- Plan your painting schedule. Certain weather and temperatures can affect the way your paint dries.
- Prepare the surface adequately, making sure to remove all dirt, grime, and loose paint.
- Which kind of paint will you use, oil or latex? One important thing to remember is that once you use latex, you must continue to use latex.
- Be aware that there are three degrees of shine for paint, gloss, semi-gloss, and flat or matte.
- Remember that quality paint will last longer than cheaper paint. It will not fade or peel as quickly and usually gives better coverage
- Think about the orientation of the sun. The amount of sun can change the hue of the paint color and can also cause certain colors to fade faster.

More durable Some feel it helps to preserve wood and adheres better Harder clean-up	
Less durable Easier to apply Easier clean-up	

6. REPAIR WINDOWS AND DOORS

Historic windows should be cleaned, repaired, and maintained. Missing windows should be reconstructed in kind. Historic windows were meant to come apart so that repairs could be performed as needed. Rotted or missing pieces can be repaired by splicing in new pieces only in that location rather than replacing the entire window. Consolidants can also be used on wood that is damaged or shows signs of rot to prolong the lifespan. A full explanation of how to properly maintain or repair historic wood windows can be found on the National Park Service website here: <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/9-wooden-windows.htm>.

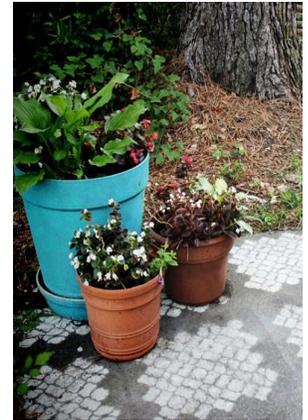
The General Services Administration (GSA) also provides technical sheets on historic preservation that list straightforward steps to follow and list companies/suppliers.

- Restoring Wood Window Sash and Frames - <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/113490>
- Primers And Paints For Wood - <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/113070>
- Epoxy Repair For Deterioration And Decay In Wooden Members – <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/112030>
- Surface Preparation For Painting Wood – <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/113074>

If metal windows are present, please contact the Texas Main Street program who can provided additional assistance.

7. ADD VISUAL INTEREST – LIGHTS, SEATING, SIGNAGE, ART, COLOR

Streetscape elements such as lights, seating, signage, trash can covers, planters, art, etc. add visual interest and comfort the experience people have while walking around downtown. It's a no-brainer to add these features to the front of your building to attract customers, but they can also improve the environment around the backdoor as well. Think about the things that make you enjoy walking down the street and the features that draw you into a business and then add those elements to your building.



Signage

Signs are just as important on the back of your building as they are on the front. They draw attention to your business and invite people inside. Signs should be attached to the building carefully, both to prevent damage to historic fabric, and to ensure the safety of pedestrians. **Signage can be attached to the surface of the façade; however, architectural features should not be covered.** If the sign is attached to a masonry façade, **fittings should penetrate the mortar joints rather than brick to prevent irreparable damage to the masonry.** If the sign is removed in the future, the mortar can then be repointed. Signage can also be attached to the top of the canopy; however, the structural soundness of the canopy should be determined first.



Murals / Public Art

People will come from miles around to take a picture in front of a unique and inviting piece of art. Murals can be added directly to the building to provide that backdrop that will draw attention. Invite artist to create an original masterpiece for your building inspired by local history and culture or to tell a story about your town. If the wall is already painted, murals can be painted directly to the surface. If the masonry is not painted, create the mural on a separate panel that can be attached to the wall like in the image below. Panels should be attached through the mortar joints. Consider how water could get trapped behind the mural; adding flashing at the top can help.



Lighting

Exterior lighting on a building and in a historic downtown provides a safer and more walkable conditions at night. Lighting can be provided in several ways including string lights, spotlights, up-lights, etc. Lighting sources should be shielded from direct glare and should conform to the International Dark Sky Association guidelines to prevent unnecessary light pollution. - <http://darksky.org/lighting/lighting-basics/>

8. GHOST SIGNS

Ghost signs are faded historic business signs or advertisements that are still visible on your building. Cuero has several of them. These signs are a unique artifact of the downtown's history and should be preserved. There are several routes that can be taken when preserving and restoring ghost signs:

- **Leave them as is.** Leaving them exactly the way they are is the authentic history, and they have a beauty all their own in this state. Do ensure that photos are taken or archived to document their history for future generations to learn about even if they can no longer be seen in entirety.
- **Lightly touch up the design and lettering so it can be seen again.** This approach uses diluted paint to allow the building to breath, while maintaining the faded appearance which conveys it as a historical mural. Often times this will require research into historic city directories, yearbooks, newspapers, Sanborn maps, museum files, and of course local citizens for historical photographs and information.
- **Repaint the mural with 100% coverage.** This approach is the least favored since it makes the mural look brand new again rather than a historical element. On the more technical level, many historic murals were painted on brick. The Texas Main Street Program does not recommend painting on brick because it can interfere with how brick absorbs and repels water. Water can get trapped behind the paint and cause deterioration of the brick.



9. BAT REMOVAL

The existence of bats in buildings is sometimes indicated by the presence of black or brown stains from body oils or droppings (guano) around cracks or crevices. Bat droppings may also appear on walls or beneath dilapidated ceilings. Bat guano may resemble small, hard rodent pellets, but it is actually soft and easily crushed revealing shiny insect parts (their diet) in the process.

Evicting Bats

All potential entry points must be sealed. This is the only effective and permanent solution. Trapping and relocating have proven to be ineffective methods because bats have powerful homing instincts and will simply return even when released at great distances. Pesticide use against bats is illegal.

Preventing Bats from Entering your Building

The first step involves inspecting the interior of the building. While the bats are likely roosting in the attic or roof cavities, start with the other interior spaces to be sure the roosting doesn't extend further. All openings connecting the attic space to their potential roosting areas should be sealed while entry points on the outside of the building are left open. Caulking, flashing, screening, or insulation can be used to seal most openings on the inside. The next step requires setting up a method whereby bats can leave but are unable to reenter. It is not proper procedure to wait for bats to fly out at night and then seal openings. This is because not all of the bats leave at the same time and some may remain in the building throughout the night especially during inclement weather.

Methods of Exclusion

The two primary methods of excluding bats are: tubes and netting. The idea behind both is very simple yet very clever. Both methods create a safe and humane means of egress but prohibit re-entry.

- **Tube Method** - The tube method involves placing small plastic tubes in strategic locations in a downward orientation from roof overhangs. The bats recognize the opening as an exit and they pretty much "slide" out of the tube. When they want to get back in, the tube, because of its vertical orientation and smooth inner surface, prevents them from "climbing" back up.
- **Netting Method**- The netting method works on a vertical surface or when placing a tube is impractical. The netting acts as a flap over an existing hole or louver in the surface of the building. The trick is to attach the netting on the top and sides over the entire hole or louver but leave it unattached at the bottom. What happens in this setup is the bats will crawl down from the hole and exit under the bottom edge of the netting. When they return, the netting is lying flat against the vertical building surface and they cannot "lift" it and climb back up to the exit hole.

Each of these methods should be left in place a minimum of 5 to 7 days to ensure all bats have left. The openings are then permanently sealed. The method of sealing depends upon the location and material composition around the opening. Don't embark upon the bat exclusion process until young bats are able to fly otherwise they will be trapped inside the building away from their mothers (who do go out nightly to feed) and die of starvation. In Texas the maternity season for bats begins as early as mid-April and the young won't learn to fly until late August. This means that bat exclusions should not occur between April and late August.

The Cuero Development Corporation offers financial assistance for bat removal, under their Main Street Façade grant program. You can contact them at 361-275-8178. Cuero has also created a relocation program to move bats to the city park. <http://cueromainstreet.com/projects/bat-relocation/> Note, while this is a great step toward getting them away from the Main Street District, it will be ineffective if all entry points on a building are not sealed. Bats have a powerful homing instinct and will return even when released at a great distance. Pesticide cannot be use against bats as it is illegal.

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

The Texas Main Street Design staff is here to answer your questions. Staff can work with property and business owners to help develop their rehabilitation plan for their building. Additional detailed renderings for specific buildings upon request. Please contact your local Main Street Executive Director, Sandra Osman, for more information – sosman@cityofcuero.com , 361.485.8008.

Not for regulatory approval, permitting, or construction

Prior to making any improvements to the building façade(s), the building owner should perform a thorough review of the major structural components of the building, including the roof, walls, and foundation. All mechanical and electrical systems should be well maintained in conformity with applicable codes and ordinances. Building uses and interior arrangements of program spaces should also be in conformity with applicable codes and ordinances.