

# COURTENAY CHARACTER AREA – TABLE OF CONTENTS

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# 1.0 Introduction

The Courtenay Place area has been identified as having a special character largely because of its existing buildings, its streetscape and the diverse mixture of uses and activities found there.

Specific buildings with particular heritage, landmark and streetscape qualities have been identified. The Character Area Plan seeks to preserve these under heritage conditions by means of rules and financial incentives.

Design guidelines are provided to ensure that new development fits in well with the existing streetscape. They aim to promote discussion on the external design and appearance of new buildings, additions and alterations. The guidelines they contain are sufficiently flexible to allow the best design solution to be achieved for specific sites.

## 2.0 Intention of the Design Guide

As the District Plan rules make clear, the design, external appearance and siting of all new buildings within the Courtenay Character Area is a Controlled Activity. This Design Guide provides the standards or criteria against which controlled elements will be assessed.

Applicants are required to demonstrate (through the detailed design of new development) a commitment to maintaining and extending the present and intended character of the Courtenay Character Area. Provided that this intention is supported and the design guidelines are followed, designers have a degree of flexibility in the preparation of development proposals.

No precise formula exists for ensuring the skilful and innovative design of buildings. The provisions of this Design Guide require that particular character elements be respected. Applicants must demonstrate that the provisions of this Design Guide have been acknowledged and interpreted and their objectives satisfied.

The illustrations in the Guide are intended to support the text by explaining principles. They are not intended to represent actual design solutions.

## 3.0 Analysis

### The Area

At the heart of the Courtenay Character Area is Courtenay Place which forms the eastern terminus of the "Golden Mile". The "Golden Mile" forms a line of retail shopping which begins at the Government Centre and railway station and follows the original shoreline around Lambton Harbour to Mount Victoria, which rises above the city and marks the eastern boundary.

Courtenay Place has distinctive townscape qualities that make it unique in Wellington. The butterfly shape of Courtenay Place - narrow at the middle at the St James, and opening out at each end to wide triangles - has an unusual historical origin, being the place where the strict grid pattern of the Te Aro Flat met the curved shoreline of the inner harbour. The southern side of Courtenay Place is straight, whereas the northern side parallels the old beach line which was just half a block seaward.

The great width of the space, and its shape, provide long views. It receives plenty of sun because of its east-west orientation and because the buildings on the north side are generally low rise. Wellington has no wide avenues, but Courtenay Place provides some of the qualities of openness, views and sunlight that this type of urban space offers. It differs in character from the narrow and well-built-up spaces of Willis Street, Lambton Quay and The Terrace.

The scale and mass of its buildings have a consistency lacking in other parts of the city. They are human in scale, and never dominate. They are generally two storeys high with punctuations of buildings up to 5 storeys, and one of 7 storeys. Their silhouette is detailed and contains a mixture of gables, parapets, roof lines and decorative embellishments.

The variety of forms and styles achieve a consistent composition because of their generally compatible scale, colours, textures of materials, decorations, and structural materials - mostly plastered masonry and concrete.

### Transport

Courtenay Place is the pivot between the public transport systems which serve the inner city and the eastern suburbs.

### Business and People

Courtenay Place has been an area of comparatively low rentals for some time. This has contributed to the development of service businesses and warehouses in it, and helped maintain Courtenay Place as a retail shopping location. Originally the entertainment centre of Wellington, this was intensified during the 1980s and 1990s by an increase in the number of its bars and

cafes, making Courtenay Place the night place of Wellington. The produce markets which previously occupied Blair and Allen Streets have left their mark on the area, and its buildings are now capable of being adapted to new, diverse uses.

In the past, new development has been incorporated into the Character Area alongside existing buildings. This has provided the vitality of change as well as preserving a sense of continuity. The Character Area Design Guide aims to continue this pattern, ensuring that the present character of the area can accommodate compatible change.

## Boundaries

The Character Area zone is bounded to the north with a hard edge, the major arterial traffic route of Wakefield Street. Across this boundary within easy walking distance is Oriental Bay and the eastern end of the planned Lambton Harbour development.

Immediately to the east are Cambridge and Kent Terraces, a north-south continuation of the arterial traffic route of Wakefield Street. Punctuating the end of Courtenay Place is the impressive Embassy theatre, framed by the houses of Mount Victoria which end at the green Town Belt with its bush-clad skyline.

The west end of the precinct zone is defined by Taranaki Street, a busy wide street, across which stands the Hope Gibbons building. This large building effectively "closes" the end of the Courtenay Character Area, although visual links remain across Te Aro Park to the busy retail areas of Cuba and Manners Malls. The St James Theatre, a significant building in Courtenay Place, is linked (by Te Aro Park) to the State Opera House and the Civic Centre - all landmarks in Wellington, the cultural heart of New Zealand. On the south side, the precinct has a "soft" edge. It fractures into a network of smaller streets and alleys, containing a mixture of light industry and warehousing.



## 4.0 Objectives

The following objectives are intended to achieve the intention of this Design Guide. They are:

- 01* To retain low-scale frontages and the existing pattern of facade height and rhythm.
- 02* To ensure that new development is designed to fit in with the existing streetscape of the Character Area.
- 03* To improve access throughout the Character Area.

## 5.0 Guidelines

The built form of new buildings should be consistent with the existing built fabric, as described and analysed in this section. The descriptions relate to the whole of the Courtenay Character Area.

### Building Shapes

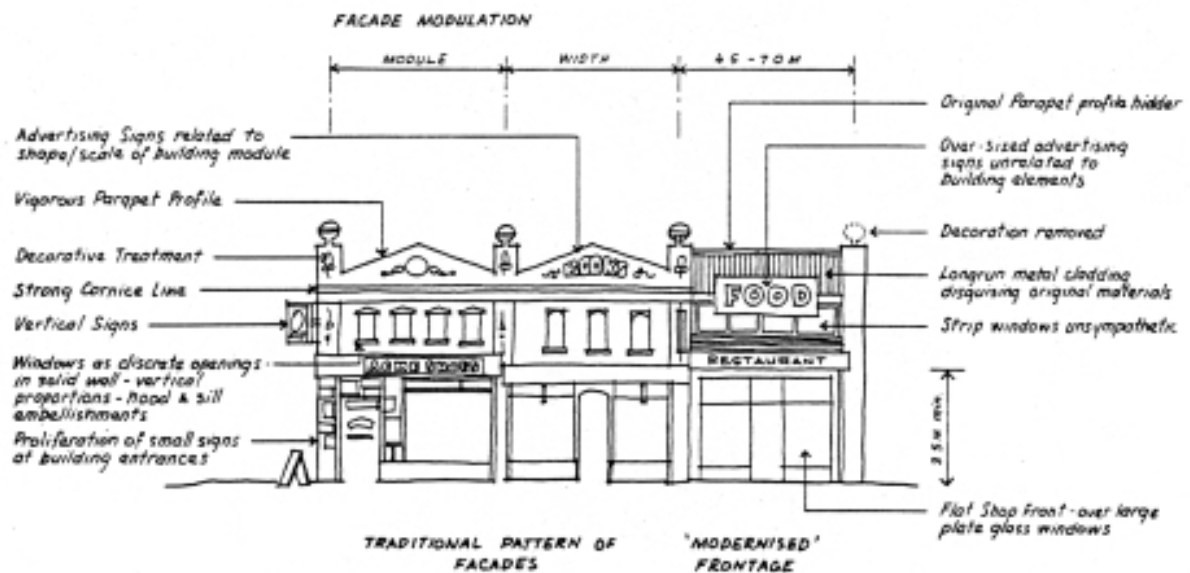
Existing buildings show a variety of height and shape, but share some points of similarity:

- buildings usually have full site coverage on all levels and are always up to the street frontage
- a rectangular building shape predominates, with sloping roofs often concealed behind parapets.

New developments designed within the height limits are expected to be of a larger scale than existing buildings, and may involve site amalgamation. It is anticipated that new development will form a layer of new buildings around and above existing buildings of similar character. To achieve this layering, new developments should:

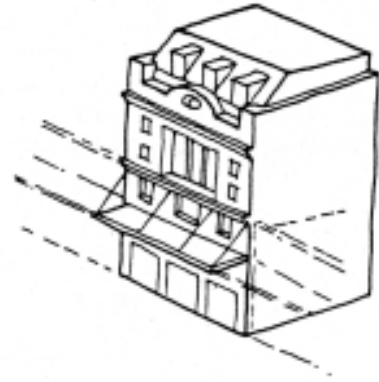
- retain a similar block form up to the street frontage
- reflect the existing site subdivision, especially on the street facades, to introduce variety along the site frontage.

The following design guides will be used to assess applications for a resource consent for a Controlled Activity:



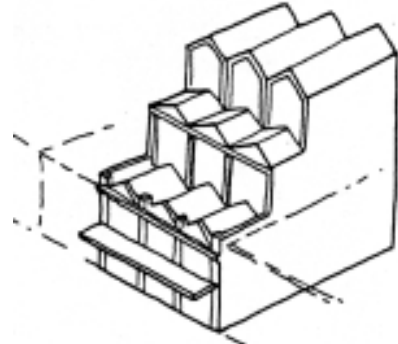
**A. New Four-Storey Frontage with Attic Levels**

Type A, a new building four to six storeys high, is considered appropriate for the whole of the Character Area, especially the northern side of Courtenay Place where at this height there is sufficient sun penetration to the southern footpath. It is important that any building above the fourth floor is set back.



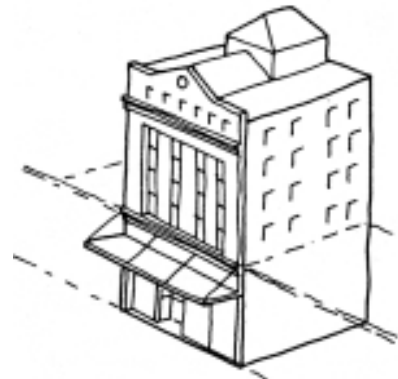
**B. Existing or Renewed Facade with Multiple Setbacks**

In type B the facade is retained and a new building is located at the rear of the site with multiple setbacks. This is considered an appropriate way of preserving the facade of a building for the whole precinct except for Blair and Allen Streets.



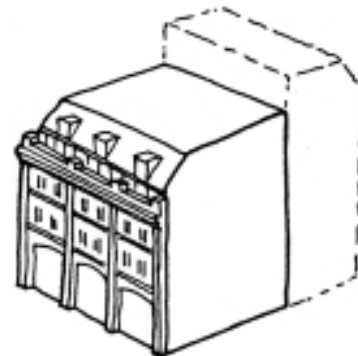
**C. New Five- to Six-Storey Frontages**

Type C is a new tower building five to six storeys high, and is appropriate for the south side of Courtenay Place where the shadowing of the street is not a concern. Variety in the height of buildings is desirable along the street wall, retaining the current jagged pattern of heights, and not making wind flows worse.



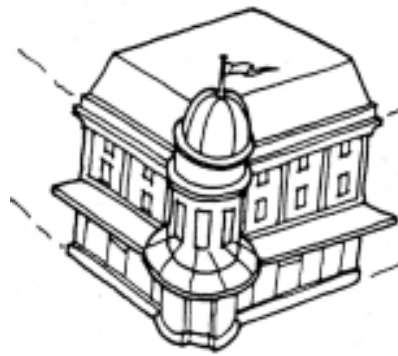
**D. Retrofitted Existing Facade (Three to Four Storeys) with Ground Floor Mezzanine, Attic Floors and Rear Additions**

Type D, a retrofitted existing facade of four storeys, is considered appropriate for Blair and Allen Streets. Additional floor area can be added as a single- or two-storey block with a mansard roof shape, to preserve the existing parapet line.

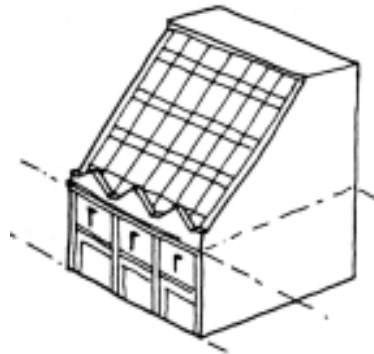


**E. Corner Sites**

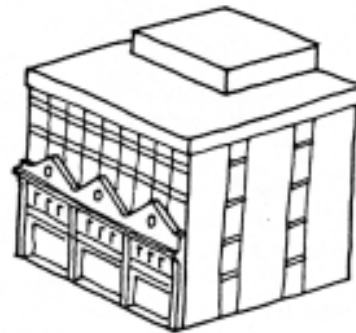
Type E is suggested as an appropriate building shape for corner sites. The corner may be emphasised in various ways (for example, entrances at street level on the corner, tower or cupola, extra pilasters).



**F. Inclined Wall with Recession Plane above Existing or Rebuilt Facade**



**G. "Applied" Facade 2D Treatment Unrelated to Upper Levels of Block**

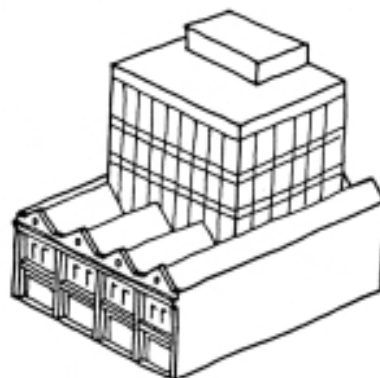


**H. Tower/Podium Constructions Incorporating Existing or Rebuilt Frontages**

Types G and H both show extensions in the form of unsympathetic towers.

Types F, G and H are considered inappropriate in the Courtenay Character Area.

Type F shows a building shape where the existing facade is preserved with a diagonal slope away from the parapet. The diagonal is a discordant form, as it is neither wall nor roof.

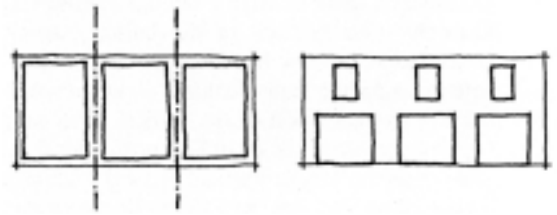


# Modulation

Modulation or the division of the buildings along the street frontage is an important feature in the Courtenay Character Area.

It is achieved in existing buildings by:

- G1** a typical building frontage module of between 4.5 and 7 metres
- G2** strong horizontal lines of the cornice, verandahs and ground floors acting as unifying elements within a complete building frontage against this vertical modulation
- G3** symbolic expression in the facade of the structural elements of a building achieved through the use of pilasters and cornices.

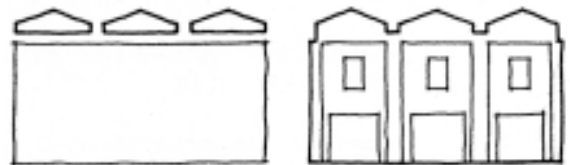


*Expressed Structural Bays ...*

*...Rhythmic openings...*

Modulation can be achieved in new buildings by:

- G4** the frontage reflecting the existing subdivision of buildings where site amalgamation takes place
- G5** articulating the building frontage as a series of structural bays
- G6** continuing the expression of the module through to the top of the building frontage as an inflection in the profile of the parapet
- G7** enhancing the module by applying different colours to the different elements or materials.



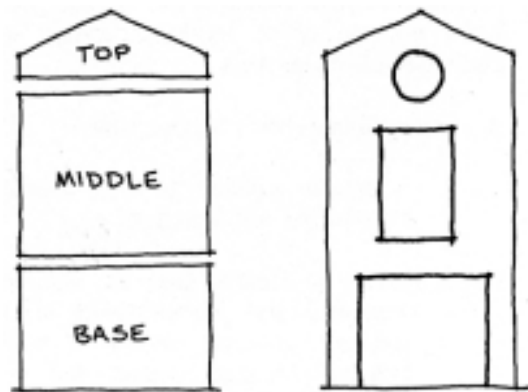
*...inflections at roof level ...*

*...Combined Modulation Effects*

## Vertical Hierarchy

Courtenay Character Area buildings exhibit vertical hierarchy (the division of the building from the bottom to top). New buildings should continue this pattern using the same features as at present. To achieve an expression of the vertical hierarchy, the scale of the elements should be proportional to the scale of the building. Vertical hierarchy can also be expressed in the size and shape of openings and balconies.

- G1** Ground floor interiors should be lofty (minimal internal height of 3.5 metres) and relate well to the pedestrian scale outside.
- G2** Frontages should possess a clear definition of base, middle and top.
- G3** For example, smaller buildings (up to about four storeys) may have a "top" expressed with a parapet or prominent cornice. Larger buildings may use the entire top storey to terminate the building effectively.



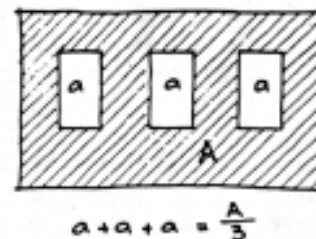
*Base, Middle & Top... ..Hierarchy of openings*



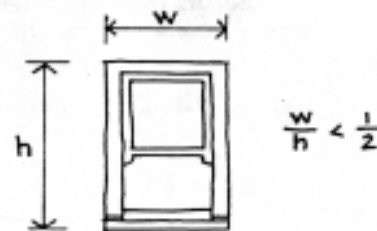
## Openings

The patterns currently found in the relationship between openings (windows and doors) and wall, and their detailed treatment should be adopted (except for ground floors).

- G1** Typically 25 to 35 percent of the wall area appears as discrete openings (as a series of punctuations).
- G2** Openings have vertical proportions (frequently as much as a ratio of 2:1 or more between the vertical and horizontal dimensions). They occur in rhythmic patterns, singly or in groups which emphasise the modulation of the facade.
- G3** Openings are often embellished with decorative hoods and sills.
- G4** In Courtenay Place a further characteristic of windows is the shallow bay window which projects from upper floors.
- G5** Balconies are appropriate to the southern side of Courtenay Place.



*Windows appear as discrete openings*



*Strongly vertical proportions*

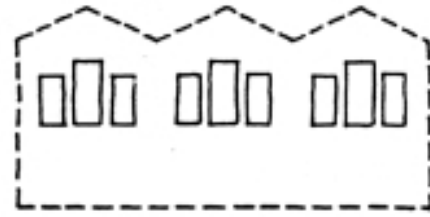
## Silhouette

Courtenay Place buildings are characterised by the rigorous outlines of their parapets - often the most prominent identifying feature of a frontage. This outline, or silhouette, provides a vitality and interest for the pedestrian. New buildings should continue this characteristic.

The silhouettes are made more dramatic because they are seen against the sky rather than against a backdrop of tall buildings.

At a larger scale the variation in building heights along Courtenay Place contribute to a lively street silhouette.

This type of variation may be included where one building adjoins another, or within a larger development.



*Openings placed rhythmically*

## Verandahs

Verandahs are required on all new development, except in Blair and Allen Streets where verandahs have traditionally been absent and should be limited to discreet awnings or canopies above entrances.

Flat verandahs predominate along Courtenay Place. Where sloping verandahs occur, these usually belong to new buildings or are a recent addition to an old frontage. In the latter use, inclined canopies are visually inappropriate because they obscure facade elements and unsettle the relative proportions of "base", "middle" and "top". This occurs even when transparent materials are used, because strong veiling reflections occur from the sky.

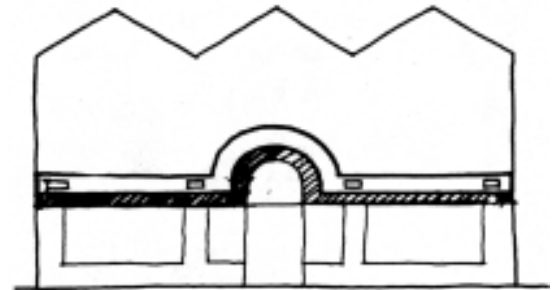
Within this general pattern, inflexions in the canopy are used to denote entrances, or to enhance the expression of the facade module.

Absolute continuity between adjacent verandahs is rare. Variation in fascia height and depth contribute to the definition of separate frontages. This is acceptable as long as it meets the practical need of keeping the rain out.

Detailed treatment of the verandah fascia (such as lighting, signs, or mouldings) provides for further expression of the facade module.

Cast iron or steel hangars are a characteristic feature of this area and their repetitive diagonal lines form an important dynamic element in the streetscape. The hangar rods, and the patch plates where these meet masonry walls, may themselves be decorative elements.

Balconies may be incorporated into verandahs.



*Canopies emphasise entrances and  
façade modulation*

## Pathways

A network of pedestrian pathways exists in the precinct zone, not only along the major streets but also in the form of rear service lanes. It is important that these should not be absorbed without trace into new, "comprehensive" developments.

The network of secondary pathways is necessary to open up the interiors of the large city blocks which are defined by major streets. The ability of people to move between blocks other than on public streets is an important amenity of the area. The existing network on the southern edge of the Character Area should be recognised and enhanced by new developments.

Where no laneways exist, but are indicated on the accompanying diagram, specifically along north-south directions through the major blocks, the Council will seek to achieve linkages in new development. It is particularly important to establish good connections across Wakefield and Cable Streets to the Lambton Harbour Development. In this way, adjacent developments can ensure that pathways link up. An important case is the pedestrian link along Tory Street between Mount Cook and Lambton Harbour. This should be encouraged by providing focus (for example, public space or retailing) in the buildings at the lower end of Tory Street.

Existing pedestrian pathways along service lanes should be upgraded to make it clear where both vehicles and people are intended to go.

