

Figure 2.4 Perugia

Figure 2.5 Typical London house with main elevation in brick and stucco base



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The most important zone for decoration in the shopping street is the ground floor. The shop front is the element of the façade which people have greatest contact with. The arcade is a most useful and highly decorative method of providing cover for the shopper in both the hot climate of southern Europe and in the wet and windy conditions of the north. The arcade also introduces a unifying element of continuity to the potentially diverse street scene made up of various retailers. With careful siting of bollards along the arcade, it also has the advantage that it discourages the ‘ram raider’ who, using stolen vehicles, drives into the shop window before removing its contents.

Shop fronts are a continuously changing feature of commercial streets as different retailers come and go wishing to place their distinctive mark upon the street. The shop front has three main horizontal divisions: the stall riser, the display window, and the fascia for advertising the retailer and his wares. The traditional shop front was a design based upon



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functional needs and requirements. Windows were required to display the goods. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a trend towards larger and larger windows so that the sales pitch could be made to those people passing in cars. As cities and central areas have been increasingly pedestrianized, with people passing by at a slower pace, shop windows have become smaller and more intimate again.

Below the shop window would be a stall riser. This would give protection from feet and dogs, and against rain splashing up from a dirty pavement. Ideally the stall riser is a continuation of the fabric of the building, so that the whole shop front

integrates and harmonizes with the architecture. Many modern shop fronts have ignored this feature and have taken their shop windows right down to ground level. The floorscape of the recessed entrance also provides an often ignored opportunity for decoration. This flooring can either be a continuation of the flooring materials of the street or designed to harmonize with the design of the shop unit. Above the shop window would be the fascia carrying the details of the shopowner's name or activity. These have been the most controversial elements in the modern highstreet. Bland illuminated fascia signs of multiple and chain stores have weakened local and regional identity tending to make all highstreets appear similar. Traditional signs were either unilluminated or lit by external fittings which of themselves would be decorative. The fourth element of the shop front, the door, is a location for special decorative treatment. The decoration of the window surrounds should not distract from the merchandise and its display, nevertheless, some of the traditional shop windows dating from the last century are fine decorative settings for the display of goods for sale (Figure 2.6). They are good models on which to base a modern interpretation of shop front design, having more aesthetic appeal than the standard 'house style' store front with long fascia that proclaims ownership across an array of fine upper storeys.

The finer articulation of the middle zone of the façade consists in its relief. Elements such as cornices, string courses and vertical edging along property boundaries define the zone. Within the zone the articulation is largely achieved through the decoration around the edges of windows, niches, or the treatment of projecting bays, balconies and stairwells. Often the ornamental work is of contrasting colour and material from the main background walling material. One or other of the materials, background or decorative material, should be seen to clearly dominate the composition. There should be no hesitation, no indecision as to which is the main colour or material. Since the trim is the most



expensive part of the construction it is usually the smaller in expanse and often successful for that reason.

Other important considerations for the location of ornament are the distance of the viewer from the façade; the angle at which it is viewed; and the time the viewer has in which to look at the composition (Bentley *et al.*, 1985). A prime location for architectural decoration is at the external corners of buildings, particularly if the corner is at the junction of several streets. The external angle of the building will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter. However, it should be noted here that this

Figure 2.6 Renovated Victorian shop front, York