walking our mainstreets:

some architectural terms

What’s the name of that thing?
Naming is the beginning of caring. Here are some of the details that give character to historic mainstreet buildings.

finials
dome
pediment

bracketed cornice
datestone
mansard roof

rose window
window hood
arch and keystone

arched corbel table
terra cotta ornament
corbeled brick

Doric column
brackets
Ionic column

Our neighborhood business districts are the heart and soul of our communities. Revitalization programs like Mainstreets Pittsburgh drive investment to and create jobs in our neighborhoods.

—Mayor Luke Ravenstahl

Pittsburgh’s buildings have stories to tell. Sometimes, we just get too caught up in the daily grind to listen.

The Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation is helping us reconnect to our urban environment. The organization has long hosted walking tours of Downtown Pittsburgh, and now—this fall—they’ll be adding other neighborhoods to the repertoire.

—Caralyn Green, Pop City (August 12, 2009)

Ten Free Walks

Always from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.
Reservations are required. Tours are limited to 25 people unless otherwise noted.

Sept. 5: Mt. Washington
Sept. 12: Friendship/Garfield
Sept. 19: Lawrenceville
Sept. 26: Downtown (45 people max)
Oct. 3: Strip District
Oct. 10: West End Village
Oct. 17: Bloomfield
Oct. 24: South Side
Oct. 31: Northside/Historic Deutschtown
Nov. 7: East Liberty

For meeting locations and reservations:
marylu@phlf.org
412-471-5808, ext. 527
www.phlf.org

Offered by the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation in cooperation with the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh and Mainstreets Pittsburgh.

Photos courtesy of PHLF and Erin Shilling.
The architectural styles are described in their purest forms. In practice, most structures are a combination of several different styles. Also, numerous remodelings and modernizations make the original lines difficult to discern. This chart, should, however, allow you to identify the architectural styles of some historic main street buildings.

**Italianate: 1840–1880**
Adapted from Italian Renaissance palaces, these buildings have a square body topped by a level roof line. At the roof line are deep eaves decorated with large brackets. Window shapes may vary from floor to floor, with a rounded top as the most common shape.

**Second Empire: 1865–1885**
Borrowed from France, this style is square and boxy with massive ornamentation. Windows of many sizes and shapes decorate the façade. The most identifiable feature is the mansard roof, named for 17th-century French architect François Mansart. A full story tall and shaped like a flat-topped pyramid, the roof is often accented by a central tower structure and dormers. Painted in dark colors, often reds and deep greens.

**Romanesque: 1875–1900**
Characterized by massive walls and arched windows and doorways, the façades of these buildings are often ornamented with short columns and squat towers. Always built of brick or stone, they are sometimes decorated with terra cotta. The finest example of this style in the country is the Allegheny County Courthouse on Grant Street in downtown Pittsburgh.

**American Renaissance: 1880–1920**
American Renaissance architecture (also known as “Beaux-Arts”) was based on the revival of Classical architectural forms from the Italian Renaissance (roughly 1400-1580), as taught at the École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) in Paris. Parisian training methods were followed at almost all of the architectural schools established in the United States in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, including Carnegie Technical Schools (CMU), established in Pittsburgh in 1904. The style often exhibits double columns; arches with decorative keystones; decorative balustrades (railings) around roofs; and cartouches (ornamental plaques), medallions, and relief (two-dimensional) sculpture on the façade. Stone is often used and the grandest buildings may have domes and three-dimensional sculptures. Banks, post offices, and museums built during this period wear the style proudly.

**Art Deco: 1925–1940**
Art Deco is characterized by its rounded shapes, parallel lines and chevrons, and streamlined look. Many Art Deco buildings are new fronts on old buildings. They often are made of stucco and concrete. Store fronts were usually colored glass or enamel on metal. Art Deco colors were red, black, coral pink, and turquoise.