

MASONRY REPAIR AND REPOINTING FOR HISTORIC PROPERTIES

For historically designated buildings, repointing, repairing, or reconstructing masonry walls requires a DC building permit. The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) reviews these permits to ensure that the original appearance and character of the masonry will be retained. You will need: 1) photographs of the building sufficient to show the existing masonry, 2) a written scope of work or contract detailing what work is to be performed, and 3) a building permit application, which can be obtained at the city's building permit office at 941 North Capitol Street, NE in Room 2000, or online at www.dcrd.dc.gov (click on "Permits"). With these completed, contact the HPO at 44-8800 or come by the office at 801 North Capitol Street, NE, room 3000 any weekday 9:00-5:00. Once the permit has been issued, you may begin the work.

Masonry Repointing

Mortar on most 19th century buildings in Washington contains a mixture of lime and sand, often with pigments such as brick dust or tinting. Portland cement mortars were not widely used until the 20th century. While precise matching of the original composition of mortar is not always necessary, new mortar should replicate the historic mortar in color, texture, tooling, and in its general level of hardness and permeability. Modern mortar mixes intended for new construction are not appropriate for historic masonry. Because they are harder and less permeable than historic masonry, modern mortars may result in cracking and spalling of historic bricks and stone. While a qualified mason should assess your specific situation, as a general rule type "O" and "N" mortars are most appropriate for 19th century pressed brick row houses. For more information, consult the National Park Service's Preservation Brief #2 "Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings" at www2.cr.nps.gov/tps (click on "Preservation Briefs").

Masonry Cleaning

Sandblasting is never appropriate as a method of cleaning historic masonry. Washing with a low-pressure water wash is generally effective, and may be enhanced with the use of mild cleaning agents. Masonry cleaning should be performed at the lowest effective pressure -- for Washington's 19th century pressed brick, a moderate pressure between 200-800 psi (pounds per square inch) is generally sufficient. Be wary of anyone proposing to use a psi above 1200-1500, as it may permanently scar, etch or erode historic masonry walls. Finally, it is generally not advisable to pressure wash a masonry building between the middle of November through the end of March. Particularly on older buildings with soft mortar, pressure washing forces a good deal of water into the building's walls which needs to have sufficient time to evaporate out of the walls before winter freezes. Masonry sealer is very rarely appropriate or necessary for historic buildings, and should never be applied within 30 days after pressure washing.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
OFFICE OF PLANNING

The HPO can provide guidance on more complex masonry work, such as removing stains and graffiti, patching stone, repairing concrete, etc. For more information, call the HPO staff at (202) 442-8800.

Below are contractors that have undertaken masonry repair work that has been approved in Washington's historic districts. The HPO encourages that you require a contractor to perform a test patch for your inspection before allowing a full-scale application of any pointing or cleaning program. If you have additional contacts that have completed quality masonry work on an older building, we would appreciate hearing about them so that we can evaluate their work and add them to the list.

Repointing

Bricklands Ltd.	202-544-9300	
The Shining Brick Company	301-353-9239	
Pointing Plus	202-812-6468	http://pointingplus.com
Precision Renovation & Cons.	202-397-3450	http://www.precisionrenovationandconstruction.com
Edgar's Masonry Cons.	703-906-6718	http://www.edgarsmasonry.com
A Restoration Center	703-834-1194	
TR Sellheim Construction	202-362-1700	

Stucco Repair

Eight Brothers	202-669-4606	http://eightbrothers.net
James S. Lertora, Inc.	301-384-0990	
John H. Hampshire	410-366-8900	http://www.jhhampshire.com
C.R. Calderon Construction, Inc.	301-614-0714	

Brick (custom shapes and replications)

Stone Art	203-467-4426	www.brickmatching.com
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