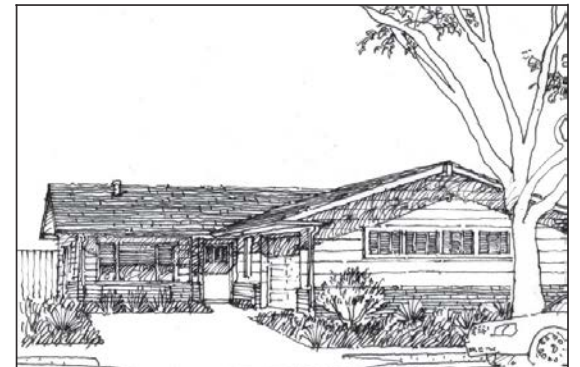


# CITY OF ALAMEDA

## Ranch House Guidelines





## CONSULTANT TEAM

The City Design Collective  
IWR Urban Design

*in collaboration with*

Vargas Greenan Architecture - Civic Design  
and the City of Alameda Planning and Building Department

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*Special thanks are offered to residents of the Alameda community who  
participated in the public planning process.*

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## **Contents**

This document contains information specific to the design and character of Ranch Style homes. The contents of this document are intended to supplement the contents of the 2005 *Guide to Residential Design*, and to ensure that modifications to Ranch Style houses and new construction complement the style's defining characteristics and preserve the quality and character of existing neighborhoods.

## **Guidelines are organized as follows:**

- Composition
- Windows
- Roofs
- Exterior Building Materials
- Additions
  - » Illustration: Typical single-story ranch house
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RANCH STYLE ARCHITECTURE is a common American domestic architectural style that gained popularity during the 1940's, and become the dominant style in the 60's and 70's during a period of post-war suburban expansion. As large numbers of homes were being constructed well outside of traditional city limits, ranch houses were often situated on lots that were considerably wider than more 'urban' lots found closer to the city center. As such, the style is noted for its long and simple horizontal profile and low roof pitch, attached garage, and simple single-story rectangular volumes that would often 'ramble' across the property. Exterior facades were designed to accentuate the horizontal nature of the style, and often included horizontally-arranged groups of windows, while employing a relatively minimal use of exterior decoration.

In Alameda, ranch houses tend to be designed to accommodate relatively narrow lots typical of Alameda's historic platting. As a result, houses often employ ranch house character expressed in a form and layout that is compact and oriented perpendicular to the fronting street, or may employ a split-level design in which a second story is located above a fronting garage.

## OVERVIEW

In March of 2005, the City of Alameda adopted the “*Guide to Residential Design*” (*Guide*) to assist applicants who wish to develop or modify residential buildings throughout the City. The *Guide* contains a *statement of values* and *guiding parameters*, followed by standards and guidelines pertaining to *additions*, *modification to porches and stairs*, *building materials and detailing*, and *new construction*. Appendices to the *Guide* contain references to applicable *General Plan Policies*, relevant subsections of the *Alameda Municipal Code*, a *glossary*, a *guide to Alameda’s architecture*, and an *application submittal checklist*.

### Applicability

- A. The standards contained in this document apply to properties located within Ranch Overlay Zoning Districts.
- B. This document supplements the standards and guidelines contained within the *Guide to Residential Design*. (*Guide*)
- C. When the content of this document conflicts with the *Guide*, this document shall govern.
- D. Applicable requirements of the *Guide*, the Municipal Code, and the General Plan addressing topics not covered by this document shall apply.

### Site and Architectural Review

Proposed construction of buildings and modifications to existing buildings shall require architectural and site design review as established by the City and specified in the Alameda Municipal Code, Section 30-37.

Significant deviations from this document may be approved by the City. In addition to ranch style houses, new infill development may include other common postwar contemporary architectural styles, if the design complements the existing neighborhood scale and massing. Similarly, additions that include a concurrent remodel of an existing ranch style house to create a new cohesive design such as a Mediterranean Revival are acceptable.

Exceptions shall be granted only if the following conditions are met.

- 1. The applicant demonstrates that a superior design solution would result if the exception were granted, and the new solution is supportive of the intent of the requirement.
- 2. The proposed exception will not result in conditions that adversely affect or detract from the character of the neighborhood.

## STATEMENT OF VALUES

*The City of Alameda and its residents take great pride in the architectural quality of Alameda’s established neighborhoods and historic identity.*

*In the building and remodeling of individual buildings, the community wishes to maintain its continuity with its past. All of Alameda’s neighborhoods have a valued context that is defined by buildings sharing qualities of mass, height and character, and any potential changes must blend into this context.*

*In addition, many individual buildings have historic or architectural value above and beyond their neighborhood contexts. A key objective of the Guide to Residential Design is to maintain the defining characteristics, including the details and materials of these buildings, as well as the overall character of a neighborhood.*

*“Guide to Residential Design”  
March, 2005*

## COMPOSITION

The Ranch Style house is typically composed as a single-story asymmetrical building form with long horizontal proportions and organized either as a simple rectangle, “U” shape, or “L” shape. Most houses contain an attached garage which may be front or side loaded, and are traditionally accessed from the primary street. The front facades of the Ranch House typically accentuate the garage, the primary entrance and entry porch, and the windows of the primary living room. Facade colors are typically light earth tones and pastels. Trim is commonly white, and contrast between trim and primary material is minimal.

### Facadeds

- All building walls fronting the primary street should have a greater degree of fenestration than walls that front onto adjacent residential properties.
- Blank walls shall be avoided.

### Porch

- Entry porches should typically be recessed and sheltered by an extended roof, supported by a beam and columns not to exceed 6” by 6”.
- Posts and rails should be constructed of natural materials including wood, metal, and wrought iron.
- Pressure treated wood should be avoided.
- Historic porches shall be preserved.

### Garage

- Garage door may front onto primary street or may be oriented toward side property line.



“L” Configuration with front access to garage.



Rambling configuration with side access to garage.



“U” Configuration with front access to garage.



Traditional rectangle with accent roof over garage.



Rectangle configuration with garage on rear of property.



Two-story “L” configuration with front access to garage.



## WINDOWS

### Overview

- Windows should not be flush with building walls. Glass should be recessed a minimum of 2 inches.
- Upper story windows should be operable.
- Non-operable windows should be limited to accent windows and as part of a grouping of otherwise operable windows.
- Windows on upper stories should generally be smaller in size than ground-floor windows.
- Where utilized, horizontally-proportioned divided lites shall be true divided-lites. Snap-on or 'sandwich' mullions are not appropriate.

### Arrangement

- Where living rooms front the primary street, a large horizontally proportioned window should be the primary design element.
- Windows along street-facades should be larger than windows located on side facades.
- Accent windows may be located adjacent to and/or above the primary entrance, along the exterior garage walls, stairs, or hallways. Accent windows typically employ a diamond or square shape.
- Multiple windows may be grouped together to create larger horizontal openings.

### Design

- Typical window types include sliding, fixed, and single-hung.
- The primary living room window is typically composed of a large fixed pane flanked by



Large horizontal window is a prominent feature.



Diamond-shaped accent window.



Window design incorporates base treatment.



Metal awnings are not typical design elements.

vertically proportioned operable window panes.

- Where utilized, window shutters shall be sized to cover the window glass.
- Large front street facing windows in living areas should have a low sill height.
- Small horizontally arranged accent windows, or other accent details should be located in upper portion of garage doors.
- Ornamental and arched windows should be avoided.
- Sills are not typically prominent design features, and should function simply to shed water away from the window and building base.
- First story window sills should be integrated with the design of the base treatment.

### Materials

- Materials are historically aluminum or wood and sometimes steel in older examples. All are acceptable in new construction.
- Window materials should be consistent throughout the house.
- Replacement windows should preserve the original material and profile where possible.
- Vinyl may be used as a replacement but should match the original design.
- Original decorative elements such as shutters and pediments should be preserved and maintained where possible.



Accent windows on garage wall



Accent window along garage wall



Small windows should be avoided on front facades.



Window shutters adjacent to second-story windows.

## ROOFS

### Design

- Typical styles include gable, cross-gabled, hipped, and gable-on-hip, and should have a low to moderate pitch not exceeding 4:12.
- Roof pitch and materials on independent slopes and gables should be consistent.
- Flat roofs shall be avoided
- Roofs should overhang building walls by no less than 18 inches. Overhangs may be accented with brackets.
- Eave overhangs may be 'open' using exposed rafters, or 'boxed' using concealed rafters.
- Small, vertically-proportioned dormers are not appropriate.
- Historic roof forms and pitch should be preserved during renovation and additions.

### Materials

- Preferred materials include wood shingles, and asphalt composition shingles.
- Historic roofing materials should be replaced in-kind.
- Ornamentation to roof detail should not be applied during remodelling if it did not exist as part of the original design, unless the architectural style is changed entirely and the ornamentation is consistent with the new style.

### Garage Roofs

- Garages may include a special roof treatment such as an extended gable or shed to reduce the perceived visual mass.



Low-pitched gable roofs.



Asphalt composition shingles are typical.



Wood roof shingles are traditional to ranch homes.



Garage with unique roof treatment.

## EXTERIOR BUILDING MATERIALS

### Materials

- Exterior walls should be composed of stucco or wood siding.
- Stucco should be smooth.
- Where stucco is used as the primary exterior building material, horizontal siding may be used beneath the sloped area of the roof as an exterior wall accent.
- Wood siding may include board-and-batten, lap, or tongue-and-groove. Siding and cladding material should be mitered. Exposed siding dimensions should be between 8" and 10".
- Accent materials may include board-and-batten, brick, or stone and are recommended to accent the building base.
- Original exterior surfaces should be preserved and maintained.
- Synthetic materials such as vinyl should not be used to replace existing siding and exterior facades.
- Simulated wood such as fiber-cement may be utilized for replacement siding.



Stucco exterior with wood siding beneath the gables.



Wood siding with brick base accents.



Board and batten with brick base treatment.



Combination of brick and stucco building material.



## ADDITIONS

### Overview

- Additions to ranch houses should retain the horizontal profile, low-pitched roof forms, window design, and building materials characteristic of the original house.
- If the design complements the existing neighborhood scale and massing, additions that include a concurrent remodel of the house to create a new cohesive design are acceptable.
- Ranch Style houses are typically one story volumes. Additions should not cover the full extent of the house. A combination of two and one story volumes is most appropriate.

### Massing

Additions can be approached in two ways:

- 1) Addition may be situated to the rear of the building to reduce visibility from the street.
- 2) Addition may have a two-story volume intercepted by a one-story wing similar to historic split-level ranch houses.

### Details

- Additions should utilize materials in keeping with the palette of the original structure.
- Second-story roof forms should reflect the pitch and style of the original house and should read as “subordinate” to first story roofs. Interior floor-to-ceiling height should not exceed 8 feet.
- Vents should be located on the rear-facing slope of the second-story roof.



Low profile second story at rear of house.



Horizontal windows are appropriate, however, simulated vertical window lites are not consistent with ranch houses.



Split-level ranch includes second story over garage.



Shed roof above garage doors accentuates horizontal lines, and “breaks down” the vertical building volume.



Blank walls on additions should be avoided.



Second story materials and roof forms are consistent with original house. Pair of single-hung windows are inconsistent with horizontal first story windows.

Typical single story ranch house

*This ranch house is organized as an "L" with low-pitched intersecting gable roofs, a side access garage, recessed entry, and picture window.*

Gently sloping wood  
shingle roof with  
simple detailing

Building mass has a  
low horizontal profile

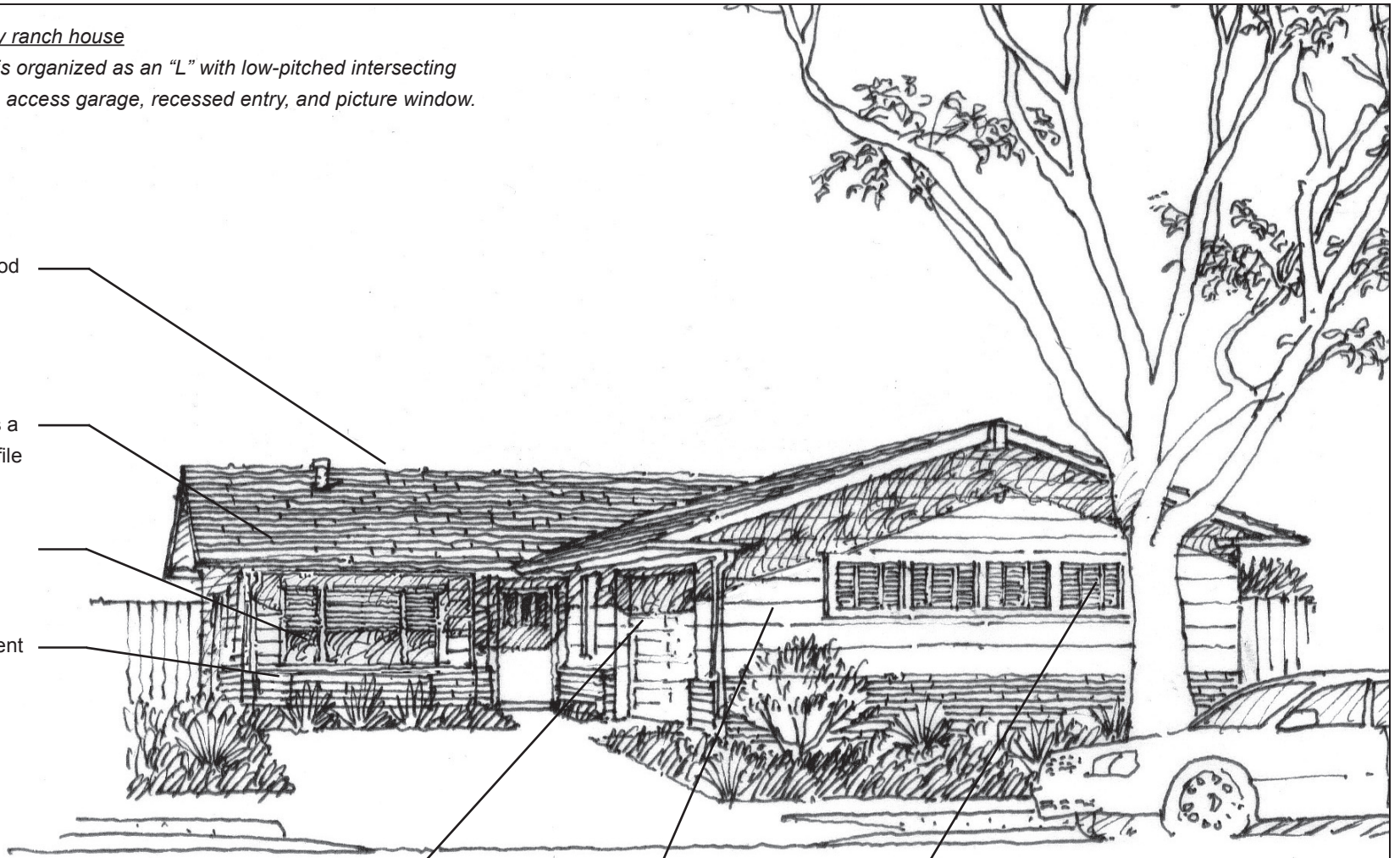
Picture window

Brick base treatment

Garage having  
side-access

Wood siding with  
wide exposure

Accent windows  
organized as a  
horizontal band





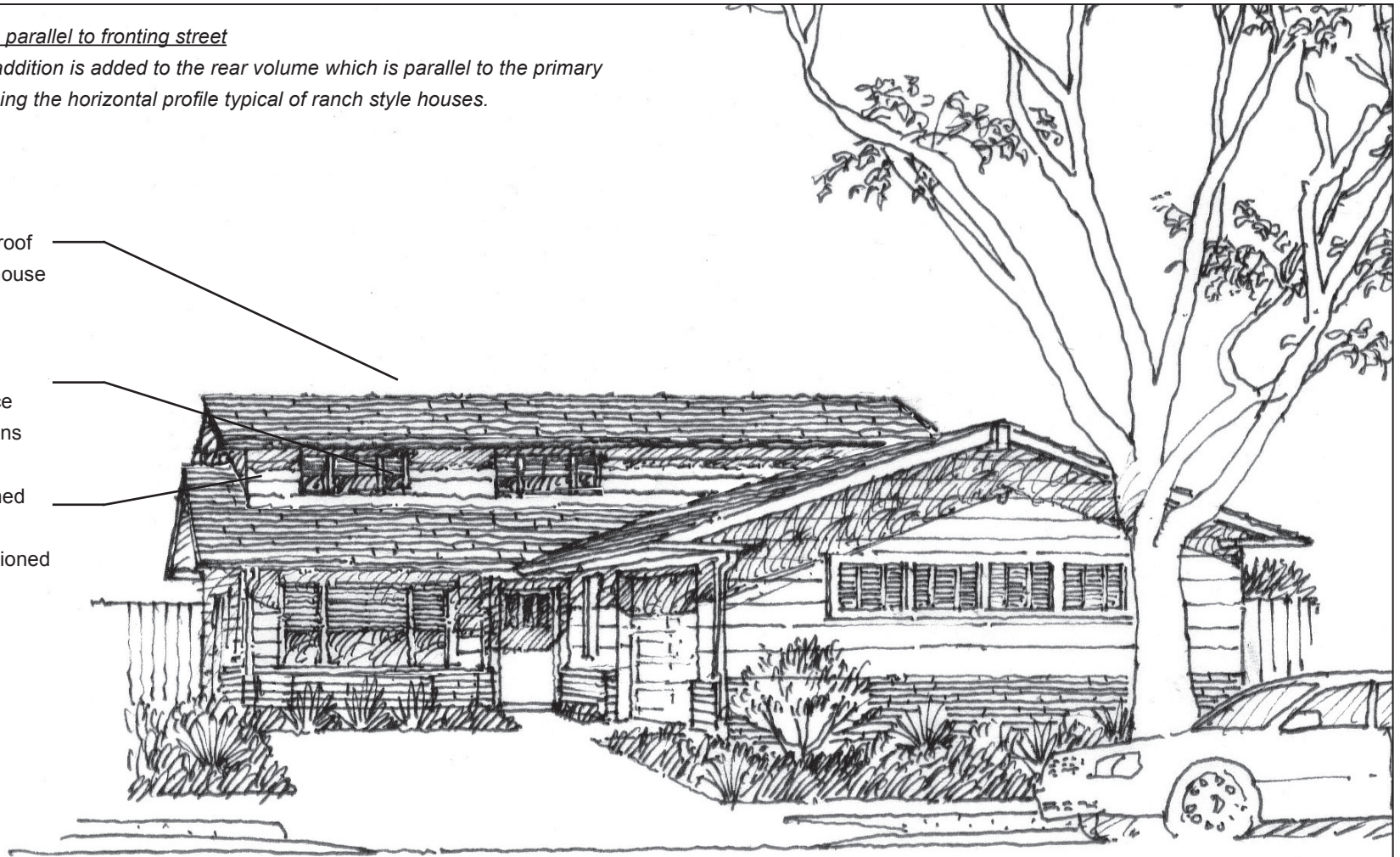
Preferred addition - parallel to fronting street

*This second-story addition is added to the rear volume which is parallel to the primary street, thus reinforcing the horizontal profile typical of ranch style houses.*

Low-pitched gable roof  
replicates original house  
roof design

Grouped windows  
are used to reinforce  
horizontal proportions

Exterior wall designed  
to accommodate  
horizontally-proportioned  
windows

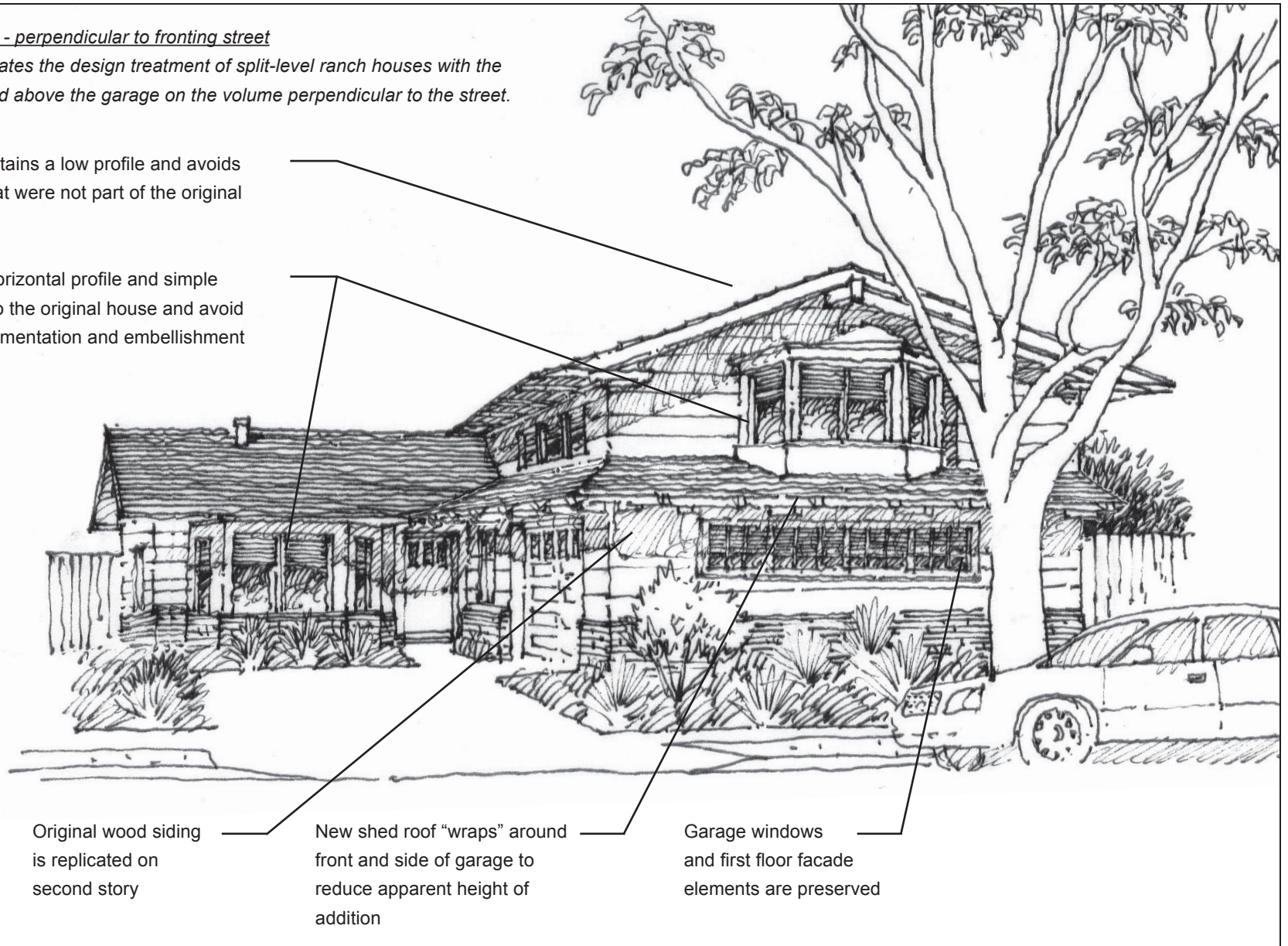


Preferred addition - perpendicular to fronting street

*The addition emulates the design treatment of split-level ranch houses with the second floor added above the garage on the volume perpendicular to the street.*

New roof forms retains a low profile and avoids complex forms that were not part of the original design

Windows retain horizontal profile and simple design common to the original house and avoid unnecessary ornamentation and embellishment



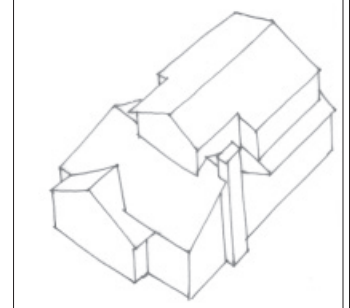


*Preferred addition - perpendicular to fronting street, above rear volume of 'cross-gable' style house.*

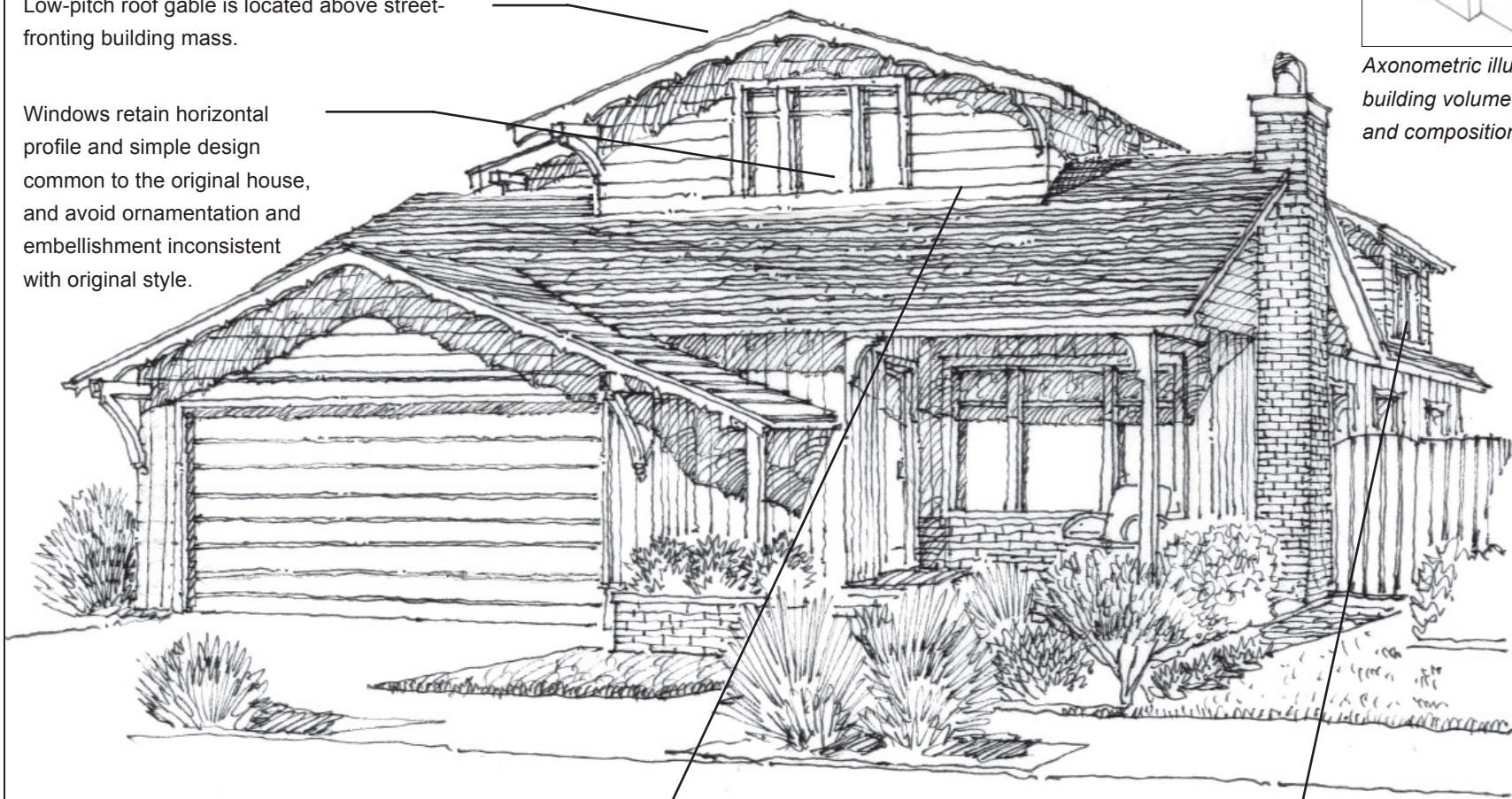
*Second story addition located primarily above the rear volume maintains the low profile typical of the ranch house style.*

Low-pitch roof gable is located above street-fronting building mass.

Windows retain horizontal profile and simple design common to the original house, and avoid ornamentation and embellishment inconsistent with original style.



*Axonometric illustration of building volumes, massing, and composition.*



Second story volume appears insubordinate to primary (first floor) building volume.

Second story wall is setback to reduce perceived height and to minimize overall visual impact.



Inappropriate modifications

This image illustrates inappropriate transformation of a traditional ranch style house. The design creates two distinct volumes that have differing styles, rather than a single architecturally cohesive design.

Second story roof style and pitch is inconsistent with original design

Arch window introduces element typical to Spanish/Mediterranean architecture

Small vertical windows are not consistent with ranch style

Extension of bay to second story creates a dominant vertical facade feature



Use of stucco on first story remodel and second story addition is inconsistent with original wood siding