



# DURANGO.STRATER.YOU Making History

*Thank you for choosing to be part of The Strater Experience. You will find history and awe-inspiring story and craftsmanship in every corner of The Strater. Please know that you are welcome to walk through our hotel lobby, stop and take in the showcases and, we hope, choose to stay longer in this great town of Durango in one of our 93 unique storied rooms.*

*Welcome and, again, our gratitude for being part of our living history. — Rod Barker, Owner*

## THE STRATER STORY 1887 – 1893

During a time when Durango's future still hung in the balance – would it remain a mining camp or become a metropolis – a Cleveland pharmacist named Henry Strater had the vision and faith that Durango would prosper, and with its prosperity, it would need a grand hotel. Construction was quite a challenge, yet Henry's dream was realized. The Strater Hotel opened after an expenditure of \$70,000, and placement of 376,000 native red bricks and hand-carved sandstone cornices and sills.

The Strater Hotel proved to be a popular winter retreat as the Durango townsfolk would close their own homes during the cold winter months and move into the hotel. Each room boasted its own wood-burning stove and comfortable furniture, with some rooms equipped with pianos and double-duty washstands/facilities – cleaned each morning by the housekeeping staff.

Henry Strater, who placed his pharmacy in the prominent corner of the hotel, had no intention of running the property, and leased it to Proprietor, H. L. Rice. Under Rice's management, The Strater Hotel soon became known as the place of social gathering.

Being young and inexperienced in business, Strater unfortunately discovered that he had neglected to exclude his pharmacy location in the lease to Rice. Rice extracted an extremely large rent, which infuriated the young pharmacist and prompted him in 1893 to build the competing Columbian Hotel directly to the south, with the intent of putting Rice out of business. Both hotels competed toe to toe until 1895 when the silver panic put both Henry Strater and H. L. Rice out of business.

## 1893 – 1926

Following the financial devastation of the silver panic, the Bank of Cleveland repossessed The Strater and sold it to Ms. Hattie Mashburn and Charles E. Stilwell. Both had the savvy and grit to make things work in the toughest of



### STRATER VISITORS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF:

Louis L'Amour • Gerald R. Ford • John F. Kennedy  
The Grateful Dead • Marilyn Monroe • Dan Fogelberg  
Steven Spielberg • Chevy Chase • Paul Newman  
Robert Redford • Will Rogers • Audie Murphy  
Jack Elam • Harry Carrie, Jr.

times. Stilwell took the hotel through the turn of the century and developed a rather more refined appeal by offering such things as opera and fine dinners.

## 1926 – 1983

During the Roaring Twenties, Durango's economy chugged along. James A. Jarvis had introduced the movie industry, oil and gas had been discovered, and coal still fired the Narrow Gauge Railroad. In 1926, a group of Durango businessmen lead by Earl A. Barker, Sr. formed an organization to buy the now aging hotel, and the group focused on refreshing the image of the 39-year-old property.

The Strater's tradition of hospitality continued through the years. Many famous people made The Strater their



home away from home such as western author Louis L'Amour, who always asked for the room directly above the Diamond Belle Saloon, Room 222. He said that the honky-tonk music helped set the mood for his novels of the Old West. Indeed, a good part of L'Amour's Sackett novels were written at The Strater. L'Amour and his family would spend a good part of the summer enjoying the local surroundings and sharing stories with the staff. Today, room 222 is known as the Louis L'Amour room.

Jentra and Earl Barker Jr. began renovating the historic property with special attention to such details as bathrooms, air conditioning, heating, closets, television, and telephones. The journey into creating the Victorian charm in the décor began on a trip to a hotel convention in Atlanta, Georgia, where they found an authentic Victorian bed in an antique store. Earl and Jentra supposed it would be interesting to furnish several of the larger hotel rooms with authentic period furniture. They cashed in their airline tickets and drove back in a U-Haul truck, stopping at antique stores along the way. Such is the beginning of the hotel's collection of American Victorian-era walnut furniture, which has grown into the largest of its kind in the world.

## 1983 – TODAY

The hotel's renovation and antique collection has continued since 1983 under the direction and design of current President, Roderick E. Barker, son of Earl and Jentra. Rod has overseen installation of fine woodwork and beautiful hand-printed Bradbury and Bradbury wallpapers, and a configuration suiting the Victorian Period. Windowed showcases brimming with antique collectibles are located throughout the public areas and invite guests to further explore the history of Durango and The Strater Hotel. Each of the 93 guestrooms are now individually and uniquely designed, plus the beds have been converted to standard sizes including a majority in queen size with some kings as well.

Together with master woodworker, Charles Schumacher, Rod designed and remodeled the hotel lobby, the new and stunning Office Spiritorium, the beautiful Mahogany Grille Restaurant, the Pullman Room, and the granite and marble-lined public restrooms. Wallpapers and carpets are specially selected for each area. A single window treatment of drapes and valance can have up to 30 yards of plush velvet.

## THE DIAMOND BELLE

This corner of The Strater, that is now Durango's only Old West Saloon, was also the original saloon of The Strater Hotel, and then once housed The Strater-Thorpe Drug Store as well as other businesses. Earl Barker Jr. told his father of his idea to convert the space back to being a saloon. Earl Sr. said, "No, you'll never get more than the \$25 rent." So, in 1957, when Earl Sr. went back to Arizona for the winter, Earl Jr. and Bob Blomstrom (pictured in mock-"wanted posters" on the walls in The Belle) restored the room back to a turn-of-the-century saloon. Earl Jr. decided it was easier to ask forgiveness, than permission. When Earl Sr. returned and saw all of his friends having a great time in

The Belle, he told everyone it was his idea all along!

The saloon girls and bartenders are dressed in costume to remind us of that bygone era. "The Belle Girls" are arguably some of the most photographed people in Durango.

- The balcony was built as apothecary storage when the space was the drugstore.
- The tin ceiling is original but has been painted.
- The lion heads from which the chandeliers hang are from an old design found in Telluride.
- Below the balcony railing is a sign in gold, humorous to the drinkers below, "*Work is the curse of the drinking classes.*"
- The upper plate glass windows are original from 1887, as is the hand-painted oak wainscoting.
- The flocked wallpaper came from England in the 1985 remodel.
- The blue star Bradbury and Bradbury art wallpaper, installed in 2005, is hand-screened and was specially selected to better show off the beautiful, ornate bar.
- An artist in residence paid his hotel bill with the 2 oil paintings that hang above the piano and above the front door. The portrait above the piano depicts Evelyn, who was one of the early saloon girls.
- The stained glass over the front door is original from 1887.



## Belly Up to the Back Bar

Built for a bar in the rough and tumble mining town of Silverton, this bar has a bullet hole in the eastern drawer. It was put there by a Colt 44 revolver during the turn of the century when an enraged patron sought to get the attention of the barkeep. Attention and return fire was given. No fatalities were reported. (Modern-day note: our barkeeps will tend to you without this prompt!) The bar was later moved to Durango where Earl Barker found it in a warehouse and incorporated it into the Diamond Belle Saloon in 1957.

Some of the world's best ragtime pianists have played in the Diamond Belle, as well as popular local musicians. Cowboys and cowgirls have even ridden their horses and mules into The Belle, of course, only to be turned back out again. Notable business deals have been documented on Diamond Belle cocktail napkins, in addition to spontaneous poems. The Diamond Belle Saloon is a favorite gathering place for locals and visitors alike. *Thanks for joining us!*

