

distinctly Colorado

Builders capture look of the American West

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PHOTOGRAPHY
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Too bad the wild

jackrabbits that call The Westin Westminster home don't pay. At ease on the landscaped grounds, they quietly nibble indigenous grasses, indifferent to the buzz of people just a hop away. ¶ If the hares seem comfortable, they should. Colorado's high plains don't end at the Westin's walkways. In fact, the grasslands keep rolling right into the architecture and design of this one-of-a-kind hotel. Inside, light, space and color mimic the magnificent backdrop that last year helped draw 23 million visitors to Colorado. »

Andrea Lawrence Wood
of Andrea Lawrence Wood
Interior Design Ltd.,
at the Westin Westminster

What the Westin has discovered, along with a growing number of architects, city planners, designers and business owners, is that visitors and locals alike want to experience a piece of Colorado as they shop, sleep and dine.

From hotels dressed in the high West, to shopping malls with trail systems that pass right through them, to an airport that takes a design cue from the snow-capped mountains seen on its horizon, a growing number of Colorado businesses are tying design to their place in the American West.

"People who come to Colorado from other parts of the world have a very strong desire to feel like they are in Colorado, even when inside," said Andrea Lawrence Wood. Wood's design firm, Andrea Lawrence Wood Interior Design Ltd., created the unique look of the \$68 million Westin. "People respond to a design that has a strong connection to place," she says.

While her knowledge of decorative design runs deep, Wood delved even deeper into the history of the Westin Westminster's surroundings, so that every artifact, every design point, would be meaningful. This attention to detail shows up in the lobby's antique corn-grinder table, classic kilim hand-woven rugs and dried flower arrangements of wheat and thistle. In the library, vintage books with titles like "Men to Match My Mountains" and "Snakebite and Other Stories" line the shelves.

"You can't go wrong when you follow nature's lead," said Wood.

Tim O'Byrne, owner and developer of the Westin, agrees. In fact, O'Byrne convinced a reluctant lender to provide an additional \$1 million for a dramatic 60-foot glass wall and adjacent courtyard in the Westminster conference center's ballroom.

He, too, is passionate about the property's authentic high-plains design.

"Every piece in (the hotel) had to meet the standard 'Is this Colorado?' and, if so, 'Why is this Colorado?' If it didn't answer those two questions, it didn't pass the test," said O'Byrne. "A lot of developers just open a catalog. That saves money, but it doesn't give a customer that certain feel of where they are.

"While it's expensive to create that feeling, we think we're going to get a big return on

that investment," he said. "The design is critical to the ultimate success of the business. We wanted to bring the outside into this space."

Design features like the ballroom's courtyard bring in the outside — and the cash. "This room is a huge source of revenue," said Susan Stiff, spokesperson for the Westin, who sees guests enjoying the Colorado climate and breathtaking views of the Rockies. "People are outside all the time, all year round. You'd never see that downtown, and you don't see that in other hotels."

Yet one need not venture far from the Westin to find other Colorado businesses with design inspired by their place in the American West.

Just four miles north in Bloomfield, Flat Iron Crossing caters to a unique clientele. With Internet and catalog shopping, customers need a reason to come to the mall. Factor in our state's passion for mountain sports, and shopping centers have a particular challenge attracting Coloradans.

According to Patrice Duker, spokesperson for the International Council of Shopping Centers, customers today want a "lifestyle experience," one that reflects the community that surrounds a center. In the Denver-Boulder corridor, lifestyle is all about the outdoors.

"The Colorado consumer doesn't want a typical inside mall and artificial environment," said Hugh Crawford, general manager of Flat Iron Crossing.

Enter the so-called 'hybrid' mall, which offers a unique brand of both indoor and outdoor shopping ... and unconventional amenities.

“What everybody talks about in Colorado is the quality of life. We wanted to embody those things in the design. We wanted to create something that related to this place.”

Curtis Fentress, Fentress Bradburn Architects

the mall, natural light cascades from a 1,000 foot-wide clerestory revealing views of both mountains and plains.

Colorado's farmhouses and agricultural history inspired the mall's agrarian detail: The elevator runs up a replica of an old, abandoned grain silo. Mustards, rusts and greens are pulled directly from the color of farmland in the eastern plains. The food court resembles a dilapidated sugar mill, with exposed beams, ductwork and stone pillars — an allusion to the sugar beet's past reign as top crop in the area. And a large redwood deck connects guests from inside shopping to the outdoor village, where well-mannered dogs are welcome to stroll with their owners. One extra special touch: The concierge desk offers picnic blankets for guests to sit on the grass and soak up the sun.

"Everything we've done is to stay within the experience of Colorado," said Crawford.

Thirty acres of green space and parks surround the 1.5 million-square-foot shopping center.

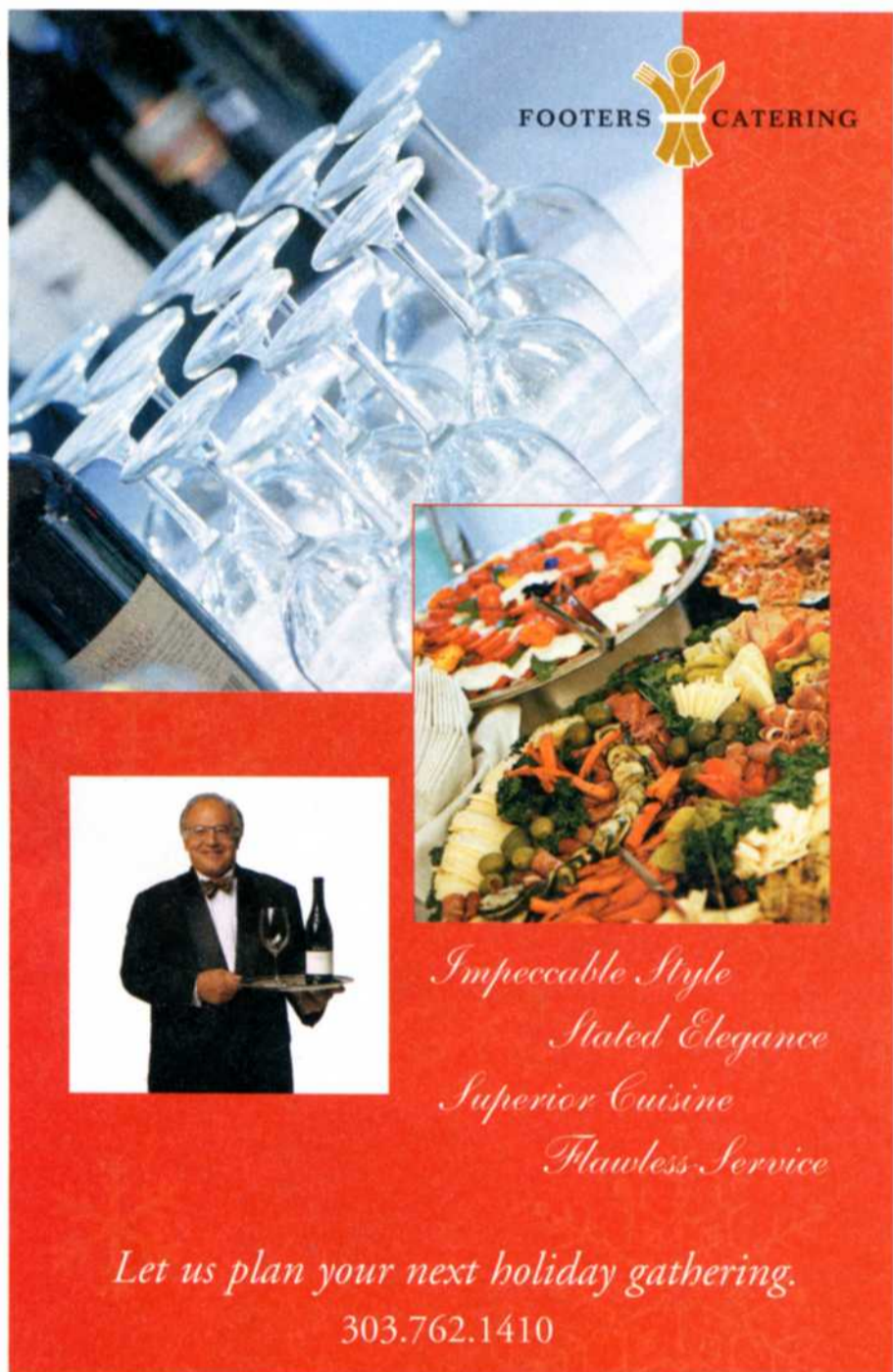
Nearby townfolk can access Flat Iron Crossing on a regional trail system that intersects and then flows right into the mall. The trail winds its way inside via giant glass 'garage doors' that open to let in fresh breezes.

"Our bike racks are always full," said Crawford. "We want people to feel comfortable, that this is their home. We want this to be their place."

Flat Iron's architecture, like the prominent rock feature for which it is named, angles westward toward the sky, the tip of its roof soaring 85 feet. Inside

South of Denver, Park Meadows offers another kind of Colorado experience: the mountain lodge. Pine scent, pumped into entranceways, is a subtle reminder of where shoppers are supposed to be.

The \$164 million building joins form and function in the Majestic Court, where a red rock waterfall replica humidifies a wood interior that otherwise would split in the arid climate.



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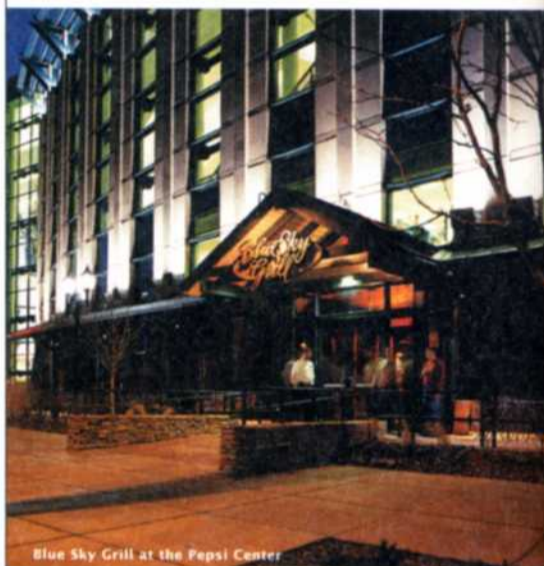
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And throughout the shopping center, subtle and not-so-subtle design elements honor Colorado. Like the curve of a mountain canyon, the layout of the mall flows naturally. Light fixtures sport custom caps in the shapes of sunbursts, a nod to the state's more than 300 days of sunshine. An almost 360-degree mural includes the words to "America the Beautiful," a poem penned by Katherine Lee Bates on top of Pikes Peak.

Closer to downtown, at the Blue Sky Grill in the Pepsi Center, Stan Kroenke, owner of the Pepsi Center and Kroenke Sports Enterprises, created an old-fashioned hunting lodge so rich in detail, diners regularly leave their tables to tour the restaurant, a quasi-museum. The ceiling is built with old Wyoming snow fencing, the walls with reclaimed Yellowstone timber.

A towering stone fireplace dominates the restaurant. Stacked by hand with winches, it contains individual corner stones weighing as much as 1,000 pounds. Five feet of concrete below the floor supports the 50,000-pound mass.

Antique Winchester guns, antler chandeliers, a stuffed eight-foot black bear (taken on Kroenke's Alaska ranch) and reproductions of Philip Anschutz's Western art collection — vintage frames and all — complete the look.



Yet the most prominent symbol of Colorado's design connection to the West is Denver International Airport, whose passenger terminal mirrors the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies.

For the 32 million travelers who pass through DIA each year, the airport is the gateway to their experience of the West.

Its striking architecture is unique in its own way, but the design is particularly remarkable given an industry burdened by practical matters, like building airports that work.

Developers very rarely pour resources into aesthetics, but Denver wanted more than just a structure to move people and airplanes. The city wanted an enduring, innovative concept.

For \$455 million, Fentress Bradburn, the architectural firm that designed DIA, delivered. In fact, its aesthetics were so integral to the overall plan that in some instances form dictated function.

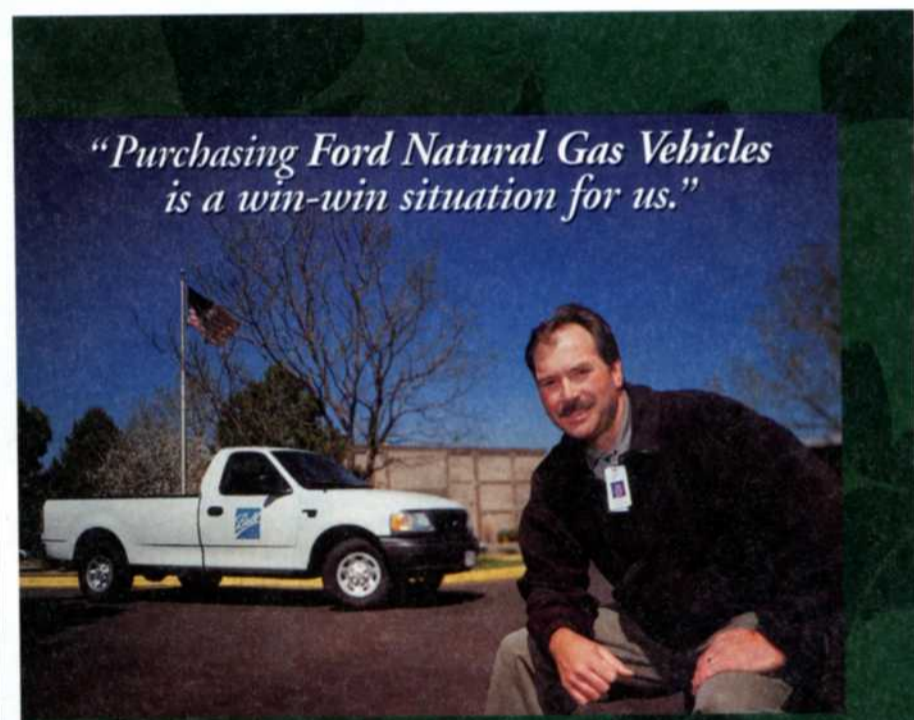
Take, for example, the 60-foot-high, 220-foot-wide glass 'picture' window on the south end of the terminal's great hall. Curtis Fentress, principal of Fentress Bradburn, has dubbed the view there "Colorado advertising."

"We put the glass there because it's such a dramatic view," he said. "On a clear day, you can see Pikes Peak."

Although the result was spectacular,

the window itself posed Fentress's greatest design challenge. The glass wall is a cantilever, supported only on one end, from the floor, and it is able to move independently from the roof.

"What everybody talks about in Colorado is the quality of life, the mountains," said Fentress. "We wanted to embody those things in the design. We wanted to create something that related to this place." ■



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