

Denver's Brown Palace getting 3-year facelift



By [Nic Turiciano](#) | The Denver Post

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The red sandstone on the outside of Denver's Brown Palace Hotel has seen its fair share of history — Molly Brown, the Beatles and 12 presidents have all stayed within its walls since its doors opened in 1892.

After more than 120 years of the city's famously moody weather, though, the palace is in need of a face-lift.

A three-year restoration of the building's facade began earlier this year to return the building — which shows cracks and the loss of color common to old age — to its former glow.

The project is expected to cost a “few million,” according to Brown Palace managing director Marcel Pitton.

“It's not going to enhance a guest's stay,” he said. “It's more about preservation.”

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And to do that, Denver-based Building Restoration Specialties will restore one side of the triangle-shaped building each of the next three years, replacing mortar joints, small areas of damaged stone and repairing flashings.

The stone that the company will use to replace damaged areas of the facade will be hand-carved, custom-ordered Utah sandstone.

Rhonda Maas, president of Building Restoration Specialties, started the company 27 years ago, and she said it's responsible for about 85 percent of all historical restorations in the Lower Downtown area.

The company has also restored the City and County Building, as well as Civic Center and its Greek Amphitheatre.

Some of the challenges that come along with historical restorations, she said, are finding matching, period-correct materials, such as mortar and stone, and working on structures that can often be delicate.

But the craftsmanship, character and materials used in old buildings, she said, still outshine private construction going on in Denver today, which encourage "disposable" buildings.

"This building is not disposable. It is an entirely different class of building," Maas said. "It's a big financial commitment to the building. They didn't have to do it."

The construction, though, presents a bit of a quandary for the hotel. After all, Pitton said, it's not like the business can shut down for six months at a time.

So the construction crews work odd hours, starting at 10 a.m. instead of a more typical 7 a.m. It's all in an effort to make the construction, which is clearly visible from the street, invisible to the hotel's guests.

It's just one more challenge to restoring a building that has no shortage of eccentricities.

From the hand-painted wallpaper in the formal dining area and the on-site well used for drinking water to the painted glass ceiling that showers light on patrons enjoying tea in the atrium, the Brown Palace has managed to stay current without shedding its history.

"Our job," Pitton said, "is to keep it relevant for another 120 years."

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