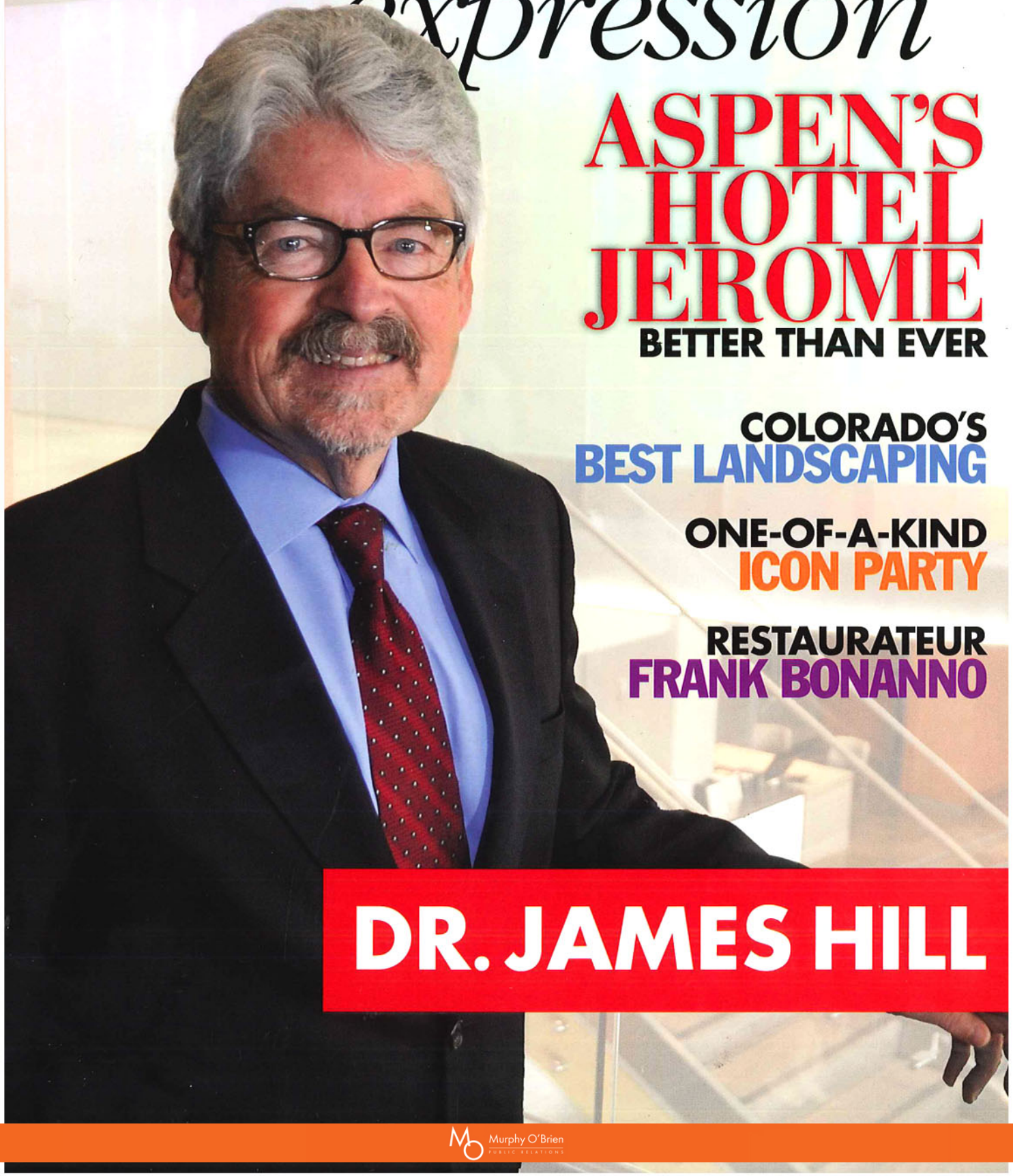
COLORADO expression



ASPEN'S HOTEL JEROME
BETTER THAN EVER

COLORADO'S BEST LANDSCAPING

ONE-OF-A-KIND ICON PARTY

RESTAURATEUR FRANK BONANNO

DR. JAMES HILL

Murphy O'Brien
PUBLIC RELATIONS

THE HOTEL JEROME

SILVER QUEEN

A BELOVED ASPEN ICON UNVEILS HER NEW LOOK FOR A NEW CENTURY

BACK IN THE 1980S, WHEN THE LATE GONZO JOURNALIST HUNTER S. THOMPSON HELD COURT IN HIS DE FACTO OFFICE IN THE JBAR OF THE HOTEL JEROME IN ASPEN, A YOUNG JOURNALISM STUDENT ASKED HIM WHAT ADVICE HE MIGHT HAVE FOR AN ASPIRING WRITER. "Run like a rat across the tundra," he replied and then turned back to his drink. Everyone has a Hotel Jerome story, and that's mine.

I don't know about rats and tundra, but I do know you don't mess with an icon, and the Hotel Jerome is Aspen's most beloved locale. When the town got wind that Auberge Resorts planned to close the hotel for a complete renovation, everyone—pedicab drivers, society doyennes, trust fund ski bums and Aspen natives (yes, there are Aspen natives)—wanted to protect their image of the storied hotel. "Everyone loved the Jerome, but it had become a museum. People wanted to look at it, but they didn't want to be here," says Tony DiLuca, general manager of the hotel. "The JBar was a local watering hole, but the hotel had become a place you come only on special occasions like Mother's Day. We wanted to bring it back to life." ¶ In December, the Hotel Jerome emerged from its four-month extreme makeover as Aspen's crown jewel. Its welcoming presence promises cool, chic luxury in a spectacular natural setting where discerning patrons can take advantage of Aspen's legendary skiing plus sophisticated cultural offerings from the Aspen Institute, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Food and Wine Classic in a laid-back (if celebrity and designer boutique-filled) Western town.

A STORIED PLACE WITH PLENTY OF STORIES

This isn't the first time the Hotel Jerome got a new lease on life. It was built by Jerome B. Wheeler, a co-owner of Macy's department store who was so impressed by the natural beauty of Aspen (and by the massive haul of silver pouring out of nearby mines) he constructed the Wheeler Opera House; in 1889 he opened the Hotel Jerome, a grand hotel that offered the refined amenities of the best European hotels. The silver panic of 1893 put an end to Aspen's aspirations with an economic decline that would last until after World War II, when returning 10th Mountain Division veterans turned the spectacular mountains into a celebrity-filled ski mecca. The Hotel Jerome served as Aspen's makeshift morgue during the flu epidemic of 1918, and housed women prisoners during its long descent into its incarnation as a decrepit boardinghouse facing condemnation. In 1984, developer Dick Butera saved it from the wrecking ball and structurally overhauled the deteriorating building, enlarging and changing its footprint. In 1985, interior designer Zoe Murphy Compton gave the Jerome its high Victorian look that most visitors associate with the hotel.

Don Wilson of DRW Trading purchased the Jerome in 2009 with an eye to stewardship of this remarkable Western icon. Management company Auberge Resorts also appreciated the place the hotel occupied in the hearts of the Aspen community, and wanted to make the crown jewel of Aspen gleam again while maintaining its unique charm. By the time the Jerome closed for the renovation, the project team of Aspen-based architects Rowland+Broughton, interior designer Todd-Avery Lenahan and Tony DiLuca of the Jerome had a clear vision of how to take the hotel into its second century.

Understanding the "must-haves" of the project was foremost in the minds of everyone on the design team. "We worked very closely with the City of Aspen to tell story of the Jerome," says architect Sarah Broughton of Aspen-based Rowland+Broughton. "Our period of significance may be the 1880s and 1890s, but the Jerome has many layers of history. We had to determine what was actually historical." For instance, the fireplace in the front living room was built in the 1940s and the front desk was moved during that time. "The room has completely evolved from what it originally was, but along with Aspen's historic preservation office, we wanted to preserve this cultural timeline." Broughton found a few surprises as she learned what was historic in the Jerome—and what was not. Take the bar in Jacob's Corner. "Most people thought the bar was historic, but we found out from Dick Butera that he had actually acquired this bar in southern Colorado during the remodel in the 1980s." Despite its assumed historic provenance, the team determined that it was not important to preserve and out it went.

The JBar was a different story. Fears about what might happen to the JBar produced the loudest buzz of the project. "There was no reason to change the JBar," DiLuca quickly points out. "We just freshened it with new wall coverings and put in some new furniture. Nothing happened in there." The big round table in the front still serves as the community table. It is still the center of the après ski scene in Aspen.

In fact, much of the hotel feels unchanged despite undergoing a radical change. Interior designer Todd-Avery Lenahan described the design mission as preserving the charm, history and integrity of the hotel's style while elevating it, making it fashionable and relevant to today's discerning luxury hotel guest. The hotel's flow was re-conceptualized; the atrium now functions as the lobby and is filled with the energy of arrival and the anticipation of the quintessential Aspen experience that awaits guests from around the world. The Living Room is the Jerome's new heart. Guests and locals alike gather here; the space is hopping from breakfast through après ski, as a pre-dinner meeting place and intimate spot for a quiet nightcap. The subdued elegance of the Jerome's fine dining restaurant, the Prospect, serves innovative, locally-inspired menus that incorporate fresh, organic, natural and seasonal ingredients in an elegantly subdued setting.

Victorian doesn't exactly pop into mind as sophisticated, fashionable style today, yet the Jerome manages to feel purely authentic and *au courant* all at once. Lenahan embellished the 93 guest rooms with period millwork that was absent in original design. The interior finishes feel more historically accurate than the original building. Architect Broughton points out that true Victorian style can be quite sparse. "Most people think of the gilded, fringed look of the 1980s interpretation of Victorian, but true Victorian style is incredibly eclectic," Broughton says. "It incorporated Asian and European objects, Eastern hardwoods brought by rail, Indian rugs and pottery and antiques. We've included nods to mid-century, the 1930s and all periods of the Jerome's history just as the Victorians would have done."

REINVIGORATED AND REIMAGINED

A historic design sense and palette frames a grand 19th century hotel reimagined for the 21st century. Luxurious guest rooms appointed with de rigueur plasma televisions, Wi-Fi and indulgent modern bathrooms combine the leather, wood and stone of the Rocky Mountains with contemporary art and the sleek lines of modern furniture for an international feel that's grounded in the American West. Today's hotel guests enjoy a full spa with treatments that utilize local minerals and medicinal plants used by the Ute Indians who lived for centuries in the Roaring Fork Valley.

The newly buffed and glossed Hotel Jerome doesn't feel like a museum anymore, but it's still the Jerome. The sense of continuity comes in part from its staff. Executive Chef Rob Zack, who began his career at the hotel nearly 20 years ago, participated in the renovation project. Tony DiLuca spent two decades at the Jerome and returned in 2011 once again as general manager. "There's history here," he says. "Workmen carved their initials in the brickwork back when the hotel was built. We found pieces of paper in the mortar, fragile handwritten notes that are still there." DiLuca personally selected much of the furniture that would be reinstalled in the remodeled hotel. "As we were unwrapping the furniture that had been restored I was smiling from ear to ear. It was like old friends had come back."

Aspen is back at the Jerome as well; the first reception held in the renovated hotel benefited the Aspen Historical Society. Locals don't wait for Mother's Day to enjoy dinner at the Jerome and JBar denizens have returned to their barstools. Throughout the hotel, original art incorporates quotations from Hunter S. Thompson himself.

Frequent *Architectue & Design of the West* contributor Kimberly Field didn't take Hunter S. Thompson's advice. She is the author of several books and writes about Western lifestyle for regional and national magazines.

Murphy O'Brien
PUBLIC RELATIONS