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Introduction
Denver is unusually fortunate in having retained much of its structural architectural heritage. After much had been lost to urban renewal and other public and private agencies, concerned citizens rebelled. The Denver Landmark Preservation Commission (1967), Historic Denver, Inc. (1970), Colorado Preservation, Inc. (1984) and History Colorado (1987) have all worked to identify and preserve Denver places notable for architectural, geographical, and historical significance. Since the 1970s, Denver has designated 51 historic districts and 333 individual landmarks, more than any other city nationwide of comparable size.

Historic districts such as Lower Downtown have transformed once decaying core city neighborhoods, becoming a major factor in Denver’s growth in population and prosperity. Whereas most core cities are losing population, the City and County of Denver has been growing since 1990. Before that, Denver, like many US cities, was losing population in the familiar pattern of urban blight and suburban flight. Between 1990 and 2010, however, the city’s US Census population grew from 467,610 to 600,158. Historic districts have played a major role in stabilizing both commercial and residential areas and in sparking restoration efforts that have increased property values and attracted many newcomers to the city.

These districts in particular have made Denver one of the most livable, prosperous, and steadily growing cities in the country. The aforementioned Lower Downtown Historic District reincarnation has sparked rejuvenation of many adjacent, once struggling inner-city neighborhoods, most notably Capitol Hill, Curtis Park, Highlands, and the South Platte River Valley. Two historic districts at the former Lowry Air Force Base have helped shape one of America’s most successful conversions of a former military base to mixed residential, retail, and office use.

Preservation efforts have saved some of Denver’s nineteenth-century masonry buildings, which reflect its gold rush origins. The discovery of a few specks of gold in the South Platte River near its junction with Cherry Creek led to the creation of Denver City on November 22, 1858. Founder William H. Larimer Jr. named the town for Kansas territorial governor James Denver, hoping to ensure its selection as the seat of what was then Arapahoe County, Kansas Territory. Larimer platted Denver City with streets parallel and perpendicular to Cherry Creek. Only after Denver began to blossom in the 1870s were outlying areas platted to conform to federal land grids based on cardinal compass points.

Aggressive town promoters, led by Rocky Mountain News founding editor William Newton Byers and territorial governor John Evans, enticed railroads to this isolated town 700 miles from the Missouri River frontier communities. After railroads steamed into Denver in 1870, this crossroads in the middle of nowhere grew into the second-largest city in the Far West. By 1890 Denver had a population of 106,713, smaller than San Francisco but larger than Los Angeles, Seattle, Phoenix, and any town in Texas.

Like other inland cities without navigable rivers, Denver’s hub was the railroad station. The landmarked Union Station was reincarnated in 2014 as a luxury hotel and transit hub for buses and rail traffic. Railroads hauled gold and silver ores from mountain mining towns into Denver’s smelters, producing fortunes that built a grand opera house,
elegant churches, majestic hotels, imposing office blocks, and masonry mansions.

Flush times ended with the silver crash of 1893. After federal repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, a federal subsidy for silver, that year, the price of silver dropped from more than a dollar to less than sixty cents per ounce, devastating Colorado’s most lucrative industry. Responding to the economic slump and population loss in the mid-1890s, Denver’s power elite set about diversifying the city’s economy. While still serving a vast, if faltering, mountain mining hinterland, the city also focused on becoming the supply and food processing center for farmers and ranchers. Architecturally, Denver shifted from mansions to more modest post-1893 classic cottages, bungalows, and foursquares.

Not content to be the regional metropolis only for Colorado, Denverites used railroads to extend their economic orbit to neighboring states. Agriculture and food processing, stockyards and meatpacking, brewing and banking, and manufacturing and service industries became mainstays of Denver’s economic base. During and after World War II, federal jobs—civilian and military—stabilized the boom-and-bust city. Tourism has also emerged as one of the city’s most reliable industries. Surging heritage tourism has capitalized on the Mile High City’s preservation of many landmarks and historic districts.

The City Beautiful

Denver’s City Beautiful movement encouraged orderly, planned growth. Robert W. Speer introduced this urban vision of the Progressive Era after his election as mayor in 1904. Speer had toured the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago and, along with 30 million others, had marveled at the transformation of a swamp on Lake Michigan into an urbane, Neoclassical paradise. He brought the dream home and, as Denver’s mayor, set out to turn a dusty, drab, unplanned city into “Paris on the Platte.”

Speer first engaged Charles Mulford Robinson, a New York City planner and author of Modern Civic Art, or the City Made Beautiful (1903), to prepare a master plan. The 1906 Robinson plan, augmented by George E. Kessler’s 1907 park and parkway plan, was further revised and extended over the years by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Frederick MacMonnies, Edward H. Bennett, Saco R. DeBoer, and others. Unlike many plans that remain on the shelf, the City Beautiful agenda was vigorously implemented by “Boss” Speer, who operated both over and under the table. Denver became one of the better examples of City Beautiful planning. These schemes were later expanded with the help of New Deal programs and, more recently, were revived by Denver’s first Hispanic mayor, Federico Peña (1983–91), and first African American mayor, Wellington Webb (1991–2001), as well as subsequent mayors John Wright Hickenlooper Jr. (2001–10) and Michael Hancock (2010–present).

Denver’s City Beautiful landscape centers on Civic Center Park, surrounded by city, state, and federal office buildings. A network of parkways stretches out from Civic Center by way of Speer Boulevard throughout the city to many neighborhood parks. These neighborhood parks serve as mini–civic centers surrounded by schools, libraries, churches, and other public buildings.
The Denver Mountain Parks network consists of Winter Park Ski Area, Red Rocks Park with its Greek style outdoor amphitheater, Mt. Evans, and forty-five other parks covering about 14,000 acres in Arapahoe, Clear Creek, Douglas, Grand, and Jefferson Counties.

George E. Kessler, who created the Denver park and parkway plan, was a German-born, European-trained professional landscape architect who became this country’s foremost parkway planner. Kessler worked on New York’s Central Park, helped lay out the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition grounds in St. Louis, Missouri, and gave Kansas City, Missouri, its park and parkway system. In Denver, Kessler abandoned the Parisian model of spoke-and-wheel diagonal avenues and connecting outer rings of boulevards. Too many buildings obstructed that ideal scheme, so Kessler superimposed parkways upon the existing street grid. He placed parks at the highest points to permit mountain views, as exemplified by Cheesman, Cranmer, Inspiration Point, and Ruby Hill Parks. These spacious parks set high landscaping standards for adjacent private properties. Parkways connected many parks to facilitate driving, bicycling, or walking the parkway system on a carpet of green.

To preserve this legacy—an amenity unmatched by even the richest suburbs—the Denver Landmark Preservation Commission has championed landmarking much of Denver’s park and parkway network.

The public-minded Progressive-Era reformers of the early twentieth century created grand parks, parkways, and public buildings. These amenities still distinguish the city, giving it traditional Neoclassical moorings and generous landscaping. Denver fancied itself the capital of the Rocky Mountain Empire and favored Neoclassical buildings harking back to the Roman and Greek Empires.

The Architects

Robert S. Roeschlaub, Colorado’s first licensed architect, came to Denver from Illinois in 1873. The Denver School District appointed Roeschlaub its architect, and his fine schools taught lessons in improved architectural standards in the hastily built boomtown. A half dozen Roeschlaub schools survive as designated landmarks.

Frank E. Edbrooke, Denver’s most prominent nineteenth-century architect, was brought to Denver from Chicago in 1879 by silver-mining tycoon Horace Tabor. Tabor, a former stonecutter, explained, “Denver was not building as good buildings as it ought, and I thought I would do something towards setting [it] a good example.” He did that with the now gone Tabor Grand Opera House, the city’s finest structure, designed by Edbrooke and his older brother, Willoughby. Although Willoughby moved on, Frank remained in Denver. He introduced mainstream design influenced by Henry H. Richardson, the East Coast pacesetter whose use of Romanesque (round) arches and rough-cut stone in massive blocks characterized the popular Richardsonian Romanesque style. Edbrooke also introduced Denverites to technical achievements such as the steel skeleton of his best-known landmark, the Brown Palace Hotel.

Following Tabor’s example, other capitalists commissioned out-of-state architects instead of locals. The flush times of the 1870s and 1880s attracted such notable Illinois architects as William A. Lang, who designed numerous stone and shingle homes in his own version of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The Illinois influence can also be seen in Denver’s early skyscrapers, which tended toward the flat-topped Chicago school rather than New York City’s stepped towers and dramatic spires.

A notable attempt to professionalize building design and raise architectural consciousness was Jesse B. Dorman’s Western Architect and Building News. This illustrated monthly magazine extolled architecture as the most
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democratic and important art form. Dorman’s magazine, as architectural historian Richard Brettell put it, was “a rudder guiding the course of the building boom.” Although the Denver journal lasted only three years, from 1889 to 1891, it successfully promoted the Colorado Association of Architects, which in 1892 became the Colorado chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). In 1909 the AIA persuaded the Colorado Legislature to begin licensing architects.

Nineteenth-century Denver architects such as the Baerresen Brothers, David W. Dryden, Frederick C. Eberley, Frank E. Edbrooke, Aaron M. Gove, John J. Huddart, William A. Lang, Willis A. Marean, Albert J. Norton, Robert S. Roeschlaub, and Frederick J. Sterner used local brick and stone to build in the Second Empire, Italianate, Queen Anne, and Richardsonian styles as each mode became successively popular in the eastern United States.

Neoclassical architecture, which became stylish after 1900, came to include Beaux-Arts revivals of Greek, Roman, and Italian styles. Jules Jacques Benoit Benedict, the first Denver architect to train at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, left many outstanding landmarks in that style. Sadly, his only known commercial building, Central Bank, was demolished in 1990 despite its landmark designation. The Neoclassical tendencies of the early 1900s resulted in two very common Denver residential types: the foursquare and the modest, one-story classical cottage with its central attic dormer and Tuscan porch columns.

Brothers William E. and Arthur A. Fisher dominated both residential and commercial building in Denver between 1910 and 1930. They favored the red tile roofs and thick masonry walls of Mediterranean design. The Fishers and their most prominent employee, Burnham Hoyt, produced many notable interpretations of Spanish and Italian styles.

The Fishers also used other revival styles trendy during the 1920s through the 1940s—French and, most notably, English, including Colonial, Georgian, and Tudor. The Fishers and other leading twentieth-century architects such as Maurice Biscoe, Theodore Boal and Frederick L. Harnois, Aaron M. Gove and Thomas F. Walsh, Harry James Manning, and Ernest P. Varian and Lester E. Varian gave Denver notable landmarked examples of various revival types.

Denver’s most creative twentieth-century architect, Burnham Hoyt, designed the municipal outdoor amphitheatre at Red Rocks Park. The national AIA, for its centennial celebration in 1955, picked the best building in each state and selected Red Rocks as Colorado’s finest design. The AIA praised Hoyt’s minimalist construction, beautifully integrated with the natural environment. Few other architects have achieved such sensitive use of natural terrain and vegetation in their work.

Twentieth-century styles such as Prairie, Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and Postmodern caught on slowly in Denver. As early as the 1930s, modern concepts, shapes, and materials were introduced by such architects as Robert K. Fuller, Eugene G. Groves, Victor Hornbein, Burnham Hoyt, Merrill Hoyt, Glen W. Huntington, G. Charles Jaka, and Eugene Sternberg. Before the 1950s, few architects could make a living by specializing in modern architecture.
western emphasis on elbowroom, producing single-family detached homes. Such residences, with side yards as well as front yards and backyards, predominate even in the poorest inner-city districts.

Unconstrained by large bodies of water or by the mountains 15 miles away, Denverites were free to build in every direction, and they did. Streetcars, and later automobile roads, shaped a metropolis that now sprawls through six suburban counties and over 2,500 square miles, from the Front Range of the Rockies on the west to the most spacious airport in the United States on the east.

Many landmarks in this book were constructed during Denver’s greatest boom era, 1880–93. These monuments in brick and stone commemorate an optimism that has characterized the city since its gold rush origins. The native stones of the Rocky Mountains—rhyolite (volcanic lava rock), Colorado Yule marble, sandstone, travertine, and granite—were used to trim and face brick structures built during flush times.

Denver is a brick city. Because the nearest forest lies fifty miles away and clay beds underlie many areas of the city, brick was often easier and cheaper to use than local timber, which was generally soft wood. Bricks were also more fire resistant than frame and were encouraged by city ordinances after the Great Fire of 1863, Denver’s only major blaze. Brick, reddish local sandstone, and, in recent years, tinted concrete give Denver its ruddy complexion.

Denver’s setting is special because of its backdrop—the snow-capped Rocky Mountains. Mayor Speer realized that this mountain view was one of the city’s greatest assets and limited building heights to twelve stories. Not until the 1950s did a growth-hungry city abandon the height ordinance to court high-rise developers. With few exceptions, developers have had their way to this day. They have built heavenward and demolished any old buildings in their path—witness the demolition of Benedict’s Central Bank Building for the Four Seasons Hotel and condo tower and the 1996 demolition of I. M. Pei’s Hyperbolic Paraboloid for a St. Louis hotel chain’s aggressive expansion plans. To make matters worse for those wanting overviews of the city and the mountains, none of the forty- and fifty-story towers erected since 1980 have roof-level viewing areas open to the public. Recent ordinances have been only partially successful in preserving Denver’s mountain views, a sight that can cheer up even the poorest and most depressed resident or visitor.

TEMPLE HOYNE BUELL, THE STATE’S MOST SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPER-ARCHITECT, TOLD THE AUTHOR IN 1986, WITH A WINK, “WE DON’T FIGHT OVER ARCHITECTURAL STYLES. THE CLIENT IS ALWAYS RIGHT.” DENVER ARCHITECTS, LIKE THEIR TRADITION-MINDED CLIENTS, USUALLY OPTED FOR THE IMITATIVE RATHER THAN THE ORIGINAL, GIVING DENVER HANDSOME, SOLID, BUT GENERALLY CONVENTIONAL BUILDINGS.

Denver’s Distinctive Architectural Characteristics

Denver buildings, although generally imitative of those in other cities, are often distinctive in three ways: spacious settings, masonry construction, and mountain views. Generous settings characterize a metropolis largely unconstrained by natural impediments. Denver developed with a
Ethnic Legacies

Greek, Roman, Spanish, English, French, and Italian influences are prominent in early-twentieth-century revival style architecture used for both residential and commercial structures in Denver. Denver’s early “brick” ordinances, which mandated the use of fire-retardant materials in building construction, excluded adobe bricks, discouraging a functional, handsome Hispanic building tradition. Denver lacked the solid German, Irish, Slavic, Scandinavian, and other ethnic neighborhoods of many cities, although heavily African, Asian, Jewish, Italian, and Hispanic American areas did emerge.

Little Israel, the old Jewish neighborhood along West Colfax Avenue, is largely gone. Landmarked remnants are Golda Meir’s relocated girlhood home and the Emmanuel Sherith Chapel on the Auraria campus. On Capitol Hill, the former Temple Emanuel Synagogue is now a public events center, whose Middle Eastern influences provide a contrast to the Gothic and Romanesque elements of Christian churches.

Little Italy in Highlands is represented by that area’s heartbeat, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church. Several other nearby North Denver landmarks—the Frank Damascio House, Cerrone’s Grocery, and the Hannigan-Canino Terrace—are reminders of this now dispersed Italian enclave.

Germans, Denver’s largest foreign-born immigrant population in the nineteenth century, have left notable landmarks, such as St. Elizabeth’s Catholic Church, the Tivoli Brewery, and the Buckhorn Exchange Restaurant. The oldest ethnic clubs in Colorado are the landmarked Denver Turnverein on Capitol Hill and the Turnhalle Opera Hall within the Tivoli Brewery complex. Such institutions not only provided the food and drink but perpetuated the song, dance, music, and language of the homeland.

Anglo-Americans gave the city some of its finest landmark churches (Asbury Methodist and Trinity United Methodist), hotels (the Oxford and Brown Palace), and office blocks (the Boston, Equitable, Kittredge, and Masonic Buildings). Episcopal churches with notable English Gothic architecture include several landmarks—St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral, St. Luke’s Church, St. Mark’s, and the Chapel of Our Merciful Savior. St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, the city’s first Irish parish, was a source of Hibernian pride and fostered one of Denver’s most popular civic festivals, the St. Patrick’s Day Parade.

The French Gothic style is celebrated in the Immaculate Conception Cathedral and the Ivy Chapel at Fairmount Cemetery, both designated landmarks. The Chateau style is best seen in the Croke-Patterson-Campbell Mansion, while later French Revival influences are showcased in the Frank Smith and Crawford Hill Mansions.

Of the black community’s institutions, Shorter A.M.E., Zion Baptist, and Scott Methodist Churches are landmarked, as is the Douglass Undertaking Building. The restaurant of Barney Ford, the pioneer black leader, and the residence of Dr. Clarence Holmes, a major twentieth-century spokesperson, are designated landmarks, although Dr. Justina Ford’s house, now the Black American West Museum, is not.

Hispanics, the first European group to settle in Colorado, have landmarks in Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Cajetan’s Catholic Churches and the Byers Branch Library, with its Spanish architecture and Spanish language programs. Denver has a Mexican-oriented commercial district on Santa Fe Drive between Seventh and Twelfth Avenues. Denver lacks a Hispanic-flavored historic district such as Olvera Street in Los Angeles.

Denver Styles

No distinctive Denver style has emerged, although brick foursquares became so common that they are locally known as “Denver Squares.”

Coloradoans generally borrowed traditional styles from the eastern United States and Europe, whose cities they hoped to emulate. As Richard Brettell explained in his 1973 book *Historic Denver: The Architects and the Architecture, 1858–1893*, “Denverites gave their commercial buildings gravity by the use of the Renaissance rounded arch; they gave their churches a ‘churchy’ quality by the use of the Gothic arch; and they gave their homes a ‘homey’ quality by the addition of a balustraded front porch.”

Denver’s earliest landmarks, especially those in Curtis Park, reflect the Italianate style popular in the 1880s. Denver has only a few examples of the earlier Second Empire style, notably the Crawford Building in Larimer Square and the Knight House in the Ninth Street Historic Park. More common in Denver are Queen Anne and Romanesque styles. Neoclassical types such as the foursquare and classic cottage also abound. Denverites, who used their buildings to convey a sense of tradition and permanence in a raw young city, favored historicist revivals like the Colonial, Georgian, and Tudor. Most Denver buildings are not stylistically pure;
rather, they are vernacular versions, often an eclectic mix of elements from two or more styles.

The only exceptions to Denver’s copy-catting of styles originating elsewhere are the tuberculosis houses found in the Montclair Historic District and a few other places. These single-story bungalow-like houses had long street-facing facades with screened porches on either end. A very open floor plan allowed air and sunshine to circulate around the house. Built especially for lung disease patients around 1905–10, most have been heavily altered.

Some architects experimented with the Spanish Colonial and Mission Revival modes. Arthur A. Fisher and William E. Fisher, the principals of Denver’s most prolific early-twentieth-century architectural firm, argued that Spanish styles were ideal for a southwestern state with a Hispanic heritage. Furthermore, Colorado has a bright, sunny, dry climate, like the American Southwest and Spain, with temperature extremes that make stout masonry walls sensible because they keep buildings cooler in summer and warmer in winter. A derivative of the Spanish hacienda is the ubiquitous post–World War II ranch house, of which there is not yet an individually landmarked Denver specimen. Another common style, the bungalow popular from 1900 to the 1920s, is well represented in the city’s largest historic district—East Seventh Avenue Parkway. Art Deco shaped only a few Denver residences, apartment houses, and commercial buildings. The Paramount Theater and the Cruise Room of the landmarked Oxford Hotel are examples. Denver has demolished or altered many of its few examples of Streamline Moderne commercial buildings, but residential examples can be found in Park Hill, the Country Club, and, most notably, the Bonnie Brae area. Twentieth-century styles remain underrepresented among designated landmarks.

Denver Landmark Preservation Commission

Urban renewal projects, speculation, and rapid and reckless growth spurts have eliminated many notable structures, especially in the Central Business District and Capitol Hill. Wholesale demolitions led the mayor and city council to establish the Denver Landmark Preservation Commission (DLPC) in 1967. Since then, more than 9,000 structures, including individual landmarks and those in districts, have...
been designated for preservation by the city council on the recommendation of concerned citizens with approval of the DLPC. Designations are made on the basis of architectural, geographical, and historical significance. After a structure is landmarked, the DLPC reviews any exterior alterations that require a building or zoning permit. The commission has ordinance authority to deny demolition in historic districts or of individual landmarks.

The state of Colorado has promoted preservation in several ways. A 1991 state statute provides state income tax credits up to $50,000 for authorized maintenance of designated residential landmarks and contributing structures in historic districts. In 2014, the state of Colorado greatly expanded its tax credits for historic preservation, leaving $50,000 as the maximum credit for approved improvements to a residential landmark but allowing commercial projects to be eligible for transferable credits capped at $1 million per project.

In 1990 Coloradans approved an amendment to the state constitution allowing gambling in the fading gold-mining towns Black Hawk, Central City, and Cripple Creek, with the provision that gaming taxes go to historic preservation. These funds are distributed through History Colorado’s State Historical Fund (SHF), which has issued over $100 million to restore designated landmarks in all sixty-four counties. This incentive led many local government land-marking agencies, recognized as Certified Local Governments (CLG) by History Colorado, to add sites to their lists. Those certified local landmarks and districts are eligible to apply for state historic funds. Denver, which obtained the first CLG, has received many millions in SHF funds to restore its designated landmarks.

How to Use This Guide

This is a guide to the Denver buildings and districts proposed by citizens and sanctioned by the Denver Landmark Preservation Commission and designated as landmarks by the city council and the mayor. Structures are listed by their original names, with prominent later names also provided. Notable buildings that are not individually designated landmarks but fall within historic districts are discussed in the text but are not numbered or mapped. If a building is also on the National Register of Historic Places, it has been identified as NR (or, in the case of a district, NRD for National Register Historic District). The highest federal designation, a National Historic Landmark, has been bestowed on Civic Center, with a second Denver NHL designation approved in 2015 for Red Rocks Amphitheatre. The National Register program, established in 1966, is similar to the DLPC program in that it identifies, designates, and attempts to preserve significant buildings and districts. Since 1990, Colorado has also identified locally significant landmarks by listing them on the State Register (SR). Many buildings and districts are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and are designated Denver landmarks. The National Register program is administered for the federal government by the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) of History Colorado and the National Park Service. National Register administrators, unlike the DLPC, have little control over alterations and demolitions of listed structures.

As with all architectural guidebooks, readers should be aware of some problems. Dates of building permits, building design, ground breaking, cornerstone laying, completion, and occupation usually stretch over several years. Here, I have listed the date of completion.

As to sometimes confusing architectural and stylistic terms, I have relied on the comprehensive glossary the Society of Architectural Historians developed for its Buildings of the United States series, as exemplified by the glossary in Buildings of Colorado (Oxford University Press, 1997).
The name after the date of construction is that of the architect. Individual landmarks and districts are arranged in what I hope will be a convenient order for walking, biking, and driving tours. For the most part, individual landmarks within a historic district are covered with the district, but sometimes the tour order suggested another placement. Four landmarks could not be squeezed onto the maps, so they remain unmapped here:

Bethesda Chapel and Gateway, 4400 East Iliff Avenue (#301)
Fire Station No. 18, 2205 Colorado Boulevard (#167)
Globeville School, 5110 Lincoln Street (#267)
Field Officers Quarters, Fort Logan, 3742 West Princeton Circle (#302)

For the latest updated list of individual landmarks and historic districts, check the City of Denver website (denvergov.org/landmarks) for maps, lists, and other information. New landmarks and districts are continually being designated. While this book was in press, the City designated three new landmarks in the National Western Stock Show Complex: The Stadium Arena, The Denver Union Stockyards Exchange Building, and The Armour Office Building. In south central Denver, The South Lincoln Street Historic District, in the 200 South Block, featuring smaller residential designs by William Lang, the city’s foremost nineteenth-century residential architect, was also designated in 2016.

Over the years, Denverites have built many special places. Although the ones in this book are the officially designated buildings and areas of note, the great fun in rubbernecking around Denver is discovering other special places on your own.