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Old World Hotel Goes HVAC Green

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After years of neglect, new owners have returned this "hub of business and social activity" from early 1929 to the fullness of its elegance and grandeur.

Modernized Old World Hotel Goes HVAC Green

*H*arrison, Arkansas was the final stop on the way to fame for bandit Henry Star, one of the most interesting characters out of the Old West. During his 32 years as a criminal, Star robbed more banks than both the James-Younger Gang and the Doolin-Dalton Gang combined.

Star began robbing banks on horseback in 1893. For his last heist in 1921, he traveled to a bank on the square in Harrison, AR, by car, making him the first to use an automobile in a bank robbery. A bullet in the back ended his career of crime.

Eight years after Star's death, within sight of the old bank where he was shot, and quickly on the heels of an epic stock market crash, construction of the 35,000 s.f. Hotel Seville was com -

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pleted. The building became the ornate center - piece of Harrison - providing a more wholesome claim to fame for the community. The cost of building the structure in 1929 reached \$150,000 with furniture costing another \$20,000, a tremendous amount back in the good ol' days.

According to an article dated Sept. 24, 1929, "On the first floor is a spacious lobby, its ceiling reaching in the center to the third floor, circled on the second floor with the balconies of the mezzanine lounge. Here are found the wonderful arches and pillars so characteristic of the architecture of Old Spain, with decorations of parallel lines of opposing colors ... with Arabic inscriptions on wall decorations in gold and rich tints."

A survivor of the great depression, the hotel became the first establishment in Boone County to serve "ice cold water." Among the hotel's notable guests have been the 33rd U.S. President Harry S. Truman and Grand Ole Opry comedienne Minnie Pearl.

Since its early days, the hotel proudly served as



At points, the ceiling of this spacious and open lobby reach the third floor. Visitors will be captivated by the ornate arches and pillars characteristic of Old Spain architecture.



The 56-room Hotel Seville is now a registered landmark with the National Historical Society. A formal dining room, Harrison's most historic room, can seat groups up to 100.

the hub of business and social activity in Harrison. But, there were years of neglect through the decades; the new owners wanted most to return the building to the fullness of its elegance and grandeur.

"We knew that eventually we could overcome the many challenges of bringing the hotel back, even making many contemporary improvements," said Don Alberson, part-owner of the hotel. "What we have now, after many months of renovation, is a four-star hotel with one of the finest eateries in the state. It's become an oasis for business travelers, the community, and for special events."

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(TOP) David Conner, checking proper voltage as Cash Curtis checks a separate unit while Philip Curtis looks into another unit's refrigeration line set. (RT) David Conner, checking unit out.

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Today, the 56-room Hotel Seville is a registered landmark with the National Historical Society, offering guests a unique Old World Euro style, complete with presidential suite and parlor, wet bar, balcony, dual-head glass shower and whirl-pool tub. The restaurant and grill, John Paul's, is "the place to see and be seen." It's also one of



Cash Curtis, service technician, checking R410A refrigerant charge. In the background, David Conner, service manager, and service tech Philip Curtis, owner, checking proper voltage and operation.

the few places in the county serving cocktails. The Hotel's formal dining room is Harrison's most historic room with space for groups of up to 100.

They topped it all off with a polished entrance, LCD televisions, high speed internet access and - "Our crowning accomplishment," added Alberson - something hotel guests have wanted for decades, and now have abundantly since 2008: year 'round comfort delivered by 30 Fujitsu mini-split HVAC systems.

The multi-zone heat pumps, with

condensing units that serve between 2 to 4 evaporator units, including seven ceiling-mounted cassette units, now meet the indoor comfort needs of the entire building, including all public spaces and private guest room areas.

"The key challenge, and what led to our initial research into split system technology, was the great difficulty and expense of installing a central HVAC system," said Alberson. "The old structure had many spaces that

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just weren't suitable to duct runs and trunk lines. Then we looked at overall system efficiency, and at that point the mini-splits - which offered not only super-high efficiency, but the greatest level of control and zone-ability - sold themselves."

What's It Take To Be A Hotel Restorer?

Don Alberson is the kind, unassuming kind of guy you'd want as a neighbor and as a role model for kids. He's entrepreneurial, works hard as a commercial electrician and a partner in Alberson Construction Management, is active in his community.

In the 90s, Don and his wife Julie owned a bed n' breakfast for six years, though they've been engaged in historic renovation work for 13 years. Don's equal investment partner in the Hotel Seville is Jack Moyer who has two hotel management degrees and began his career with Hilton and Adams Mark Hotels before he arrived in Eureka Springs to manage the 1886 Crescent and 1905 Basin Park Hotels. Together, the two invested about \$3.2 million in the hotel's renovation.

So, what's it take to be a hotel restorer? A whole lot of ambition, dedication to craft and community, plenty of time and money. Together, they and a few minor investors manage hotel investment and operations and sustain a payroll of 25 staffers.

"The only challenge, if you could call it that, was the need to get all of the refrigerant lines between the air handlers and roof-mounted condensing units within the maximum allowable distance and rise," said Bobby Deaton, owner of Island Airco, who

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David Conner, service manager and tech adjusting air circulation and reinstalling a Fujitsu air filter.



Philip Curtis, owner, on ladder, with David Conner, service manager and tech, in the Hotel's restaurant installing an air intake grill and cover on a ceiling unit.

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subbed out much of the installation work to Philip Curtis, Curtis Heating & Cooling. "But Chad Ellis and Cash Curtis, the key installers, could work with the 82-foot line-set allowance we had between units, and made all the connections successfully."

According to Curtis, the Fujitsu systems were sourced through manufacturer's rep Bill Riddell and Robert Crow, branch manager of Sanders Supply.

"The Halcyon multi-zone heat pump line gave us 110 component combinations to achieve mix-and-match flexibility," added Curtis. "We wanted the R410A inverter units, but also the highest efficiency system we could get. The multi-zones we installed offered efficiency ratings of up to 16.5 SEER and 9 HSPF. We could select either 24,000 or 36,000 BTU outdoor units com-

bined with 9,000, 12,000 or 18,000 BTU wall-mounted or concealed ceiling indoor units - a variety that worked well for every need within

the hotel."

With comfort like this, they've definitely softened the 'ol rugged West. ■■

Gas & Water: A Volatile Brew

It wasn't delivered ice that gave Hotel Seville its early claim to fame as the first establishment in Boone County to serve "ice cold water." As the story goes, it was an invention that first brought refreshment ... then peril.

Hotel part owner Don Alberson tells it this way:

"Many years ago, the hotel had a propane boiler. As you know, LP gas stored underground is very dense and cold, making the piping between the tank and boiler quite cold, too. Someone came up with the idea of extending the gas line [a long copper coil with pre-scented, undetectable LP gas?] through the hotel's water tank. Apparently, a leak developed in the pipe within the water tank. A guest left a cigarette burning in his sleeping room while he took a shower with the bathroom door closed. It appears that there was enough propane in the steam from the shower that when he opened the bathroom door it exploded, blowing the guest into the hallway. Yeah, it sounds a bit far-fetched, but I got this story from an old volunteer fireman who was on duty the day it happened."

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