



# Old School COOL

*30 DESIGN LESSONS* learned from Park City's newly renovated Washington School House Hotel

BY BRAD MEE    PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SPENGLER

**O**ld school is the new cool, or so asserts Washington School House Hotel, the latest addition to Park City's list of ultra-luxe inns. One visit to the historic schoolhouse-turned-boutique-hotel corroborates the claim. This newcomer not only offers superior service and enviable proximity to Park City's Main Street, but also a décor that dazzles all who walk through

its doors. "We wanted this property to be different than what is expected of mountain hotels," says designer Paul Wehsener. He and his design partner/wife, Shannon, joined a team of talented pros to renovate the 1889 building with stunning style. Fact is, we loved the look so much we wanted to take it home. The design duo offered tips to help us do just that.



## Lessons from the living room

**1 Create a white backdrop.** “When mixing several different eras of furniture, some more ornate and others simpler, an understated backdrop showcases the collection and doesn’t compete,” says Shannon. Here, a seamless canvas shaped by white walls and ceilings unifies the interior’s modern art, antiques and vintage pieces.

**2 Embrace European scale.** “The scale of the space drove the smaller scale of the furnishings,” says Paul. “One learns that European furniture, like the room’s 19th-century Bergere chairs, is smaller than we are used to, but is very approachable and comfortable,” says Shannon.

**3 Edit the material palette and design elements to create an “undecorated” look.** The team was inspired by a schoolhouse style characterized by whitewashed walls, wood floors, simple details and woodwork.

**4 Choose rugs carefully.** “Don’t commit to a rug until you see it in the space,” advises Paul. The living room’s antique rug was over-dyed in dark blue to give it a modern edge and easy-to-maintain coloration. Its size perfectly accommodates the seating area without intruding on the beautiful wood floors.

**5 Save fragile fabrics for pillows.** Choose durable, easy-to-maintain textiles for upholstered pieces, preserving special fabrics for pillows that can easily be moved out of harm’s way.

**6 Choose a key focal point.** Mounted above the fireplace, the 10-foot antique French opera house mirror dominates the décor. “Every piece is special but nothing stands out more than the mirror,” says Shannon. “Everything was planned around it.”

**7 Use stone to add weight and authenticity.** The designers painted the chimney’s limestone to prevent it from competing with the antique French fireplace surround.

**8 Be imaginative.** Paul brought new life to an old six-foot-wide light fixture formed of natural elk antlers. He coated it with white lacquer and bejeweled it with dozens of crystals before hanging it in the main living room.



## Lessons from the stairwell

**9** Use molding to add instant architecture. Ideally simple in style, floor-to-ceiling board and batten paneling adds dimension and understated drama to the stairwell.

**10** Treat woodwork with a special finish to differentiate it from drywall. Throughout the hotel, semi-gloss paint accentuates all of the woodwork.

**11** Paint baseboards rather than staining them. "It gives a crisp finish to a wood floor," says Shannon.



## Lessons from the third floor landing

**12** Position furniture as art pieces. Once covered in simple muslin, this antique gold settee now dons a Jim Thompson cut velvet. "The fabric makes it really special," says Shannon. An uncluttered setting allows the settee to stand alone and perform as functional art.

**13** Use a fabric treatment to protect furnishings' fine textiles from stains and spills.



Paul and Shannon Wehsener,  
Paul Allen Design

## EXPERT ADVICE

*The right white:  
Paul and Shannon's top pick*

"White is the perfect choice when you want architecture and texture to prevail," says Paul Wehsener. The design duo's favorite white is Benjamin Moore's White Dove. "We love this color. While it appears white, it is really creamy, so it's easy on the eyes and plays well with light," says Shannon. The color flows throughout the Washington School House Hotel creating continuity. "Not too gray or too yellow, it's a great backdrop for the interior's icy, silvery blues," Shannon adds.



WHITE DOVE  
Benjamin Moore

## Lessons from the fixtures and features

**14 Choose an extraordinary entry fixture.** "Lighting is an important feature throughout the hotel and the foyer chandelier—the first fixture guests see—had to be special," says Paul. He explains that lighting is an excellent way to add a modern edge to an antique-laden interior.

**15 Favor functional accessories.** Staged on the living room's French trestle table and 18th-century console, a group of antique silver trays, candlesticks and a compote bowl are as beautiful as they are useful. They lend the space a comfortable, collected look and feel.

**16 Consider outdoor fabrics for indoor use.** Chic, tailored slipcovers of Perennials outdoor fabric dress the dining room chairs, protecting them from soil and stains.

**17 Personalize with art.** Every room in the hotel hosts an original oil.

**18 Use sconces beside the bed.** Table lamps consume a lot of space on bedside tables and risk being knocked over easily. "Choose sconces that are adjustable," advises Shannon. "But plan ahead. Most sconces are hardwired."

**19 Choose white linens for guest rooms.** Visitors prefer bedding that looks clean and fresh.

**20 Create order with symmetry.** Balanced elements support a calm, serene atmosphere.

**21 Create a classic, open ambiance.** Mirrors, an open chrome vanity base and edited material palette foster the bathroom's timeless, uncluttered style.

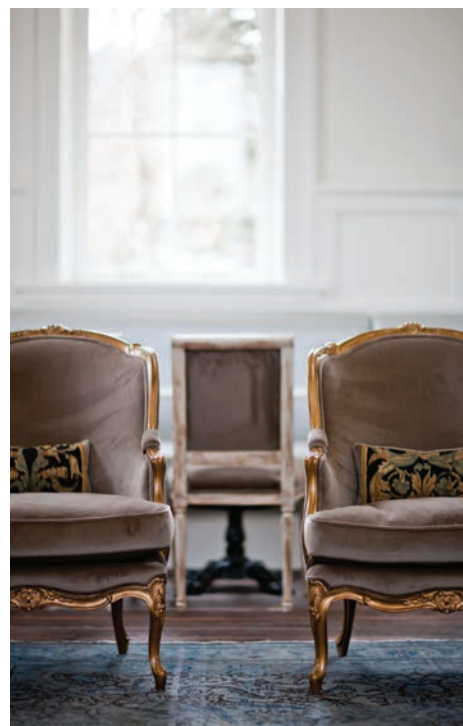
**22 Don't fear marble.** The designers chose a unique crystallized version for the bathrooms. "The quartzite in the marble glistens like snow," says Shannon.

**23 Consider wall hooks rather than towel bars.** "Hooks consume less wall space and are easier to use," says Paul.

**24 Don't be square.** Large 8-by-16-inch rectangular tiles, rather than more conventional squares, add character and classic style to the bathroom walls.

**25 Accentuate shapely furnishings with solid fabrics.** For a pair of shapely living room chairs, Paul and Shannon chose an understated taupe velvet that allows the carved frames to prevail.

**26 Choose gold finishes judiciously.** Avoid anything too bright. "You don't want a shiny brassy finish but rather something deeper and more antiqued," says Shannon.





## Lessons from the reception area

**27 Incorporate built-ins.** Built-ins add depth to a décor and their hidden storage allows you to stow excess pieces, helping to create an uncluttered look.

**28 Edit collections.** "People don't have to see every piece of silver or glassware you own," says Shannon. Rotate items in and out to keep the look fresh and interesting.

**29 Use mirrors to expand space.** "Mirrors not only make a room feel larger but are an excellent choice in spaces with art," says Paul. "They don't compete."

**30 Use glass objects to lighten a display.** Crystal pitchers and glassware provide interest and sparkle to the built-in shelves without adding bulk or visual weight. **USD**



One of Park City's historic landmarks, the Washington School House was built in 1889 and is just steps above bustling Main Street.

## BY THE NUMBERS: WASHINGTON SCHOOL HOUSE HOTEL'S FACT AND FIGURES

<b>8</b> months to complete the entire renovation	<b>1889</b> <i>Year the original school house was built</i>	<b>12</b> guest rooms	<b>24/7</b> <i>concierge service</i>	<b>16</b> foot-high ceiling in the main living room	<b>775</b> <i>square-foot penthouse</i>	<b>19</b> distinctive chandeliers illuminating the interior	<b>7</b> <i>Old Town lots comprise the hotel's property</i>	<b>45</b> minutes from Salt Lake International Airport	<b>12,000</b> <i>square-foot interior</i>	<b>2</b> blocks to Park City Mountain Resort Town Lift
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