

# SOPHISTICATED LIVING

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# OLD-SCHOOL COOL

Historical charm and high alpine design converge in the heart of Park City at a 200-year-old schoolhouse turned polished boutique hotel.

*By Elise Hofer Shaw / Washington School House photography Michael Spengler*

Park City, Utah, is in the middle of a whiteout, being born again beneath a blanket of 12 inches of fluffy, fresh powder. It's been a record-breaking season for snow, one that has already seen more than 365 inches accumulate by the end of February. But this morning clouds are scarce, the sun is out, and it's a comfortable 30 degrees for spring skiing—and the natives are restless, eager to hit the mountain and make the first tracks in the snow.

Our basecamp is the Washington School House, Park City's only mountainside luxury hotel adjacent to the largest single ski and snowboard playground in the United States: Park City Mountain Resort. Offering more than 7,300 acres of skiable terrain, the mountain is truly epic—and mere steps from the

hotel's back door. Proximity is definitely a perk, but that's not why guests of the Washington School House return season after season. They come for the understated charm and designer details. They come for the quaint confines that only a 12-suite property can offer. They come for first-rate services like fireside gear fittings and private chef-prepared dinners that have earned the hotel spots on *Travel + Leisure's* "It List" and *Forbes's* "Top 10 Luxury Hotels." And, yes, the fact that the Washington School House also happens to be the boutique hotel that Netflix buys out annually for the Sundance Film Festival, not to mention a respite of choice for snow-loving celebs like Robert Redford, Elijah Wood and Chelsea Handler, admittedly adds to its cachet, too.





But above all, guests of the Washington School House come to be a part of history. Built in 1889, the property was a schoolhouse for miners' children until 1931, when it shuttered after the Great Depression laid waste to Summit County's labor jobs prospecting silver and lead ore. After a stint as a VFW hall, followed by decades of abandonment, the building was turned into a bed and breakfast during the late 1980s that served its patrons well for 26 years (wood panelling, floral drapes et al). But the Washington School House's most stylish incarnation was completed in 2011 by its current owners who enlisted Paul Allen Design for the four-story overhaul. The schoolhouse's solid bones were left intact, including its limestone facade and original bell tower, but the rest was a total gut job to make way for 16-foot-high ceilings, reclaimed barnwood floors, Carrara marble-topped built-ins, a subterranean ski lounge, a heated pool, and rooms and suites that boast a balanced mix of Gustavian antiques, fine art and modern alpine touches like antler chandeliers dipped in glossy white lacquer. For the San Diego-based design firm's first foray into hotel design, they knocked it out of the park (pun intended), partly because they approached it like a residential project. The result? A cool and clean redesign that respects the building's historical integrity, garnering the hotel nods from *Architectural Digest* and *Elle Decor*.

My king room faces west overlooking the 20-foot plunge pool that's terraced into the hillside, dappled with blue spruce and aspen trees and bearing as its crown jewel a torch from the 2002 Winter Olympics that has been fashioned into a fire pit. The window well, where I choose to enjoy my morning French press

coffee (brought in from beloved local beanery Pink Elephant), is appointed with two Victorian-style armchairs and farmhouse sconces. The stately wrought iron bed's mattress boasts both a pillow top and a feather bed, all ensconced in Pratesi linens for maximum comfort. As for the en suite bath, it's a study in white porcelain and marble, the only pop of color being a mix of Molton Brown bath goods that fill the air with bergamot and orange while I wrestle into my ski gear.

True, it's about a three-minute downhill walk to the Town Lift that whisks skiers and snowboarders to the base of Park City Mountain. But chauffeur privileges are part of the package at the Washington School House, an extension of the hotel's Ski Valet services. You can literally pick your starting point from two base villages and they'll shuttle you there in moments in a white SUV with lift ticket in tow so you can skip the lines, click in and go. Since Vail Resorts bought and combined Park City Mountain and Canyons Resort into a mega-resort in 2015, the mountain has been running like a well-oiled machine courtesy of a \$50 million renovation and operating budget that has been put toward the addition of the Quicksilver Gondola (linking Park City Mountain to Canyons), the widening of multiple trails, the revamping of Miners Camp (a massive new mid-mountain bar and restaurant for brews and bites between runs) and more. Talk to anyone who skis Park City regularly and they'll tell you that the flow and connectivity from ridge to ridge has been significantly improved. After an afternoon of off-trail powder skiing spanning 5,000-plus acres, I can vouch that the diversity of terrain is divine.





A two-queen room at Washington School House



For savory spreads culled from Utahan charcuteries and cheesemongers and house-made sweets, the living room at the Washington School House can't be beat.



The bedroom in the Penthouse Suite is peppered with antiques.



A lofted one-bedroom suite at the Washington School House



The cozy ski lounge at the Washington School House





Riverhorse Provisions, a quaint noshery and gourmet market on Main Street



The Park City Sour at The Farm



Handle restaurant sources local and regional ingredients at the height of freshness.



High West



The bar at Handle restaurant



The charcuterie board at The Farm restaurant



## REDUCE, REUSE, UPCYCLE

While at Old Town Cellars in Old Town Park City, we stumbled upon a Cotopaxi pop-up shop. The outdoor brand's mantra, "Gear for Good," isn't just lip service: two percent of all of Cotopaxi's revenue provides grants to nonprofits that have demonstrated outstanding impact, agility and persistence toward alleviating poverty around the world. Our current covetable carryall is the Uyuni 46L Duffel (\$80), a colorful, go-anywhere cross-body made from material scraps from big-name outfitters like Patagonia and The North Face. A good cause *and* great mountain style? Done and done. [cotopaxi.com](http://cotopaxi.com)



The Old Town Cellars philosophy merges the art and culture of professional wine making with the mountain town lifestyle of Park City.



Après-ski is a communal part of the Park City lifestyle, and options abound along Main Street. But for savory spreads culled from Utahan charcuteries and cheesemongers, house-made sweets and wines that have been blended and bottled in town, a cozy corner by the fire in the grand living room back at the Washington School House can't be beat. You see, another ace the hotel has up its sleeve is the culinary trifecta of chefs Ernesto Rocha (executive breakfast chef), Callie Varner (pastry chef and après-ski fare artist) and Kyle Hirsch (on-call private dinner chef). Rocha's hearty mountain breakfast menu is served each morning, with Varner's daily après-ski eats set out every afternoon starting at 4PM. And with 24 hours notice, Hirsch can curate a private dinner for groups large or small that'll knock your ski socks off. Ours boasted a belly-warming carrot ginger bisque made with coconut milk and cilantro, a baby arugula salad with cucumber ribbon, candied walnuts, sweet pickled parsnip, Gold Creek feta and a honey pear vinaigrette, and a perfectly seared bone-in filet mignon with a mustard bourbon demi-glace served with Yukon potato au gratin and heirloom carrots. (Hirsch's menus change frequently depending on what's in season and can be customized around any dietary restrictions.)

Exploring Park City's growing culinary scene is part of the fun, and the 24-hour concierge at Washington School House is happy to dole out dining recommendations. For lunch on the mountain, we liked The Farm, a slope-side restaurant at Canyons Village where one can fuel up on bison chili and organic winter lettuces and herbs in a heated yurt overlooking the Red Pine Gondola. If snowshoeing Wasatch Mountain State Park followed by an afternoon of shopping Main Street is more your speed, break up the day by

popping into Riverhorse Provisions' noshery for a bowl of healthy grains and kale or house-made soups. Park City's restaurant with the biggest buzz right now is Handle, helmed by award-winning chef Briar Handley. Its menu of creative yet comforting American cuisine (think buttermilk fried chicken and roasted sunchoke risotto) and shareable small plates (try the smoked Idaho trout and buffalo cauliflower) is driven by the seasons, and Handley prides himself on sourcing local and regional ingredients at the height of freshness. The bar's rustic-chic vibe and ruggedly inventive cocktails like the Rattlesnake—a stiff pour of High West double rye with absinthe and egg-white foam that's branded with an "H" drawn in Angostura bitters—are added incentives for a visit.

Speaking of libations, Park City's cocktail culture has significantly matured over the last few years. New on the scene is Old Town Cellars, a private label winery that sources fine wines from top wine growing regions around the world and then blends and bottles on site. (Washington School House is a fan and always has its seasonal varietals in rotation at the hotel.) And High West Saloon, located next to the Town Lift base—the only ski-in gastro-distillery in the world—is a local gem just a stone's throw from the hotel. Doctor's orders: Request one (or two) of the house's signature Dead Man's Boots cocktail—Rendezvous rye, reposado tequila, fresh-squeezed lime juice, simple syrup and Fever Tree ginger beer over chipped ice—and you'll forget about the residual pain in your shins from hours of powering through fresh powder. Sleep, ski and repeat. **sl**

*Washington School House Hotel, 543 Park Ave., Park City, Utah; 435.649.3800. washingtonschoolhouse.com. For mountain information, visit parkcitymountain.com.*