

\$20M makeover in the works at Cheyenne Mtn. Resort

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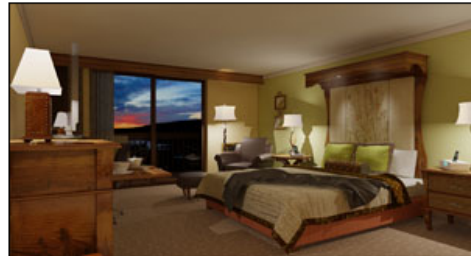
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Rooms will be refurbished at a cost of \$19,000 each.

Cheyenne Mountain Resort, one of the area's leading hotels and conference centers, has launched a \$20 million renovation despite the slow economic recovery.

Upgrades already have been made to a few common areas and work will soon begin on remaking each of the hotel's more than 300 rooms.

During the downturn, as many businesses in the hospitality industry tightened their budgets, so did Cheyenne Mountain. But business is climbing back up. So far this year, revenue is 6 percent over budget, said Laura Neumann, general manager of the resort.

The timing was right, she said, for the first major renovation at the hotel since Cornerstone Real Estate Advisers bought the property and overhauled it in 1996.

She cited several reasons for the project.

One of the resort's highest priorities is maintaining its AAA four-diamond status, she said. This means investing in the property so that it stays up-to-date. Interviews with guests underscored the need to upgrade, as well.

Another motivation was the eventual resumption and completion of work on an expected competitor: the Renaissance Hotel on the north side of Colorado Springs.

The resort, which is managed by Benchmark Hospitality International, has 316 rooms and suites in eight separate lodges. Each room will be completely refurbished, from the carpets and furniture to the draperies and fixtures. The hotel is spending \$19,000 on each room.

Out will go the "heavy armoires" and in will come a lighter, more "residential" feel, said John Branciforte, director of sales and marketing for the resort.

That means the furniture will be natural wood, and rooms will have a mix of square and round end tables, rather than identical ones, to make them feel more like home, he said. Room colors will include paprika, beiges, sage and other earth tones.

The design will incorporate a "fusion of texture, luxury and color drawn from the natural surroundings," including Aspen-leaf designs in the weave of the rugs.

The overall theme is to bring guests a "sense of place for the authentic Colorado experience," Branciforte said.

Rooms also will get additional electronics, including flat-screen TVs and iHome MP3 clock radios.

All the conference and ballrooms will be refurbished with new carpeting, wall coverings, sconces and new audio-video and teleconferencing capabilities.

A wall that separates the Remington conference rooms, on the center's east side, will be removed, and the ceiling and stone on the fireplace will be raised to 14 feet.

Landscaping will also be given a Colorado theme, as gardeners replace existing plants with indigenous ones and create a "riverbed look" throughout the grounds.

Thus far, Cheyenne Kidz Club has been revamped, motorized bumper boats have been added to the lake, a lower courtyard has been landscaped, and the previously bare Mountain View terrace, which overlooks the 35-acre lake and Cheyenne Mountain, now has teakwood living-room sets, Adirondack chairs and a 15-foot firepit.

Two guestroom prototypes are being built on-site and will be completed by July 14. Then room renovation begins, one lodge at a time, in the fall.

The 6,400 square-foot Colorado Ballroom, which holds 400 to 500 people, and the 2,400 square-foot White River Ballroom, which holds 162 to 180, will be renovated during three weeks in September and ready by Oct. 9.

Denver-based Ricca Newmark Design was hired for the job. In Colorado, some of Ricca Newmark's clients include The Broadmoor, Little Nell Hotel in Aspen and the St. Julien Hotel in Boulder.

The campus layout of Cheyenne Mountain should make the renovation less of an issue to guests, Branciforte said, because an entire lodge can be closed and remodeled, without the guests being disturbed by construction.

All guest rooms and conference rooms are expected to be completed by April 2011.

Right about when the economy is expected to make a recovery.