



History of The Pinnacle Club by Grand Hyatt Denver

by Bill Husted

It was 35 years ago. It was the fall of 1978 when we first met J.R. Ewing holding court at the Petroleum Club in “Dallas,” the TV series. And it was in the fall of that same year that Denver’s Petroleum Club opened at the top of 555 17th St. If the Denver version lacked some of the soapy drama of the television series, it lacked nothing in prestige and the pure striking power and beauty of its presence. This was the club you had to belong to, not only to impress clients and friends, but to impress yourself. Two floors that overlooked the mountains and plains. Two floors that took your breath away.

When the members first rode up the elevator to the Petroleum Club, the 37th and 38th floors of Denver’s Anaconda building, their ears popped. When they got to that top floor and walk towards the floor-to-ceiling windows, their eyes popped. No view in Denver had ever rivaled these vistas. On a clear day they could see – well, maybe not forever, but almost. They could see Wyoming. They could see 7,500 square miles of America. They could see Pikes Peak, a hundred miles south to Colorado Springs, along with 2000 named peaks. According to the US Geological Survey, the area overlooked is larger than Connecticut, Rhode Island and Delaware COMBINED. It was and still is a place to take in the grandeur of the Centennial State, a place to be humbled by the West.

Founded in 1948 (when the initiation fee was \$25, dues \$5/month), the Petroleum had grown from a handful of oilmen to a membership of 2,400 in 1978 with a three-year waiting list. After moving around Denver for 30 years, this new clubhouse was a symbol of how the oil business had changed Denver and enriched it.

That first year in their new digs, members realized they met and mingled in one of the most dramatic private clubs in America, and they took great pride in it. The 37th floor offered some meeting rooms and, most importantly, the Men’s Tavern, a pool and card room for members to pursue interests beyond the oilfields and boardrooms: eight-ball, gin, pinochle and canasta. These games of skill and chance echoed the skill and chance of the oilfields, as lunch stretched to the afternoon, this room would bring together men with oil their common bond.



The club was built to be self-contained with its own mechanical, electrical, gas and heating system – to allow it to operate full-steam when the building was closed during the weekends. It was as if the Petroleum Club said to the city, don't worry about us. Our hands are dirty, our boots dusty, but we know how to handle pretty much anything.

But as impressive as this enclave was, its diverse membership was more so. Denver oilmen, and a handful of women, were an independent lot, a gaggle of wildcatters, tycoons, lawyers, suppliers. “It had the full flavor of the oil and gas guys,” a former member said. “There was a big round table where people would join each other for lunch, the Knothead Table. Almost every day you'd see Denver's most notable there. Every element of the industry would meet up there.”

A booklet published to celebrate the new clubhouse in 1978 drilled it: “There's no doubt the oil men and women like to have a good time. But better than that, they like to see that everyone else has a good time. They're a gregarious lot and they compare themselves to people in the armed services: they've lived in so many different places that they've developed a very outgoing attitude towards getting to know other people... And they've learned to relish a wide variety of life's offerings: the luxury of our new facility; the rugged existence of weeks in the field; the gamble of exploration; or a healthy fight over politics.”

One former member said a “healthy fight” did not only meet a shoutin' match. There were some fist-to-cuffs in the card room from time to time, some wild parties, lobster nights, steak nights, costume parties, and to this day no one talks about New Year's Eve parties at the Petroleum Club. In some ways it was like Las Vegas, what happened there stayed there. Except deals, which were often sealed with a handshake that was expected to be kept more sacredly than a contract. Some contracts were written on napkins and tablecloths and remain in company files to this day.

The gusher days of the Petroleum Club started to wane in the mid-80s, and it kept waning. The price of oil dropped, and dropped, hitting a low point of less than \$15. A bartender at a popular downtown watering hole famously pronounced he knew things were bad when, “a martini costs more than a barrel of oil.”

Eventually the adjacent Grand Hyatt Denver took over the management of the Petroleum Club space, now renamed The Pinnacle Club, and opened it to the public as Denver's premiere event and special event center. The Petroleum Club reestablished itself at the Denver Athletic Club with 16 founding members in 2007. Times had changed. But the Pinnacle Club abides. Having just completed its renovation, once again it is in the center of Denver's imagination.



“There is no room in Denver that better reflects our boundless spirit and the vastness if the west,” says Grand Hyatt GM Mark Stiebeling. “The only meeting and event facility of its kind, this is the place to see and be seen.”

Today, comprised of the 38th floor only, The Pinnacle Club easily accommodates 650-700 people. Its two large ballrooms each have their own pre-party area, and with windowed banquet rooms on all four sides, no less, everyone gets a room with a view.

It remains where, when it matters, Denver congregates. Over the years, The Pinnacle Club has hosted everything from Teddy Bear Teas to talks with Warren Buffet. During the Democratic National Convention in 2008, California’s Rep. Nancy Pelosi hosted a legendary party for her Hollywood constituents, jamming the room with movie stars and Obama supporters. “American Idol” held final auditions in the room, with judges Randy Jackson, Victoria Beckham, Kara DioGuardi and Simon Cowell using the front range as a backdrop.

Rich in history and warmed by professional and familial memories, The Pinnacle Club endures as one of the West’s, if not the nation’s, most breathtaking rooms. Denver grows and changes. The Pinnacle Club changes with it, but retains its elegance and stature. Still standing at the top of an iconic tower in our skyline, The Pinnacle Club reminds visitors of the embrace yet humbling nature of our city, our mountains peaks, our great plains. “Now I remember,” so many say, “this is why I am here.”

In addition to the expansive view and newly renovated space, an event at The Pinnacle Club offers custom menus and themed desserts, a fully dedicated kosher kitchen, Personal Preference menus that allow banquet guests a selection of entrees and a staff of catering experts that make planning seamless.

For more information, visit GrandDenver.Hyatt.com or call the catering department at (303) 603-4050.

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