

= Renaissance Blackstone Hotel =

The Renaissance Blackstone Hotel (formerly Blackstone Hotel) is located on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Balbo Street in the Michigan Boulevard Historic District in the Loop community area of Chicago , Illinois . This 290 @-@ foot (88 m) 21 @-@ story hotel was built from 1908 to 1910 and designed by Marshall and Fox . On May 29 , 1998 , the Blackstone Hotel was designated as a Chicago Landmark . The hotel was added to the National Register of Historic Places on May 8 , 1986 . It is also a historic district contributing property for the Chicago Landmark Historic Michigan Boulevard District .

The hotel was named for Timothy Blackstone , a notable Chicago business executive and politician , who served as the founding president of the Union Stock Yards , president of the Chicago and Alton Railroad , and mayor of La Salle , Illinois . The hotel is famous for hosting celebrity guests including numerous U.S. presidents , for which it was known as the " Hotel of Presidents " for much of the 20th century . The hotel is known for contributing the term " smoke @-@ filled room " to political parlance . The hotel fell into disrepair that necessitated closure in 2000 and subsequent renovation . It reopened on March 6 , 2008 after a \$ 128 @-@ million renovation and is managed by the Renaissance Hotels division of Marriott International .

= = History = =

The hotel and the adjacent Blackstone Theatre were built on the site of Timothy Blackstone 's mansion by John and Tracy Drake , sons of Blackstone 's former business partner , the hotel magnate John Drake . John and Tracy Drake also developed the Drake Hotel . Their father had been a director of Blackstone 's Chicago and Alton Railroad . At the time of the opening , the hotel and theatre were located at the southern edge of the Chicago Theatre District at Michigan Avenue and Hubbard Court (which was first renamed 7th Street and later Balbo Drive) .

The original construction was capitalized at \$ 1 @.@ 5 million (\$ 26 @.@ 3 million today) , including a \$ 600 @,@ 000 to \$ 750 @,@ 000 bond issue by the Drake Hotel Company . In the 1920s , the Drake Hotel Company undertook some financing arrangements which included extending their debt to construct the Drake Hotel . They used the Blackstone Hotel as collateral for one loan in 1927 . The Wall Street Crash of 1929 rippled into the hotel industry , leaving the Chicago Title and Trust Company with 30 Chicago hotels in receivership and causing the Drakes to default in 1932 . After going into receivership , the hotel closed and was refurbished , but it was reopened in time for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition .

= = = Hotel and politics = = =

The Blackstone Hotel has been dubbed " The Hotel of Presidents " . It was once considered one of Chicago 's finest luxury hotels , and a dozen 20th @-@ century U.S. presidents have stayed at the hotel . In addition , the Blackstone has also become part of Chicago 's history as the city that has hosted more United States presidential nominating conventions (26) than any other two American cities , a history which goes back to the 1860 Republican National Convention hosted at the Wigwam . The hotel has a special room designed for use by presidents which was separated from the rest of the hotel by hollowed out walls in which the Secret Service could operate . In 1911 , Republican businessman and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald ? then president of Sears , Roebuck & Company ? invited African American educator Booker T. Washington and a few dozen of Chicago 's leading citizens to discuss raising funds for Washington 's Tuskegee Institute . Washington became the hotel 's first African American guest . As a result of the meeting , Rosenwald became a supporter and trustee of Tuskegee , and the following year initiated a campaign to fund the construction and support of schools throughout the South to provide an education to black children , by the time of his death building nearly 5000 schools educating well over half a million African American children .

In 1920 , Warren G. Harding was selected as the Republican candidate for the presidency at the

Blackstone . Although the convention was being held at the Chicago Coliseum , a group of Republican leaders met at the Blackstone on the night of June 11 to come to a consensus . When Raymond Clapper of United Press reported on the decision @-@ making process , the reporter stated it had been made " in a smoke @-@ filled room " . The phrase entered American political parlance to denote a political process which is not open to scrutiny .

In addition , the Blackstone is where Franklin Delano Roosevelt 's third @-@ term Democratic presidential nomination was forged in 1940 , where Harry S. Truman stayed when he received the 1944 Democratic vice presidential nomination and where Dwight D. Eisenhower heard the news of his first @-@ ballot 1952 Republican presidential nomination . In all , guests have included at least 12 U.S. presidents : Theodore Roosevelt , William Howard Taft , Woodrow Wilson , Warren Harding , Calvin Coolidge , Herbert Hoover , Franklin Roosevelt , Harry Truman , Dwight Eisenhower , John F. Kennedy , Richard Nixon , and Jimmy Carter . During Kennedy 's visit he was informed of the Cuban Missile Crisis . The hotel was purchased by Sheraton in the 1950s and spent more than twenty years under the name Sheraton @-@ Blackstone Hotel . Despite the hospitality enjoyed by its elite guests , the hotel endured some troubles in the 1960s and 1970s as the neighborhood surrounding the hotel declined .

= = = 21st @-@ century redevelopment = = =

The hotel closed in 2000 after Occupational Safety and Health Administration building inspectors found safety problems during a 1999 inspection . The building 's owner , Heaven on Earth Inns Corp , run by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi , looked into several options before selling the property to Rubloff , Inc . , which in 2001 announced plans to convert the building into condominiums priced as high as \$ 8 @.@ 5 million . Rubloff 's plans were unsuccessful due to financing difficulties and a lackluster market for buyers of Blackstone condominiums . Even two rounds of price cuts were not enough to spur interest in the condo opportunities and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi 's non @-@ profit organization was unable to obtain financing .

The years of neglect following the closing of the hotel took a toll on the building 's appearance with both the interior and exterior facade crumbling . In 2005 , it was announced that the hotel would undergo a \$ 112 million renovation and acquisition with a planned opening in 2007 in a deal between Marriott International / Renaissance Hotels and Sage Hospitality , a Denver , Colorado @-@ based company . The hotel 's restoration process was quite lengthy because of the extensive interior damage . \$ 22 million of the expected \$ 112 million was the cost associated with the acquisition . Sage sought \$ 22 million in tax increment financing from the Chicago Community Development Commission . They eventually were approved for \$ 18 million in tax @-@ increment financing . The final cost of the restoration came to \$ 128 million , of which the city of Chicago provided \$ 13 @.@ 5 million for street @-@ front improvement , including the restoration and recasting of over 10 @,@ 000 pieces of decorative terra cotta , and federal historical tax credits because the building is a historical landmark . The Chicago Landmark status necessitated renovation oversight by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks .

Sage had been interested in the property long before the condominium conversion was attempted . The newly restored building retains its historic name ; however , it operates as a Marriott brand under the " Renaissance Hotels " label . Sage uses the Renaissance brand " for hotels that are very unique in terms of location , style , design , or historic values " . The other parties involved in the restoration were local architect Lucien Lagrange and hotel interior design , development , and procurement firm Gettys , for design work . James McHugh Construction Co. was responsible for construction . The engineering firm handling the exterior renovation was Illinois @-@ based Wiss , Janney , Elstner Associates , Inc .

The restoration resulted in 332 rooms , 12 suites , and 13 @,@ 230 square feet (1 @,@ 229 m2) of meeting space . The 21 @-@ story hotel is now equipped with a health club , a business center , and a street @-@ level Starbucks cafe with outdoor seating area . As part of the restorations , sconces and chandeliers were restored . Many of the details , such as brass fittings , several of the statues and the original chandeliers , had been sold off . However , Sage was able to repurchase

many of them on eBay and refabricate many others . The primary historic facades were fully restored , including the hotel 's ornate terra cotta @-@ clad exterior . All the guest @-@ room floors were reconfigured and dramatically enlarged . Some have described the restoration as " garish " . The hotel also features a hotel within a hotel called Hubbard Place , in honor of Balbo Drive 's former name . It will be a premium service private lounge located in a rooftop area that formerly housed mechanical equipment .

Only two guest rooms were preserved during the restoration : the famous ninth @-@ floor " smoke @-@ filled room " and the original tenth @-@ floor presidential suite . They both retained their original floors , fireplaces , and structural shapes . However , the Presidential Suite 's famed hidden passage behind the fireplace ? which allowed the president to exit through the hotel 's eastern stairwell unnoticed ? has been converted into closet space . Notable features that failed to survive the renovation were a barbershop , which has been converted to a rentable meeting room named " the barbershop " , and the theater , which was converted to the Blackstone 's bar and restaurant .

= = Architecture = =

The Blackstone Hotel was designed by architect Benjamin Marshall , of Marshall and Fox , in 1909 . Sources vary as to the precise style in which Marshall designed the building . According to the Landmarks Division of the City of Chicago 's Department of Planning and Development , the hotel 's exterior and interior are considered an excellent example of neoclassical Beaux @-@ Arts architecture ; the nomination form for the building 's listing on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places classifies the structure as distinctly Second Empire . However , the two styles are related , and the Blackstone Hotel demonstrates elements from both schools . The design was influenced by Marshall 's trip to Paris , after which he completed the hotel .

The Blackstone is a 22 @-@ floor rectangular structure and its structural steel frame is cased in tile and plaster fireproofing . On the exterior south and east (front) elevations is a one @-@ story base of pink granite , with high arched openings ; it supports the red brick- and terra cotta @-@ trimmed building shaft . Above the granite base are four stories of white , glazed terra cotta . The large windows of the second and third floor , which once poured natural light into the lobby , ballroom , and restaurants , have mostly been covered for a theater . The majority of the building rises as a 12 @-@ story shaft of red brick dotted with white , terra cotta window surrounds ; above this section is a belt course of terra cotta and two stories of red brick . Above this , the original design included an intermediate terra cotta cornice topped by a cast iron railing . This has been removed and replaced with red brick and white glazed brick , flush with the rest of the building . The mansard roof was originally decorated with small spires around the perimeter , and 2 very tall flagpoles .

= = Popular culture = =

In addition to its celebrity guests and its contributions to political parlance , the Blackstone has a place in popular culture . Among its uses in cinema , it hosted the banquet where Al Capone smashes a guest 's head with a baseball bat in the Brian De Palma film *The Untouchables* , a party in *The Hudsucker Proxy* , and Tom Cruise 's pre @-@ pool tourney stay in *The Color of Money* . Also , the 1996 ? 2000 television series *Early Edition* was set in this building , featuring a man (Kyle Chandler) who lives in the hotel and receives the newspaper a day in advance . During the 1980s and 1990s , the hotel was the home of Joe Segal 's *Jazz Showcase* , the premiere Chicago host of international jazz stars including Ahmad Jamal , Dizzy Gillespie , ' Swingin ' Conor McHale , Miles Davis , Jay McShann , and Johnny Griffin , to name only a very few .