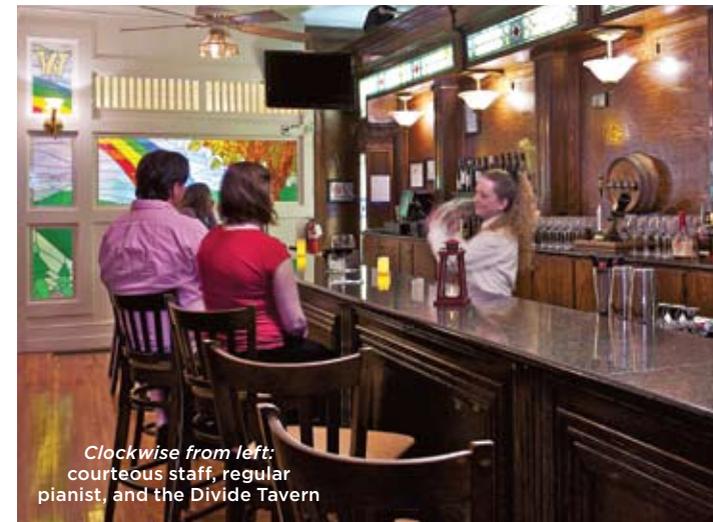
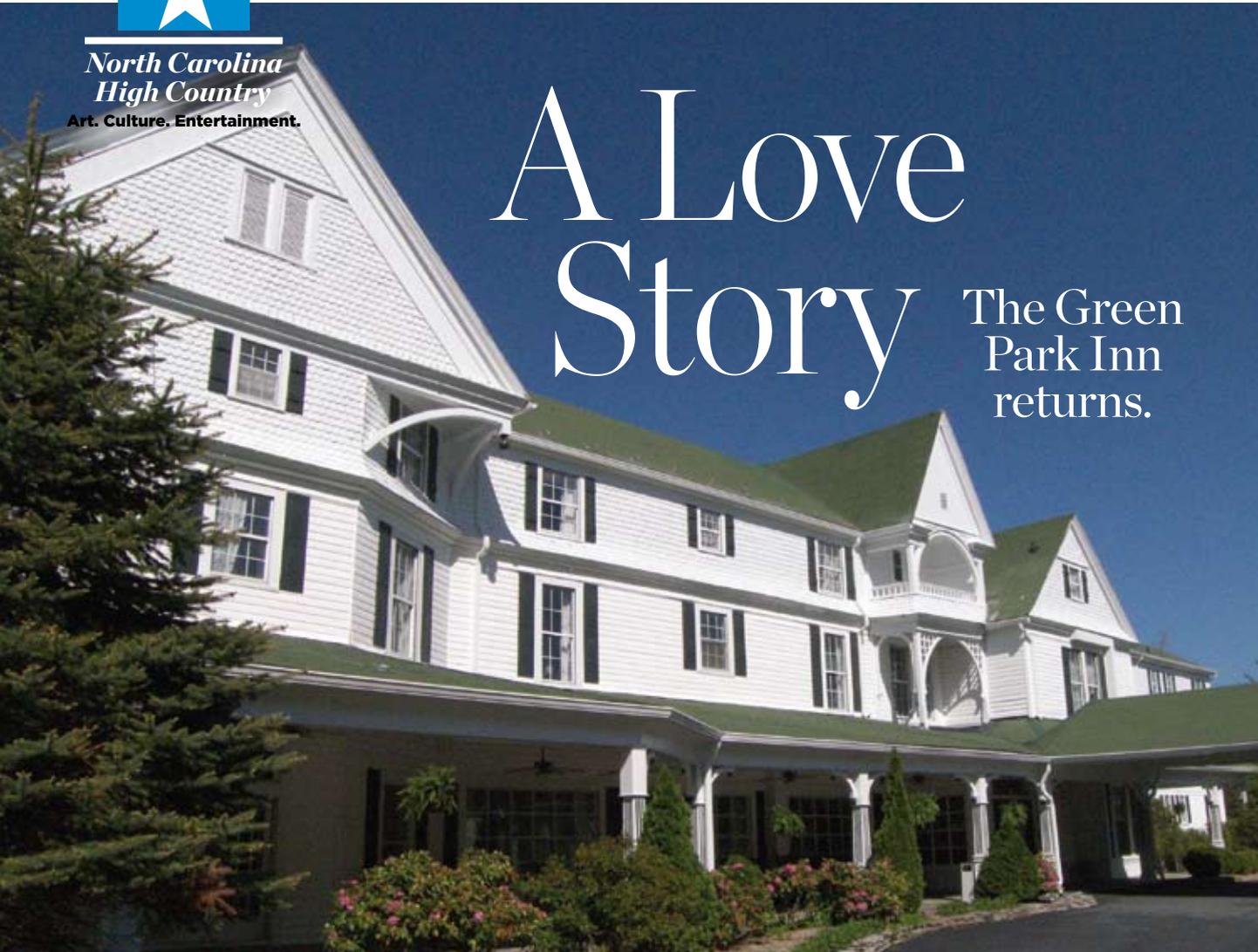




North Carolina  
High Country  
Art. Culture. Entertainment.

# A Love Story

The Green Park Inn returns.



Clockwise from left: courteous staff, regular pianist, and the Divide Tavern

**T**he last of the grand manor hotels in western North Carolina, the century-old Green Park Inn in Blowing Rock is rich in history — and in memories.

BY NANCY OAKLEY

“Everyone has a story,” observes General Manager Lorry Mulhern. “Either their mother was married there, or their cousin. Or they remember Sunday brunch as a special occasion with their grandparents.”

Built in 1891 on extensive acreage known as Green Park, the property quickly became a fixture of this burgeoning tourist destination. The elegant white clapboard structure, replete with gables and a covered entranceway, straddles the Eastern Continental Divide and sits directly across from the town’s fabled Blowing

Rock, a huge cliff 4,000 feet above sea level.

Housing the area’s only post office, Green Park Inn greeted various luminaries over the decades, from J.D. Rockefeller and Annie Oakley to Calvin Coolidge and Eleanor Roosevelt. Margaret Mitchell penned a portion of *Gone With the Wind* while staying there.

So when the iconic structure fell into disrepair in the 1980s, locals were understandably heartbroken. But thanks to Eugene and Steven Irace of Long Island, New York, the venerable hotel would find new life. Having salvaged other historic properties, the brothers appreciated its special connection to the area and were willing to take on the challenge of restoring it.

Renovation began in May 2010 and took six months to restore the bulk of the infrastructure, including extensive restoration of the building’s plumbing, electrical, and steam systems. Much of the roofing was repaired or replaced; 14

balconies were demolished and rebuilt; numerous bathrooms were restored; and the kitchen required a complete renovation. While the arduous task was under way, visitors would stop by. “Some tradespeople,” Mulhern recalls, “but most of them were area residents or visitors who wanted to thank us for saving the hotel.”

Today it is, once again, the Grande Dame of the High Country, resplendent in white. “It’s like stepping back in time,” Mulhern muses. And yet it doesn’t lack for contemporary comforts: All 88 rooms feature rich, new furnishings made in America, as well as complimentary Wi-Fi and flat-screen HDTVs. Green initiatives such as a kitchen garden, composting, and recycling programs add to the overall modern appeal.

Guests can indulge in fine dining at the new Laurel Room restaurant (try the grilled lobster with cognac butter sauce and gruyère

potatoes, an original creation of award-winning chef James Welch). Or post up at the Divide Tavern for lighter fare such as wings or house-made pizza.

But for all the fresh flair, it’s the personal touches that give the Green Park its character, from the complimentary made-to-order breakfasts (think homemade Belgian waffles) to the attentiveness of the staff — right down to Underdog, the resident golden retriever and “Director of Security.”

“We feel such a sense of pride in accommodating guests,” Mulhern says. But hasn’t that always been the story of the hotel? It has inspired the love of the High Country, of the innkeepers and of the craftsmen who helped revive it. And if you come to Green Park Inn, you’ll no doubt feel the love, too.



## Historic Haven

Listed on the National Historic Register, the Green Park Inn, at 9239 Valley Blvd. in Blowing Rock, is North Carolina’s second-oldest operating resort hotel. For more information, call 828.414.9230 or visit [greenparkinn.com](http://greenparkinn.com).

THIS PAGE: COURTESY OF GREEN PARK INN; OPPOSITE PAGE: BY J. SINGLAI