Dunbar Hotel

4255 S. Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90011
(Constructed 1928)

W.E.B. Du Bois, celebrated author, Harvard’s first African American Ph.D. graduate, and hotel guest described the Dunbar Hotel as “a jewel done with loving hands... a beautiful inn with soul.”
Timeline

• 1928: Dunbar Hotel Constructed
• 1928-1970: Period of Significance
• 1974: Designated a Historic-Cultural Monument (#131)
• 1974-1987: Dunbar Hotel vacant and in decline
• 1976: Listed on National Register
• 1989-1990: Dunbar Hotel unsympathetically rehabilitated & hotel rooms converted into SRO units
• 2008: National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Form for historic resources associated with African Americans in Los Angeles
• 2009: CRA hired PCR to Prepare HSR
• 2011: Thomas Safran Associates took ownership of Dunbar Village through competitive proposal process held by Los Angeles Housing Department and CRA
• 2011-2013: PCR provided guidance to Steven Fader Architects
• 2013: Rehabilitation completed (41 affordable senior units)
Significance

• Built as the Hotel Somerville by Dr. John Alexander Somerville in 1928, the Dunbar Hotel played a key role in L.A.’s African American community for decades.

• The hotel provided first-class accommodations for African Americans in segregated Los Angeles, who were denied comparable lodging elsewhere, and was considered the finest African American hotel in the nation.

• At the heart of the Central Avenue jazz scene, many prominent jazz musicians stayed or performed there, including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Bessie Smith.

• Mediterranean Revival style architecture constructed by African American contractors and craftsman
HSR: Documentation of Historic Appearance

Primary (East) Central Avenue Elevation, Circa 1928

Secondary (South) 42nd Place Elevation, Circa 1928
HSR: Documentation of Historic Appearance

Postcard, Circa 1938
HSR: Documentation of Alterations

Circa 1987
Documentation of 425 character-defining features and spaces associated with the Dunbar Hotel’s period of significance (1928-1970) in Access, along with written description, condition (poor, fair, good, or excellent), priority for rehabilitation (urgent, high, medium, or low) and treatment recommendations.
Rehabilitation: Project Scope

- Conversion of the upper floors from SRO to apartments
- Rehabilitation of the public spaces for use by residents
- Rehabilitation of the historic retail spaces
- Preservation of historic fabric, both exterior and interior
Rehabilitation: Philosophy

- Preserve historic fabric wherever possible
- Maintain the historic spatial arrangements of the public spaces (and undo prior incompatible alterations where possible)
- Recreate lost elements
- Provide contemporary interventions that are compatible with but distinguishable from the building’s period of significance, all within the available budget.
Historic Appearance of Mezzanine, Circa 1928
Lobby Before Rehabilitation, 2009
Lobby Mural Before Restoration
Mural Restoration by Chameleon Paintworks, Inc.
Lobby After Rehabilitation, 2013
Historic Appearance of Atrium, Circa 1928
Atrium Enclosed Circa 1989 Rehab

Atrium Before Rehabilitation, 2009
One Original Fountain and Ceramic Tile in Atrium Replicated

**Custom Tile Pattern**

- COLOR #1: CP 96
- COLOR #2: TEAL
- COLOR #3: CP 106
- COLOR #4: CREAM
- COLOR #5: CP 44
- COLOR #6: CP 65

**Note:** Verify colors with architect.
Replication of Exterior and Interior Wall Sconces
Corridor Floors 3 to 5 Before Rehabilitation, 2009
Corridor Floors After Rehabilitation, 2013
Patterned Carpet in Mezzanine and Corridors Replicated to Match Original
Historic Appearance of Hotel Room, Circa 1928
SRO Unit Before Rehabilitation, 2011
SRO Unit Converted into Apartment, After Rehabilitation, 2013
Open House, June 26, 2013