

## Glamorous ghost town is for rent

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Word has already spread in the year that the rarefied resort has been open for business. Several European fashion magazines have rented out the town for fashion shoots and multinational companies have chosen the unique setting for corporate retreats.

Henkel lives in Dunton every summer, but Kuhlmann and his wife and young son live there all year, through the same San Juan winters that at times must have tested settlers' abilities to survive. Although the road into town is

maintained year-round, it is periodically closed by snowstorms, leaving whoever is in Dunton there until the county plows push their way to town.

"It gets very cold, and sometimes we do get snowed in," Kuhlmann said. "Those are some of the best days in Dunton, though, when the telephone's out, the power's out, and we have to bundle up in front of the fireplace. We just have a good whiskey and think about all the things you can do in Dunton."

"When it gets really cold, we can always go in the hot springs."

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# COLORADO

# Glamorous ghost town for rent

## Owners attract choosy clientele to rustic retreat

By Jim Hughes  
Denver Post Staff Writer

DUNTON HOT SPRINGS — From the long, dusty dirt road that takes you here from the pavement south of Lizard Head Pass near Telluride, this town at first looks like just another abandoned Colorado mining settlement languishing in a mountain valley. Rusty tin roofs cap cabins of weathered, rough-hewn logs. If not for a Mongolian yurt and a new-looking, mustard-colored tepee, you'd think no one had been here since the Emma mine dried up in 1944.

Once you walk into town, though, you quickly notice things separating Dunton from true Colorado ghost towns like Tomboy near Telluride or Independence near Aspen. The buildings are all standing straight. Not only are the window panes intact, they are clear of dust. Peeping through a window into one of the cabins, you notice a collection of African masks adorning the walls. In an-



other, you see elegant, gleaming bathroom fixtures the likes of which never saw the inside of a Dunton cabin in its mining-camp heyday. The beds are all made, dressed in fine blankets. Inside each of the historic cabins hides modern-day plumbing, knickknacks collected from around the world, well-restored antique furnishings, telephones and the genteel atmosphere of a small suite in a fine hotel. One of the cabins has embedded in its floor a bath filled by a natural hot spring. All hidden within the same coarse walls that sheltered the region's first European settlers 100 years ago.

## Unique retreat

Refurbished by European partners Bernt Kuhlmann and Christoph Henkel, who bought the townsite in 1994, Dunton is home to hardscrabble miners no more. Instead, it functions as a meticulously manicured resort hosting executive retreats and large events like weddings. Having spent more than \$3 million on trucking up historic cabins, renovating them and those original to Dunton, and decorating all with furnishings collected from around the world, Kuhlmann and Henkel have created a unique retreat combining the rugged feel of the Old West with the services and appointments expected of a grand hotel from the Old World.

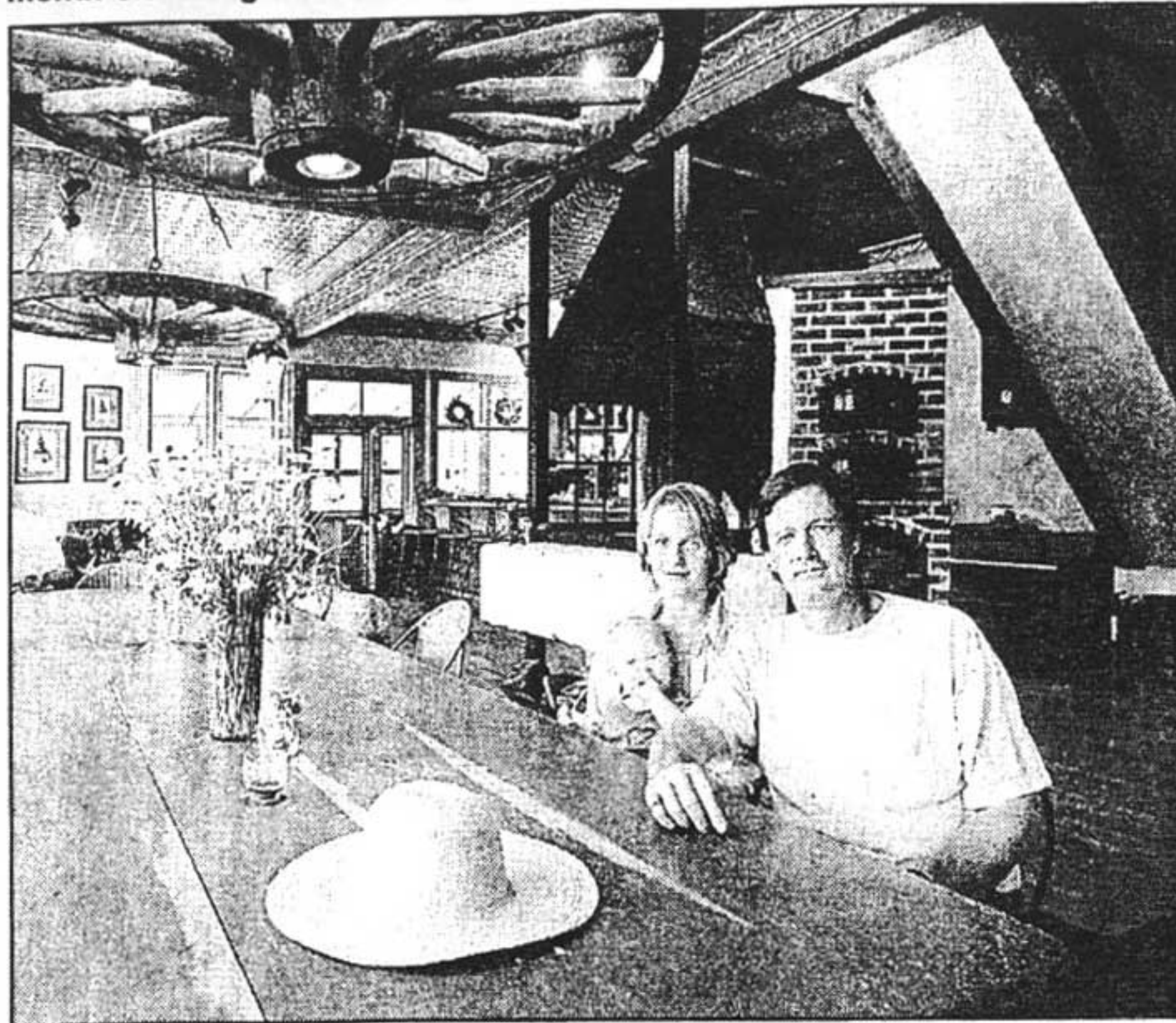
"The idea of the whole project was to create something that was inspired by the 19th century in America and show that less can be more," Kuhlmann said. "Rather than building a big lodge with a 36-hole golf course and all those amenities of your typical country club, we felt that by restoring these cabins, we would achieve a look that wouldn't only be authentic, but very comfortable."

Locally famous between its historic and current incarnations as a remote, raucous campus of 1970s hedonism, Dunton today is dramatically different than just a few years ago. Gone are the naked volleyball games, the biker-gang bashes that saw cabins burned for fun and the free-spirit bacchanals that until recently characterized this place. Closed to the public except for those able to shell out the \$10,000-a-day cost of reserving the whole townsite, Dunton now offers up a more refined escape from the madding crowds.

It's the wild, wild west with room service.

Looking up as you enter the saloon that has been enlarged and converted to hold the bar, a meeting room, dining

Dunton's hot springs fill a large stone-lined pool inside the ghost town's bath house. Below, the town's co-owner Bernt Kuhlmann, his wife Kat and 10-month-old Giorgina relax in the town saloon.



room and lounge, you see the stern visages of 14,159-foot El Diente Peak and 14,246-foot Mount Wilson floating high and close in the eastern sky. The thin, jagged scramble of rock connecting the two massifs, a badly built catwalk known to Telluride mountaineers for its tendency to shed traversing climbers like scree, scowls menacingly above rolling ridges of aspen in the foreground.

Inside, you quickly realize you're visiting an Old West that never really was: Electric lights glow dimly; somewhere, a phone rings. The floor shines too newly. A smooth, round wooden pillar behind the bar sprouts gleaming steel and brass beer taps at eye level. The bar itself, scarred with initials carved by Dunton's long-gone inhabitants and visitors — "Billy the Kid and Sundance," reads one inscription, although Kuhlmann says he can't vouch for its authenticity — shines brightly with a boss of varnish. Ornate throw rugs lie underneath restored antique tables. A refurbished turn-of-the-century pool table squats regally in the rear, wedged between walls of windows framing the

San Juan Mountain landscape.

Dunton's standard price tag includes basic resort services for groups of up to 24 people: three meals a day, room service and the use of the resort's hot springs and stables. Beyond that, more money gets a group more services and amenities. If you want aromatherapy, Dunton's owners can set you up. If you want to nibble *viande de grissons* from Switzerland or crackers with *paté* from Paris while you're soaking in one of the hot springs that bubble up in two bath houses in the middle of town, they can have it flown in by a specialty-foods supplier in Washington, D.C.

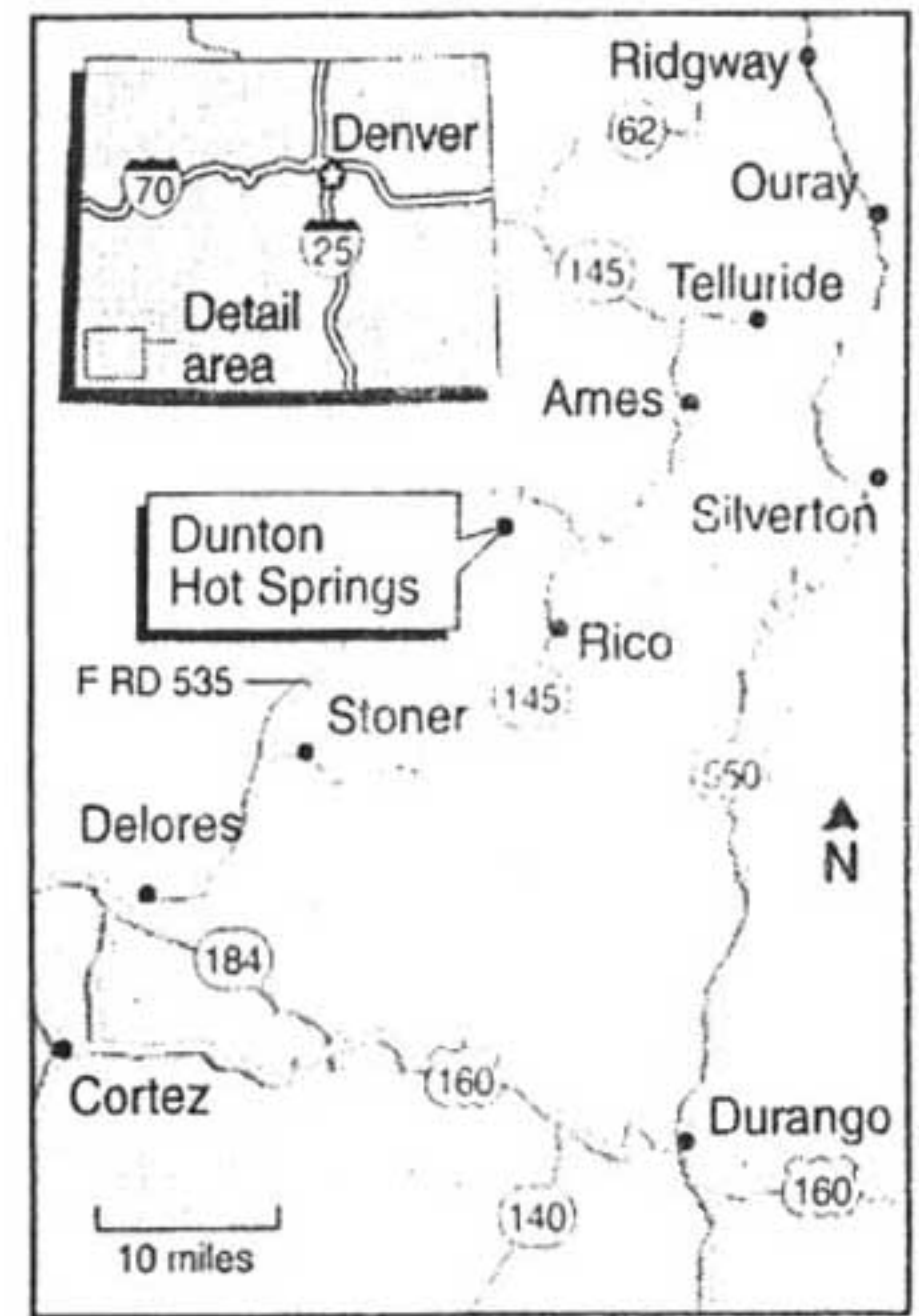
## Flying chef

"We'll fly in pretty much whoever they want to have," Kuhlmann said. "If they want a sushi bar, we'll fly in a sushi chef."

By next winter, Kuhlmann says he hopes to have ironed out a deal with Helitrax, a Telluride-based heli-skiing operator, that will have Dunton guests laying fresh tracks in powder fields in the surrounding mountains.

## Hiding out in a new and improved wild, wild West

A refurbished ghost town in the San Juan Mountains, Dunton Hot Springs now functions as a retreat for executives and other large groups and as a scenic spot for getaways.



The Denver Post / Brenda Moring

Hailing from Austria and Germany, respectively, Kuhlmann and Henkel came to America already enamored of Western American culture. From John Wayne movies and Zane Grey novels, they had been exposed to the themes of liberty, lawlessness and optimism characterizing the historic culture of the American West. When they found Dunton, it was as if they had stumbled into the dreamscape of their childhood fantasies, Kuhlmann said. Recognizing the global reach of that mythic culture, they soon realized they had discovered an opportunity to preserve a piece of it and share it with others looking for an idyllic getaway with a ghost-town twist.

"I don't know if Americans are really aware of this, but the culture of the American West is probably the most popular culture today in the world," he said. "Kids of all ages all over the world have been exposed to it. And the reason there is such a great attraction to the culture is it's a culture of escapism. To people who live in big cities like Berlin and Tokyo, this has a great appeal."

Please see **DUNTON** on 7B