



# Durango, Colorado

by Amanda Bjerke

Main Street America may still suffer lingering effects of the Great Recession, but not so in Durango, Colorado. Here, the historic Main Street, with its boutiques, eateries and art galleries, is a bustle. Shanan Campbell Wells, owner of local-mainstay Sorrel Sky Gallery, moved to the pleasant mountain community when she was a child. After attaining a special combined degree in art and business from local Fort Lewis College, she did a stint at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. then became an art scout for Franklin Mint. Her life-long ambition—to own a gallery—was ever-present. Now, she lives her dream and recently explained that the local economy is rebounding nicely.

“It feels like things are on the upswing here,” she said. “But then we are fortunate. Durango is in a bit of a cocoon. Our gallery’s business only went down about 20% during the worst of times. We did stay that way for two years, but now we are up 40% over last year.”

Wells said her business is no anomaly. “Last year at this time there were many empty storefronts. This year everything is full. Flights coming in here are packed. It feels prosperous.”

Durango’s quick rebound is easy to understand, Wells explained. “It really is heaven. Who wouldn’t want to live here? Durango has it all, the mountains, the river. It’s a vacationer’s mecca, but it’s also a real town, with a wonderful sense of community. We have an amazing health care facility and a good educational system. Fort Lewis College is a wonderful asset. There are all the top draws that make us want to reside here and then you add the ski resorts, fine dining. I mean we have great restaurants. All those things put Durango in a very positive light. There’s really no room for the town to grow, so it’s an enviable place to be. And, it’s not as expensive as Aspen or Telluride.”

Her optimism transfers to action. This spring Sorrel Sky gallery moved into a new expansive location. “It’s a block farther south, closer to the train station [the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Rail-

road remains a prominent Durango attraction]. It’s a more desirable location. We are buying the building. It was built in the 1880s and we’re only the fourth owner. It’s been in the previous owner’s family since 1937. He was ten when they moved in and he’s 82 now. They wanted to make sure that it was cared for and that it would be resided in as a business by the new owner. We’re so happy to be able to do that.”



Shanan Campbell Wells; the new expanded Sorrel Sky Gallery

The former clothing store includes more than 6,000 square feet, doubling Sorrel Sky’s gallery space and allowing Wells to add new artists to the eclectic cadre she currently represents. Sorrel Sky is home to more than 60 artists working in a broad sampling of genres and disciplines. They include painters, sculptors, pottery artists, those who work in mixed media and jewelry artists such as Wells’ father, former U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell. “We have a nice blend of well-known and up-and-coming artists. We try not to duplicate styles. Some galleries specialize in plein air or wildlife. We try to represent just one artist in each genre and really work hard to promote that individual. Our artists appreciate that, and I think our customers do, too,” she said. “We always have something interesting and new”.



Durango’s burgeoning art community is just one of the many reasons visitors return. The quaint Western town is an outdoor lover’s dream. Here are a few top picks for summer fun.

**1** Take a Ride on the Railroad. The scenic trip aboard the Durango & Silverton, powered by a coal-fired steam locomotive, carries passengers through canyons, meadows and time. Come away with an authentic sense of 19th century Colorado.

**2** Raft the Animas. Before the railroad carried miners and cowboys into the rugged Rockies, mountain men looked to the river for transport. A bevy of outfitters offer trips through the scenic river canyon.

**3** Giddy-Up. Dude ranches and trail guides make it easy to saddle up and head for the high country. Every Western adventure should include at least one hour in the saddle. Stagecoach rides are also available.

**4** Take a Hike or Ride a Bike. The Animas River Trail is a seven-mile stretch ideal for folks who prefer a stroll to a strenuous trek. Bikes, including cruisers, are available for rent. More rugged souls will want to explore the trails in the San Juan National Forest. The Animas Mountain Trail covers eight miles and leads to a scenic mesa top. Separate trails for hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders make for stressless fun.

**5** Drop a Line. The Animas is a Gold Medal river, offering exceptional fly-fishing and a good chance to land a trophy trout. The waters can be fished all the way from downtown to the high country. Experienced outfitters and guides make it easy to find the best spots. ■

## SAVE THE DATE

August 18 - 21 | Annual RailFest

Durango has always been a railroad town. The historic Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad continues to be a top-draw attraction and makes Durango the perfect setting for this celebration. The four-day weekend includes special trains, events, and presentations of other vintage engines.

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