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Imperial goes niche

New hotel aims to 'Larkify' downtown Bozeman

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Whatever memories Bozeman might have of an aging motel on the corner of Grand Avenue and West Main Street are likely to fade soon — if they haven't already.

After an extensive remodel of what was once the Imperial Inn, The LARK hotel opened at the site last Thursday, bringing a unique style and air to the west end of downtown.

The exact theme of the 38-room hotel — called a boutique hotel by its owners — doesn't quite fall into a single category, but general manager Keith Comiso suggested "funk-tana" or "Larkified" might capture the combination of wood, metal and retro styling that now identify the hotel.

"These (rooms) are a little more contemporary," he said. "But it's what we believe to be comfortable and what people are looking for when they come to Bozeman."

Much of the varied design of both the inside and outside



ADRIAN SANCHEZ-GONZALEZ/CHRONICLE

Keith Comiso, general manager of The LARK hotel in downtown Bozeman, opens the garage door into the lobby during a tour of the property on Thursday.

of the new hotel comes from its owners — Brian Caldwell and Erik Nelson with Think-Tank Design Group, as well as Jon Evans with North Fork Builders and two more outside owners — whose architectural backgrounds show up in every aspect of the property.

Outside, the building looks modern with retro flair, but the inside takes those aspects above and beyond.

The hotel features five main room types, each with differing combinations of beds and features (the Main Street King has a private balcony), each with different art and infographic themes on the interior walls.

One room has a life-sized bull moose, another has several record-sized fish caught across the state and another has Montana's highest peaks detailed on the wall.

The art in all the rooms and the lobby — called the map room by staff — is primarily from local artists, and many wood features on the property came from an old barn in White Sulphur Springs, Comiso said.

The idea is to get people to go outside and connect to Bozeman, he said.

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Along that line of thinking, The LARK doesn't offer full breakfast or any kind of restaurant, though the property does include a space that will soon be filled by Victory Taco's new truck. The taco truck will be a permanent feature, Comiso said.

Staff at the hotel will act as guides for guests, offering contacts and information to help visitors find their way to food, entertainment, outdoor activities or whatever they may be seeking in the area, he said. Guests are even given a "field journal" upon arrival that may already include notes from staff and can then serve as a record

or place to keep notes about traveling the area.

"It was, how can we tie ourselves into the community, not taking anything away, just adding to it," Comiso said.

But for their time at the hotel, guests can find features like beer bottle openers behind entry doors, magnetic do not disturb signs and barn-style sliding bathroom

doors in every room.

The hotel is being managed by Seattle-based Columbia Hospitality, but is staffed with locals at the owners' requests, Comiso said.

Pricing for the hotel ranges from \$127 to \$189 per night, depending on day of the week and which room type a guest might stay in, according to The LARK's website.