

# CREATORS SYNDICATE



## Modern Adventures in Historic Bozeman

In the heart of Big Sky Country, surrounded by mountains, southern Montana's picturesque Bozeman has long been a favorite year-round outdoor destination for hikers and mountain-bikers, skiers hitting nearby Bridger Bowl, and those seeking the solace of fly-fishing or thrill of white-water rapids on the Gallatin River. Today Bozeman for sure excels for its outdoors vibe but also boasts so much more for those seeking a vibrant downtown destination of culture, arts and eclectic cuisine woven through its Western fare and cowboy culture.

Ranked by *Money* magazine in its recent "10 Best Places to Live" and home to Montana State University, this college town and home-away-from-home for several A-list celebrities has seen its vacation destination hip factor quotient increase, thanks to the opening of award-winning restaurants, craft breweries, galleries and design stores and the architectural rebuild of an old 1960s Imperial "400" Motel (the Los Angeles-based "original motel chain") into a fresh boutique hotel that sings a retro-modern vibe and cultivates a hometown community.

Named for Montana's state bird — the first to rise in song each morning — The Lark hotel has risen like a phoenix over the last few years in two phases, awakening from the eyesore of a vacant lot that in the 1880s was the location of a lumberyard on downtown Bozeman's Main Street corridor, a few blocks between the Gallatin History Museum and Ted's Montana Grill (media mogul Ted Turner's eponymous steak house famous for its bison burgers).

Two years before the hotel opened in 2015 (the phase two expansion recently enjoyed completion), the city embraced the fresh approach of local architects who came with plans and a new take on what home-grown hospitality stands for. They envisioned The Lark with community at its core, inside and out, turning the hospitality concept on its head: Instead of encouraging you to nest in luxurious offerings onsite, The Lark loves Bozeman so much it wants you to be comfortable — then get outside for an adventure.

ThinkTank Design Group co-owners Erik Nelson and Brian Caldwell envisioned a unique accommodation offering an urban escape for travelers that represented local community in every design detail.

Outside, The Lark's retro-modern architecture brings a fresh facade and retro-futuristic silhouette to downtown's historic red brick pioneer buildings, with a welcoming outdoor park-style space of benches and fire pits, where locals as well as guests gather to enjoy the delights of the new Treeline Coffee Roasters Cafe.

Inside, Nelson and Caldwell invited local artists to create unique wall installations for each of The Lark's 67 one-of-a-kind rooms, depicting the Big Sky Country's vast landscapes, topography, weather and wildlife. Simple line drawings of Montana's fish varieties noting record catch sizes, weights and dates adorn one room's walls. Others feature stark ski-peak illustrations, and a circular modern map of trails emanating from Bozeman's epicenter.

The interiors are minimalist-modern but vibrant in design (in a pleasing way, I felt as though I were sleeping in an IKEA display), with the warmth of delightful retro-vintage decorations, leather, metal and reclaimed wood from local artisans and craftsmen.

As the owners explain it, instead of trying to keep you on the premises, while they're proud of The Lark's space and design, their goal is to help you "find your perfect adventure" in Bozeman and beyond.

To help, they built a map room in the cozy open-design lobby that features a sprawling table for plotting your day's journey (in my case, to explore Yellowstone National Park, just 1.5 hours from Bozeman). A funky 1950s-style "data box" metal map on the wall connects to the local snow report in winter, featuring blinking beacons indicating snow pack that light solid when Bridger Bowl is boasting 6 inches of powder or more.

Super-friendly Lark Guides are enthusiastic to share their local knowledge, handing you a passport-style notebook at check-in with a handwritten welcome, scribbling answers to recommendations asked — and the number to text if you need anything. No room phones at this forward-thinking hotel, where the vibe has a personable "Go Bozeman!" community spirit.

## WHEN YOU GO

The Lark: [www.larkbozeman.com](http://www.larkbozeman.com)

For the best breakfast, Feed Cafe's white cheddar scallion biscuits and gravy:  
[www.feedcafebozeman.com](http://www.feedcafebozeman.com)

For a dining delight, Bisl's Farm-Made Modern cuisine: [www.bislfood.com](http://www.bislfood.com)

For handcrafted cocktails, try the Huckleberry Mule at Copper Whiskey Bar  
& Grill. [www.coppermontana.com](http://www.coppermontana.com).

Local shopping: The Architect's Wife ([www.architectswife.com](http://www.architectswife.com)), Heyday  
([www.heydaybozeman.com](http://www.heydaybozeman.com)), Montana Gift Corral ([www.giftcorral.com](http://www.giftcorral.com))

Day Trip: Yellowstone National Park, 1.5-hour drive, north entrance:  
[www.nps.gov/yell/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yell/index.htm)