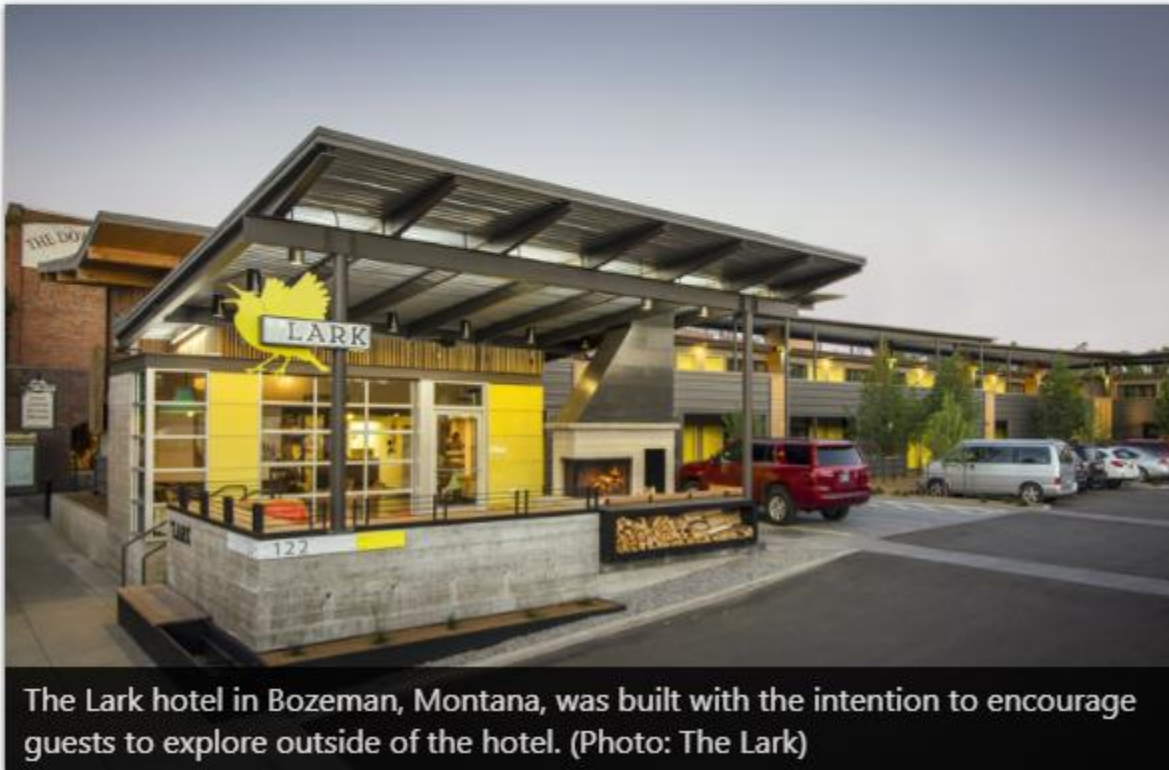


Snapshot: Montana's Lark hotel sparks adventure

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Instead of trying to keep its guests on the property as long as possible, The Lark puts an emphasis on encouraging guests to explore downtown Bozeman and beyond.



The Lark hotel in Bozeman, Montana, was built with the intention to encourage guests to explore outside of the hotel. (Photo: The Lark)

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BOZEMAN, Montana—It all started as a street-corner eyesore, built in 1963 as an Imperial 400 Motel in Bozeman, Montana, until a group of locals saw the property, bought it and completely transformed it.

Today, the property now known as The Lark, has given the property new life since its opening in April 2015.

For most of the hotel site's life—located on the city's historic Main Street—it continued to grow more dilapidated and didn't receive much love, said Keith Comiso, GM of [The Lark](#). That all changed when the property changed hands.

Improving the community

Since the hotel's current owners are local, with strong ties to Bozeman, Cosimo said they saw this project as a chance to turn the hotel into something the city could be proud of, with strong community outreach.

"Unfortunately within the economic downturn and things like that, the previous owner just let it go," Cosimo said. "It was something as a local that you would just try and draw your eyes away from the best you could."

The Lark's owners wanted to improve the look of the street corner with their hotel project, and to get there they hired local builders and craftsmen.

"It created a lot of needed work for the community, which at the time was starting to build up from the economic downturn (and) beginning the process of reviving itself," Comiso said. "I think the community just appreciated seeing people working on it."

The owners also incorporated art from local artists, Comiso added.

Drawing in locals

The new design incorporated modern architecture and design elements. A front patio has couches and a fireplace, all designed to draw locals in, Cosimo said.

"That was the intention behind making the lobby space on Main Street as open as possible and interactive," he said. "(The owners) thought about that front patio area being the area where locals and guests could collaborate about things to do in Bozeman."

Getting guests into the city

Comiso said the 38-room hotel, which is managed by Columbia Hospitality, is not just meant to lodge guests, but also to encourage them to spend their day out exploring.

"A lot of hotels will try and keep their guests on-property, (to be) spending their money for as long as they can and as much as they possibly can," he said.

That's not The Lark's goal. Instead, the owners looked around at the community and saw the best advantages of the space they had.

They decided to forego a restaurant, acknowledging that there are plenty of restaurants and bars within walking distance of the hotel.

"You can try and compete with those or you can be a part of them," he said. "It would be very difficult to compete, at least within our community."

And because of the square footage of the property, the owners also recognized there wasn't space for a restaurant.

"It's doable; you don't need a restaurant to make profits," he said.

Since the downtown also has spas, gyms and other facilities, those amenities weren't needed in the hotel either, Comiso said. Instead, The Lark has a partnership with a nearby gym they send their guests to with passes, he said, as well as an outdoor sports shop next door where guests receive a discount on equipment rentals.



On the guestroom walls inside the Lark are infographics featuring things like facts about local Montana wildlife.
(Photo: The Lark)

Staff city guides

To help educate and encourage guests to take full advantage of the city and its surroundings, The Lark has guides on staff—who are also locals—to give advice on things like where to hike and dine—pointing each guest in the right direction for the experience they’re looking for, Comiso said.

And to gain a personal relationship with guests, it’s not about just handing them brochures, he said. It means welcoming the guests over to a part of the lobby to sit down and answer questions.

One special area of the lobby The Lark staff uses is the Map Room, which features a glass-top table to slide all kinds of maps underneath.

“We’re utilizing that table as a platform to be able to walk up and spend a little time with our guests in a comfortable setup,” he said.

But the encouragement to explore doesn’t just end with the guides—the art on the guestroom walls are infographics showing things like a local ski area’s average snowfall or Montana’s wildlife.

The graphics are also for the guests “to leave with something, some sort of acknowledgment of the area they visited or a place they want to come back and visit again in the future,” he said.

The Lark’s strategy is working, Cosimo said, and the owners have expansion plans in the works. Next year the property’s new-construction addition is expected to open, adding 29 additional guestrooms and retail space on the ground floor.