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BOZEMAN'S J.W. HEIST STEAKHOUSE IS BUILT ON MONTANA HISTORY

INSPIRED BY TRADITION

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PHOTOS **CHUCK COLLIER SCHMIDT**

At Bozeman's newest steakhouse, Montana's history is tangible. In the entry, David Frederick Riley's painting features a prized bull that belonged to rancher J.W. Heist, the restaurant's namesake. >>

When a group of restaurateurs designing a classic-but-updated steakhouse were casting about for a name for their new Bozeman venture, they wanted something timeless, something elegant but approachable, something that evoked refined country—in short, something Montanan.

Joseph Walter Heist provided the perfect inspiration. A cattleman, rancher and great-grandfather of Brett Evje, one of the restaurant's founders, Heist was born in 1896 in Electric, Montana, to Cinnabar Basin homesteaders. His name, says designer and co-founder William Peace, "evokes a sense of history and tradition. It pays tribute to ranchers' continued legacy of excellence, hard work and Montana values."

The restaurant's carefully curated atmosphere would be "timeless American steakhouse with roots in New England, the Midwest and Montana," Peace explains. It begins with a vintage-look custom neon sign set against a black lacquered wood front with gold-patinaed lettering. Guests enter a space with basalt floors quarried in nearby Paradise Valley, a vintage lighting fixture and a 19th-century accounting table repurposed as the reception >>

Throughout the restaurant, designer and co-founder William Peace imbued the spaces with atmosphere, from original brick walls to an 1896 Brunswick bar from Hysham, Montana. A rotating selection of artworks is curated by Peace Design and supplied courtesy of Montana Trails Gallery and Tierney Fine Art.

The stylish addition to Bozeman's main street — with its restored facade, custom-designed detailing and neon lighting — received the City of Bozeman's Historic Preservation Award for Smart Growth Excellence.>>

host stand. A near-life-size portrait of one of Heist's prized polled Herefords, painted by David Fredrick Riley, sets expectations for the art program: works from Bozeman galleries Montana Trails and Tierney Fine Art by premier Western artists including Clyde Aspevig, Beth Loftin, Tom Gilleon, Nicholas Coleman and Michael Coleman.

The interiors meld history and the present day in original brick walls, rustic oak surfaces and luxurious burgundy leather banquettes. The palette is rounded out with medium-tone oaks, black hard-surface materials, mushroom-colored chairs, and lighting with a hint of theater. A wood-fired grill, open to the dining area, is crucial to the design, bringing forward flavor, aroma and romance.

"We intentionally created a rich, neutral background for hospitality and a feeling that is natural, warm and comfortable," Peace says. "We wanted the food, the people and the art to shine."

In keeping with the saloon era to which it hearkens, the back bar is a historic Brunswick piece sourced from eastern Montana. Alongside antique chandeliers, some from New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel, it serves as a focal point within the restaurant. The menu furthers the >>

The Solomon Room, named after J.W. Heist's father, is available for private dining and special events. Pocket doors create privacy, and an antique chandelier and original artwork bring the gravitas.

romance, of an earlier era (Oysters Rockefeller, Baked Alaska Flambe), but with executive chef John Thayer's updated takes on prime rib, seafood, specialty items like bison and venison, classic cocktails and an award-winning wine list curated by co-founder Michael Ochsner. "We wanted to create an experience where you didn't know if J.W. Heist was new or 100 years old," says Ochsner. "Either way, we wanted you to feel transported to a time and place of great hospitality, but one which is still very much of today."

J.W. Heist Steakhouse has found an immediate audience for its gourmet take on classic Western food and English-club-meets-Western-frontier ambience. For its sensitive historic update, it was recently honored with an award from the Bozeman Historic Preservation Advisory Board. Explains Peace, "We designed with a sense of tradition yet with clean lines and in a way that is welcoming to everyone. It's a white-tablecloth restaurant, but, whether a rancher or someone who has just gotten into town for business or pleasure, we want them to walk in and say, 'I want to eat here and I want to eat here quite often.' We didn't want it to be a once-a-year place, but rather a place where people come frequently and really enjoy their time." ○

LEFT: A cozy corner with banquette seating. The dining room has custom wall paneling, velvet booths, titanium granite table tops and a red hartebeest mount. RIGHT: The wood-fired grill is the centerpiece of the restaurant.

jwheist.com