

BOZEMAN DAILY
CHRONICLE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2018

GRAND OPENING

Renovated Rialto Theater reopens with sold-out show



PHOTOS BY RACHEL LEATHE/CHRONICLE

Above: The Rialto staff leads a tour of the newly renovated theater before its grand opening Tuesday evening in downtown Bozeman. The Rialto features three floors, the Blackbox (pictured), the Lightbox and the Burnbox. **Below:** Edward Whitehead prepares drinks during a media tour of the Rialto Theater.

BY LEWIS KENDALL

Chronicle Staff Writer

Supporting spotless wood floors and still smelling faintly of fresh paint, Bozeman's newly renovated Rialto Theater lit its neon sign and officially opened its doors Tuesday with a sold-out performance by indie rock band Hippo Campus.

Under construction since 2015, the two-story theater includes an upstairs bar, as well as a large gallery space and full kitchen. The building has stood vacant on Main Street since 2006.

During a tour of the space earlier in the day, the theater's developers, including Brian Caldwell and Erik Nelson, co-owners at local architecture firm Thinktank Design Group, highlighted small details in the renovation.



The walls are lined with acoustic paneling to help improve sound quality, as well as ambient lighting. Much of the wood was repurposed from the building's original flooring, and a section of wall was built from metal saved from the theater's old projection

room. The vertical fin-style neon sign, marquee and ticket booth are all homages to the Rialto's 1920s-era roots, which the group studied in advance of the remodel with help from the Gallatin History Museum.

The site was previously home to a post office, a

farm equipment company and, at one point in time, a peanut stand.

"I challenge you to go around and try to find a bad space," said general manager Matthew Beehler. "There isn't one."

Due to structural instability, the developers were forced to construct the new space inside the building's shell, similar to a ship in a bottle, Nelson said.

"We're really very proud of this space," he said. "It's been a lot of hard work, but our vision has always been doing something good for Bozeman."

The building is broken up into three spaces: the Lightbox, a second-floor gallery space with a large skylight and kitchen; the Burnbox, a higher-end bar overlooking Main, and the venue itself, labeled the Blackbox.

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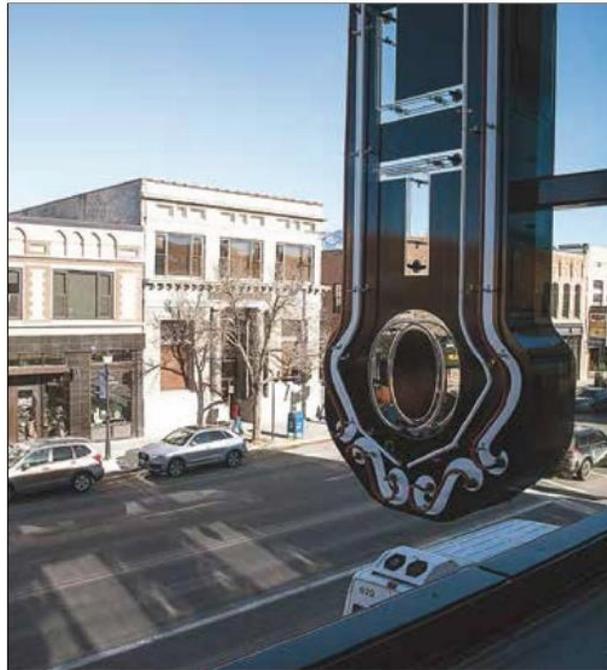
Rialto/*from A1*

The kitchen will be shared by local chefs, among them Daniel and Eva Wendell's catering operation The Food Studio, as well as Serena Rundberg and the team behind The Nova Café, Feed Café and Lot G.

The team is still ironing out a few details, but the Burnbox bar will likely have its own hours, in addition to serving drinks before, during and after events. Both the wraparound mezzanine and stage level — which is technically underground — feature bars with draft beer and wine.

The art gallery will host a rotating cast, picked by the Rialto's Artistic Director Dalton Brink, founder of Bozeman art venue The Cottonwood Club. Brink is also in charge of filling the theater's schedule with acts, and following Hippo Campus, the Rialto will present several musical acts (the Victor Wooten Trio, Brett Dennen, Car Seat Headrest, Reggie Watts and Roadkill Ghost Choir), a Bozeman Documentary Series film, a swing dancing class and a "Stranger Things" themed party — all before the end of the month.

At full capacity, the venue



RACHEL LEATHE/CHRONICLE

The Rialto sign hangs over downtown Bozeman.

can hold roughly 450 people.

"Our goal is to be a hub for culture in Bozeman, if not all of Montana," Brink said. "We're not just an indie rock house, we're not just an art gallery or a performing arts center, we're all of these and more."

"We see ourselves as another pillar along with the other wonderful pillars that are already here."

Kendall can be reached at 406-582-2651 or lkendall@dailychronicle.com. He is on Twitter at [@lewdak](https://twitter.com/lewdak)