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BUSINESS

Bozeman's Rialto Theater coming to life, set to reopen in the fall

By Lewis Kendall Chronicle Staff Writer May 11, 2017



Renovations to the Rialto Theater in downtown Bozeman are set for completion near the end of October. The renovated building will be a live music venue but will also feature a wine bar, dining space and a gallery.

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The revamped Rialto Theater is beginning to take shape in downtown Bozeman.

The long-vacant theater, located near the corner of Main Street and Tracy Avenue, is set to reopen around the end of October.

Bringing the two-story space up to code while maintaining its historical integrity has been comparable to building a ship in a bottle, said Brian Caldwell of Thinktank Design Group, the architecture firm heading up the project.

“It’s quite a bit more involved than a typical remodel; there’s basically an entire building built inside the existing structure,” Caldwell said. “But it’s really coming along.”

The second floor of the building will feature a flexible dining space occupied by Daniel and Eva Wendell’s high-end catering operation The Food Studio, as well as a wine bar and gallery room highlighted by a massive skylight.

But the centerpiece of the project will be the 400-seat theater with wraparound balcony seating. The Rialto’s new artistic director, Dalton Brink, founder of Bozeman art venue The Cottonwood Club, will be in charge of bringing a diverse mix of events and music to the theater, Caldwell said.

“Our programming and music will appeal to everyone in the community,” Caldwell said. “We’re bringing a cultural resource to the community beyond just film.”

In preparation for the remodel, Caldwell’s team — including Erik Nelson, co-owner at Thinktank, and Jon Evans with North Fork Builders — studied the building’s original appearance in photographs at the Gallatin History Museum. The exterior will feature a large marquee and vertical “fin” neon sign, while a 1920s-style ticket booth will fit inside the front doors.

“We wanted to add to what was here, not to compete or take away,” Caldwell said. “The possibilities and combinations of how you enjoy yourself at the Rialto is something we’re really excited to share with Bozeman.”

The group’s effort isn’t the first attempt to renovate the old theater. In 2010, Mary Kay Duffie signed a contract to purchase the building, but was [sued after failing to make promised payments](#).

Vacant since 2006, the theater was [purchased in late 2015](#) by the investment group behind the Lark Hotel. The group is also responsible for the [28-room Lark addition](#), projected for completion next spring.