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PANDEMIC INTO PROSPERITY

Where Class Meets Cowboy:
A SNEAK PEEK AT HOTEL DROVER

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MARCH 2021

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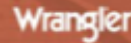
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HOTEL DROVER

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Rustic Elegance

The luxurious new Hotel Drover and its accompanying 97 West restaurant bring a mix of class and cowboy to the Fort Worth Stockyards' Mule Alley development.

BY MALCOLM MAYHEW

I'm in the kitchen of 97 West Kitchen & Bar, watching executive chef Grant Morgan plate what may just be the

biggest Tomahawk steak I've ever seen. He presents it beautifully and artfully, finishing it off with a ladle of housemade chimichurri sauce and



Tomahawk steak

a mist of sea salt. Garnished with a scoop of tricolored cauliflower, it's the perfect plate of class and cowboy.

The same could be said of the restaurant itself and of the hotel to which it is tied: Hotel Drover, the long-awaited boutique luxury hotel that anchors the burgeoning Mule Alley development, a collection of retail shops and restaurants carved out of antique mule and horse barns dotted along the cobbled roads of the Fort Worth Stockyards. The Stockyards Heritage Development Co. — a partnership between Majestic Realty and The Hickman Company — is leading the charge of the \$175 million Mule Alley development.

The ongoing pandemic has made it hard for the Drover to keep its promises about opening. Each date has been pushed; originally, it was going to open spring of 2020. The long wait has, without question, made the Drover the most anticipated hotel opening in Fort Worth in recent memory.

The hotel, part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, is now slated to open March 22.

"There's finally an end in sight," Morgan says, as he leads me and our photographer on a tour of his kitchen. "We've been dying to get this place open."

Morgan picked up the reins at 97 West after the sudden departure of

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLAF GROWALD



Texan Jenna Kinard, the restaurant's original executive chef. Kinard, who won *Fort Worth Magazine's* 2019 Top Chef competition and who was also executive chef at Max's Wine Dive, hasn't commented on the split but posted on Instagram last summer that it was due to the pandemic.

Once open, the hotel should live up to its hype if our sneak preview walk-through is any indication. Named after the cowboys who once drove cattle across the Texas plains, the property consists of 200 guest rooms and spa suites, and no two are the same. Each room has its own theme and is individually designed and decorated with modern, Texana, and/or Americana accents and artwork.

"You can stay here over and over and not have the same experience twice," says Tiffany DiPasquale, the hotel's executive director of sales and marketing.

Twenty-six suites are equipped with bronze, oversized soaking tubs, fireplaces, and terraces; the Presidential Suite has an indoor/outdoor fireplace. All the rooms share common threads: locally curated minibars, custom boot jacks, King Ranch leather goods, and Los Pablonas artisan lavender products.

Throughout the rooms and hotel, which exude a modern hacienda vibe, you'll find artwork from local, national, and international artists. The hotel's signature neon cowboy installation comes courtesy of Austin artist Evan Voyles, and the striking bronze and steel sculpture of a drover was done by the famed John Lopez Studio. Hanging high above are chandeliers made of antlers and blackened steel, and below are comfy lounge chairs, their seats made from cowhide.

Other hotel bells and whistles include a quintet of bars; a two-story library filled with Texas/cattle/Stockyards-themed books; kid and pet activities; courtyard areas; and a large "backyard," nestled alongside Marine Creek, with a bar, lounge area, and stage for live music.

Inside the lobby of the hotel will be two retail shops: The Lucchese Custom Collection, a boot and Western wear shop, and Little White Lies, a jewelry and accessory store.

With five special event spaces, spread out over 40,000 indoor and outdoor square feet, the hotel is obviously hoping to attract conventions, weddings, meetings, and other special events. Among the event spaces is The Barn, a large open space with 30-foot

HOTEL DROVER, BY THE NUMBERS

- 200** guest rooms, **84** connect
- 26** suites with bronze soaking tubs, terraces, and fireplaces
- 6** different guest room themes
- King Ranch:** Rooms are bathed in neutral tones, with artwork hand-selected by reps from King Ranch, the historic, Houston-based cattle breeding and wildlife management company whose roots date to the mid-19th century.
- Lucchese:** Custom designed and curated in partnership with Lucchese Custom Collection, these rooms feature handmade Western accoutrements and a contemporary design.
- Bunkhouse Room:** Ideal for families, the Bunkhouse features a king-size bed plus a double-overhead bunk that sleeps up to four.
- Republic:** Luxurious rooms with a Western flare.
- Frontier:** Colorful, bright rooms decorated with vivid and vibrant artwork, reflecting the wide-open beauty of Texas.
- Texana:** These rooms pay tribute to the history of Texas with authentic Western charm with a luxurious twist.
- 5** bars, located both inside and outside
- 315** square feet – starting room size
- 1,265** square feet – largest suite size
- \$7** to self-park, **\$32** for valet parking
- \$189** starting room rate, according to Marriott



vaulted ceilings dotted with Italian crystal chandeliers. Its bones are made from 150-year-old reclaimed timber.

As eagerly anticipated as the hotel is its on-site restaurant, 97 West Kitchen & Bar, which will serve what executive chef Grant Morgan calls “elevated Texas cuisine.”

That means chicken-fried steak made with New York strip, fried green tomatoes marinated in sweet tea, antelope with goat cheese grits, and a half-dozen steaks. Like a new proud papa, Morgan showed us his still-sparkling Ole Hickory Pit smoker, in which he’ll prepare several barbecue and smoked items, including full racks of pork ribs served with three-cheese mac and cheese.

Ingredients, Morgan says, will be sourced locally and regionally as much as possible. This will include the beef, which will come from HeartBrand Beef in Flatonia and Rosewood Ranches in Ennis.

97 West’s dining room will feature custom hand-crafted furniture, as well as décor elements made from 100-year-old wood pulled from the mule and horse barns.

In addition to the main dining room, which will also include a trio of private dining areas, there will be two chef’s tables — one inside, one outside.

Seating up to 12 guests, the inside

chef’s table will be located within close proximity of the open-air kitchen. The outside chef’s table will be located alongside Marine Creek, under a pergola, with a crystal chandelier hanging above. It’ll seat up to 14 guests.

Both chef’s tables will offer unique dining experiences and the opportunity to rub elbows with the chef.

“They’ll be intimate, one-of-a-kind dinners,” Morgan says. “It’ll be an opportunity for me to interact with our guests, and they’ll have the opportunity to learn a little bit about me and the type of food I do.”

A native of Arizona, Morgan has spent nearly 15 years in North Texas, first as the executive sous-chef at Luqa in Dallas, then as executive chef of Dallas’ Hotel ZaZa and its accompanying restaurant, Dragonfly. During his time at Dragonfly, he was invited by the James Beard Foundation to prepare dinner as a guest chef at the renowned James Beard House in New York.

Most recently, he was a corporate and concept chef for Dallas-based Front Burner Restaurants, overseeing The Ranch at Las Colinas, Whisky Cake, Sixty Vines, and Velvet Taco. He spent his last few years with Front Burner as the director of food and beverage for Velvet Taco; he was instrumental in helping double the number of VT locations.

Before his time in Texas, Morgan worked in Vail, Colorado, at the high-



profile Sweet Basil restaurant and at Bivans, a highly rated restaurant at the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa. He also spent three years in Vegas as a sous-chef at the Le Cirque restaurant at the Bellagio.

The years he spent as a working chef inspired him to join the culinary team at the Drover and 97 West.

“Front Burner was a great experience, and helping develop the menu at Velvet Taco, and helping develop and expand that brand, was a lot of fun,” he says. “But I felt like it was time for me to get back to cooking, to working in a kitchen every day. That’s where I do my best work.”

97 West’s beverage program — a mashup of seasonal, rotating cocktails, a wine list spotlighting American vineyards, and local and regional beers — will be overseen by Brian Richards, the Drover’s executive director of food and beverage.

Richards cut his teeth at The Broadmoor, a five-star resort in Colorado. Boutique luxury hotels are, seemingly, his bread and butter: He’s worked for boutique properties owned by Kimpton, Morgans Hotel Group and, among others, IGH.

Our tour ends in what will be known as the “Backyard,” an outdoor area soon to be decked out with a bar, heated pools and hot tubs, firepits, a stage for live music, and private cabanas outfitted with chandeliers and daybeds. All will rub up against Marine Creek, which zigzags along the spine of the property.

DiPasquale notes that COVID measures will be put in place.

“Masks, cleaning, social distancing — we’ll enforce all COVID guidelines,” she says. “We want everyone to be able to enjoy this beautiful property safely.”

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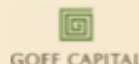
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