

Zephyr Lodge – bring an appetite, wallet, camera

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – No snow at a ski resort can be a good thing – at least when your business is construction.

With winter delayed in the Sierra, it meant the team of builders from SMC Contractors could complete the Zephyr Lodge at Northstar in five months. No days off also allowed the 17,000-square-foot facility to open this week.



Zephyr Lodge increases seating at Northstar by 50 percent. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Joe Stewart of SMC was at the resort Tuesday to see firsthand what it looks like with people using the multimillion-dollar lodge.

While building at nearly 7,000 feet presents an array of challenges, Stewart and his team had a head start on this project with having completed the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly Mountain Resort a year ago. Zephyr's design is based on her sister resort's lodge.

“This has a lot of character,” Stewart told *Lake Tahoe News* as he looked at the reclaimed wood on the exterior.

While the interior of the two lodges feels similar, the exterior does not even though the design is much the same. Much of the difference is the initial look of the lodge from Zephyr chairlift and then skiing to it.

The gray of the wood seems to blend in to the backdrop of the Sierra Crest.

With the entrance on what could be called the side wall, the building does not appear as large as it is.

This addition to Northstar could mean the era of long food lines and little room to sit is over. The 500 indoor chairs and more than 200 outdoor seats increased the overall mountain seating by 50 percent.

On a sunny day like Dec. 20, sitting outside with views of the snowcapped mountains was inviting. But the ambiance and energy of the warm indoors kept most people inside. Plus, the massive windows provide stunning views.

While the lack of snow was good for SMC, with the snowmaking guns going full tilt, the white stuff eventually presented a few challenges.

“They’ve been delivering furniture by snowcat the past couple weeks,” Northstar COO Bill Rock said.

Noting California’s dismal economy, state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, spoke of how the \$30 million infusion of cash into Northstar for this season by owner Vail Resorts is good for the local and state economies. He also presented Rock with a proclamation from the state Senate.

Food and drink

Building on the success of their Colorado resorts, the more

upscale food court is what Zephyr and Tamarack lodges offer. Often eating at a ski resort is a less than desirable experience for a vegetarian. Not at Zephyr.

The veggie burger (\$10.25) is made on site. It's tasty and a bit messy. But what a nice change from the usual cardboard restaurants often pass off as a veggie burger.

The tomato bisque (\$7.75) comes in a decent size bowl. Definitely worth having. Christine, who manages the lodge, says sharing recipes is something that's being talked about. This would be a soup worth making at home.

The veggie pizza is good, but at \$8.50 a slice, not worth it.

For some reason, the fries at Northstar, Heavenly, Vail and Beaver Creek are all lacking and can be skipped.

The Asian bowls are said to be one of the "must haves" – and based on flavor we agree. You get to choose a variety of items. Brown rice, tofu, veggies, water chestnuts and Kung Pao sauce filled my bowl. Sue's had snow peas, squash, sticky rice, shrimp and a green curry coconut sauce. Each bowl is \$14.75.

Of the seven drinks we tried (samplers, not full glasses), we placed the same in the top four, just a different order. My favorite was the African Winter – dark rum, hot African tea, peach liqueur, lemon, orange bitters. Hot and refreshing – though not often two words that go together – they do with this drink.

Sue's favorite was the Zinger – Hangar One Kaffir lime vodka, ginger beer, lime juice, orange liqueur. It was a perfect complement for her Asian bowl.

Rounding out our top four were the Pimm's Royale (sparkling wine, Pimm's No. 1, cucumber spear) and S'more Snow (Firelit coffee liqueur, Absolute vanilla, hot cocoa, whipped cream).

The Z Bar inside Zephyr Lodge has 13 specialty drinks not served anywhere else on the mountain. All are \$12.

All the juices in the drinks are fresh squeezed at the lodge.

The easiest way to get to Zephyr Lodge is via the Zephyr lift from mid-mountain. It's to the right at the top. But the lodge will be a convenient gathering spot for people skiing the Back Side, including The Promised Land lift that opened this week, too. And even if you aren't eating or drinking, the setting is gorgeous and worth stopping to have a look.

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