

Reno hotel proves gaming, smoking not needed



Brandy Mane tests her agility at the climbing gym inside Whitney Peak hotel. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

RENO – It's hard to believe this is Reno. No stench of stale cigarettes. No casino. A restaurant that is a destination unto itself. A lobby like many boutique hotels; meaning modern, chic and upscale. And live music that rocks.

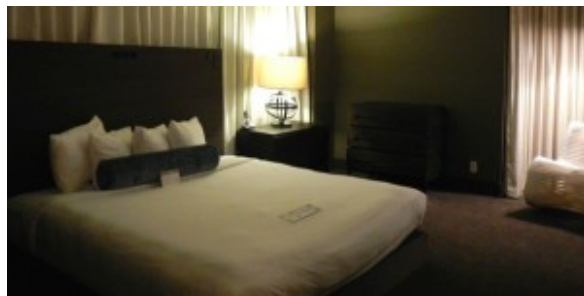
Whitney Peak Hotel isn't what one would expect from any Nevada hotel.

It is the only non-gaming, non-smoking hotel in Reno.

But for those who want to partake in those activities, the hotel is steps from venues that allow those sorts of things. Whitney Peak is in the heart of downtown – right at the famous

Reno arch and walking distance to the Truckee River area.

“It’s a hotel experience, not a casino experience,” Eli Gross, social media community manager, said. The goal, he said, is to provide a four star hotel.



Hotel rooms look nothing like when this was the Fitzgerald.

The ownership group out of Chicago took over the Fitzgerald, which closed in November 2008, and spent \$10 million transforming this property into something unique. It opened in June 2014. But before it became Whitney Peak it was CommRow from Oct. 1, 2011, to Jan. 1, 2013. This is when the exterior climbing wall was built.

Improvements are not complete. Gross told *Lake Tahoe News* it’s possible a pool will be added in the future. But it won’t be the party scene Las Vegas is known for or the Hard Rock at Stateline wants to become.

This has to do with the hotel catering to a demographic that isn’t all about partying, getting drunk and being half naked.



Food at Heritage is unique,
fun and flavorful.

By April another \$3 million will have been spent. This is to bring another 150 rooms online, upping the total to 300.

Most rooms average 300-square-feet, and are the same footprint of the old Fitzgerald that was built in 1976. Even so, it's only the size of the bathroom – especially the tub – that indicates this is not a hotel built today from the ground floor up.

Whitney Peak, while it is chic upon entering, isn't all about being high-end and sophisticated.

Rigorous Proof and Bryan Jones were playing in mid-January at Cargo, the nightclub on the first floor. It was a celebration of their album release "Moondog Matinee".



Rigorous Proof and Bryan

Jones at Cargo.

There is an outside entrance to the 5,000-square-foot music venue that seats 400 or can accommodate more than 1,000 people if they are standing.

In some ways Whitney Peak is the antithesis of upscale luxury because there is no sense of pretentiousness. Employees at the front are in flannel shirts; at the bar workers are in jeans and grey button down shirts with their sleeves rolled up. It's elegant without being over the top. Rooms are modern without being minimalist. Décor reflects the surroundings without being gaudy.

Service is at a level to be envied and emulated by others – except for at the climbing gym. Workers didn't seem to care that a rookie was in the gym. It's possible to take lessons to be more proficient at the indoor bouldering gym or to be Spiderman-like on the North America's tallest outdoor climbing wall at 164 feet.

But the members, they were helpful to explain the pitches, the holds and how to swing a leg to stay anchored.

This rigorous play area is open to hotel guests for a small fee, and to the public for daily use or monthly membership. The owners invested \$800,000 into the climbing facility.



Whitney Peak has the largest outdoor climbing wall in the United States.

Outside there are numerous routes that Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson of Yosemite's Dawn Wall fame could tackle in seconds because the holds are built-in and not a work of Mother Nature. Here climbers are roped in, then rappel down as downtown Reno is in view. People on the street gawk at the scene.

All that climbing can stimulate an appetite. Heritage is Mark Estee's seventh restaurant. The James Beard semifinalist and veteran of the Ahwahnee Chef's Holidays at Yosemite National Park is putting his culinary stamp on Reno.

Estee is all about using locally sourced food in all of his restaurants.

The open kitchen allows diners to see their food being prepared. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served here, plus there is a bar. There is no confusing what one is ordering when the menu has categories like Animals and Plants. There are plenty of offerings to satisfy those who prefer one of those to the other.

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Notes:

For more info, go online.