



Announcing
La Plazuela re-opens at La Fonda on the Plaza

La Fonda de Recuerdos – A Place of Memories

Santa Fe - Santa Feans can welcome back an old friend. La Plazuela dining room at La Fonda on the Plaza has just re-opened. The Hotel's signature, award-winning restaurant has been closed for the past six months while undergoing a multi-million dollar renovation. "It has been a labor of love for everyone involved," says La Fonda CEO, Jennifer Kimball, who has been watching over the day-to-day construction and transformation of the beloved dining room. "Entire generations of families have gathered, celebrated and dined in La Plazuela, and we have felt an enormous obligation to honor the remarkable history of this dining room. It's truly one of Santa Fe's treasures".

However, undertaking a renovation of a landmark has had its challenges, says Kimball. "I'd like to have a dollar for every raised eyebrow and inevitable question about La Plazuela's painted glass windows." The colorful windows have graced the interior of the restaurant for the past 30 years and were hand-painted by La Fonda's resident artist, Ernest Martinez. They are much-loved and an integral part of the dining experience in La Plazuela. "We kept the windows," assures Kimball, "but now they frame the glass doors that have been renovated to open and close as they were originally designed to do, creating a natural flow into the lobby."



According to Kimball, the renovation was long overdue. “La Plazuela is our signature dining room,” says Kimball, “an aging one, however. It was time to replace the leaking roof, level the sloping floor and bring this beautiful dining room back to her more youthful days.” To do this, La Fonda hired Santa Fe architect Barbara Felix, who likes to describe her process as *woven architecture*, weaving La Fonda’s history into a tapestry of all the visual and tactile materials used in the renovation. “When you step from the Plaza into La Fonda’s lobby, you know that you are experiencing the very heart and soul of old Santa Fe,” explains Felix. “This hotel has such a wonderful story and sense of place. I wanted the renovation to honor that authenticity, so guests would feel that vibrant connection with the past.”

Felix was chosen to do this project by the late Sam Ballen, the charismatic owner of La Fonda who was familiar with her design work for the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico. “Sam and his wife Ethel were great patrons of Native American art and culture,” says Felix, who also has extensive design experience in the hospitality industry. “Sam knew it was time to revitalize La Plazuela,” explains Felix, “but he also knew that a large part of La Fonda’s charm was its connection to the community.”



To that end, Felix researched the original circa 1920s drawings and specifications for the hotel by architect John Gaw Meem (Meem did the renovation in the 20s when the hotel was a Harvey House) and letters written by interior designer Mary Jane Colter. “Colter was really an amazing architect and designer whose work was clean and sophisticated but still very southwest,” explains Felix.

Colter designed Harvey Houses across the West as well as some beautiful Park Service buildings at the Grand Canyon. To get a real feel for her work, Felix and Jennifer Kimball, along with the project’s interior designer, took a road trip to Arizona, visiting hotels designed by Colter – La Posada in Winslow and the Painted Desert Inn at the Petrified Forest National Park (Colter did the interiors and furnishings). “We wanted to see her color schemes and get a sense of the tactile side of her creations,” explains Felix.



Felix didn’t stop there. She read every book on Colter that she could get her hands on. She studied old photos and films of the hotel and spent a great deal of time researching what kind of materials were used. She discovered that the original flagstone for the floor was mined in Lamy, New Mexico, but the mine was now closed. A local rancher, however, allowed her access to the old mine site to get sample stones to match for color and texture.



“Colter was also known for her wrought iron design work,” says Felix, “so we hired a wonderful local craftsman to create a railing around the mezzanine level overlooking La Plazuela that mirrored Colter’s sensibility and style.” In addition, another local artisan was brought in to create a dramatic wrought iron chandelier and a series of wall sconces. All the glass used in the lighting is re-cycled and was mouth-blown in Guadalajara, Mexico, notes Felix.



In addition, many of the dining tables and chairs were hand-carved and many of the fabrics used throughout the room are replicas of textiles culled from the New Mexico Museum collection.



A fountain will re-take center stage in La Plazuela, a tribute to the one that was in the hotel's 1920s era patio. When the original patio was enclosed in the 1970s and the space turned into La Plazuela, the fountain was removed. A central skylight was added, but over the years it began to leak, explains Felix. A new central skylight will replace the old and series of new skylights around the perimeter of the ceiling and mezzanine will fill La Plazuela, the hotel Lobby and Portal with natural light. "There were skylights in the lobby in the 1940s," adds Felix, "so again, we're honoring the past."

"It's going to be stunning," says Jennifer Kimball, who says the hotel is planning a La Plazuela re-opening celebration party for late June. Three hundred guests are expected, says Kimball. The theme for the evening is La Fonda de Recuerdos – *a place of memories* – and guests will be greeted by vintage 1920s cars lining both sides of San Francisco Street, an homage to La Fonda's early twentieth century roots. "We'll showcase the restaurant's new menu and celebrate La Plazuela's beautiful transformation with our Santa Fe community," says Kimball.



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