

Beyond the Bishop

Major renovation plans shut down historic lodge and promise high-end outcome



An artist's rendering shows the planned Bishop's Lodge Resort. | Courtesy of Bishops Lodge

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If all goes according to plan, backhoes and chainsaws and the sounds of hammers against nails will upset the quiet of the woods in Tesuque starting in a few weeks as an Atlanta-based company spends up to \$60 million in renovating and reinventing Bishop's Lodge Ranch & Spa over the next year and a half.

The resort has served for nearly a century as a sort of retreat, yet its modern day accommodations aren't so modern anymore. Despite the deteriorating buildings, the place has long been a magnet for tourists and locals who've sought refuge in the juniper and piñón.

But on Sept. 30, the ranch and spa 4 miles north of Santa Fe shut its doors, turned off the fireplaces and said goodbye to the remaining part-time skeleton staff that had picked up the slack in its waning days.

The imminent closure caught a few loyal patrons off-guard as they learned about it the hard way: Showing up on the lodge's doorstep and being told they couldn't book a stay because the place would be shut down by midweek.

"It's going to be sad to see everything gone, but at least we're going to have a chance to say goodbye," Ted Ragias, a visitor from Wichita, Kan., pictured below, tells SFR. His wife Pam stands by his side, already feeling nostalgic for the days of yore.



Thomas Ragan | Thomas Ragan

The couple stumbled upon the lodge at the foot of the Sangre de Cristos by accident more than a decade ago. Since then, it's become their tradition to drive out every year and hole up in the resort, whose buildings have a few holes of their own, the result of actions, or inaction, from a long list of managers since 1998.

The lodge has consistently placed first for the couple, winning out over pricier downtown hotels.

"It's beats staying off the Plaza," Pam, a retired schoolteacher, says as she pours a cup of coffee on the resort's final day. "What made the place great is that we could always visit the Plaza if we wanted to."

It appears the lodge owners are trying to bring an upscale approach, framing the renovation as an effort to appeal to a wider audience of Santa Fe travelers.

Nearly a dozen buildings are slated for demolition, including the tennis courts, and in all 126 rooms will rise from the reconstruction, replacing the current 80 rooms, some of which have been shuttered for liability reasons.

But perhaps the biggest change will be the introduction of golf carts for hotel guests—the new mode of transportation to get to and from the rooms.

"We're going to take the automobile out of the equation. Guests will park their cars in one centralized lot," says Richard Holland, the managing partner of HRV Hotel Partners.

The company, which bought the resort in August of last year, has a track record of buying and [developing high-end](#) seaside resort hotels, with properties in Mexico and in Key West, Fla. And now it's setting its sights on the landlocked and high desert of the southern Rocky Mountains. If architectural renderings in the lobby are an accurate depiction of what's in store for the 300-acre property, then the changes will be vast. The company says they will still keep the spirit of the lodge.

Take the Bunk House, for example. It's planned as a massive building that looks like a rustic Midwestern barn from the outside but is ripe with elegant rooms on the inside. Elsewhere, they'll erect "glamping tents" to accommodate families who want to feel like they're camping out in glamorous style.

The registration area, with its front desk, gift shop and community room for breakfast and happy hour, is set to become a fancy restaurant. And don't overlook the Kiva, a series of specialty suites that will serve as the "perfect retreat" for couples.

That's according to the company's design plans, which are under administrative review by the Santa Fe County Land Use Department, based on a master plan approved more than a decade ago.

At least one building is untouchable, and that's the Lamy Chapel, built in the middle of the 19th century by the Catholic Bishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy. He had a hand in Santa Fe architecture, dreaming up and overseeing the construction of the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi. The tiny edifice with its white steeple is something of surprise to lodge patrons who come upon it amid the thick vegetation and the bishop's private gardens.

Holland says one of the buildings that will be torn down currently blocks the view of the chapel, a structure on the state's historic landmarks list.

The land itself is a snapshot of history, and if it could talk, it would be in the Tewa dialect, that of the Indigenous people, explains the lodge's website. But the more contemporary owners can be traced to Bishop Lamy, followed by the Pulitzer family in the early 1900s, then James R Thorpe, a Denver mining man who bought it in 1918 and turned it into the resort that it is today.

In 1998, the Thorpe family sold it to an investment fund whose history is so complicated that Holland had a hard time remembering its name, although he did tell SFR it was also based in Atlanta.

As the multimillion-dollar fund was sold and resold several times over, the lodge became a revolving door of new managers over the last 17 years, all of which contributed to what Holland says was "gross neglect."

That is, until HRV bought the property last summer, then shut down the spa and restaurant in January this year and laid off dozens of employees, relying on a team of part-time maids and clerks and grounds crew these last several months.

Crystal Vickers, the front desk clerk, was one of those part-time employees. She worked at the lodge six years ago when she first came to Santa Fe from Houston.

Vickers is also sad to see it go, but she notes, "Not everything is made of marble and granite."