

SPEAKING

of food



Room with a view.

Plato's at Aspen Meadows pairs art-inspired cuisine with a multimillion-dollar renovation

By Amiee White Beazley

Photographs by Dan Bayer

The dining room of Plato's

at Aspen Meadows has inarguably one of the finest mountain views in town, especially in autumn, when the leaves on the trees are awash in gold. Lesser known, however, is the elevated—and elegant—cuisine coming from the restaurant's kitchen. Since 2014, Executive Chef Jason Thompson has overseen the property's three dining establishments (which also include Davis Commons—formerly known as Meadows Restaurant—and Hefner Lounge), as well as corporate and special events, all from a kitchen extraordinarily small for such a tall order.

When the Meadows reception building, known as the Walter Isaacson Center, began an extensive, 10-month-long renovation (which completed in June of this year), Thompson knew it was the chance for him to create the kitchen of his dreams.

Working with Aspen's Jeffrey Berkus Architects, Thompson and his team collaborated on designing a greatly expanded kitchen (including the addition of six Hestan ovens), a reimagined reception area, a new bar called Limeslicer's and an expanded outdoor dining area. The remodel also incorporated restored and refurbished art by Herbert Bayer.



Clockwise from top left: Salmon with White Mountain Farm black quinoa, confit kohlrabi and radish and cherry sweet and sour; Squid ink Carbonara with Daysprings Farm egg yolk and pork belly; Ricotta with High Mountain Apiaries honey, Colorado stonefruit and hemp heart crackers; Bone marrow brûlée with Palisade peach chutney and root vegetable chips; Summer vegetable carpaccio; Two Roots Farm kale salad with Jumpin' Good Goat Dairy feta and seasonal fruit.



Limeslicer's Bar in the Hefner Lounge.



From left to right, Executive Chef Jason Thompson, Pastry Chef Aleece Alexander and Chef de Cuisine Nate Kargman at Aspen Meadows Resort.

EDIBLE ASPEN | When you first got word of the renovations, what was your vision for Plato's?

JASON THOMPSON | We first started talking about a remodel three years ago. At that point, I'd been here a decade. Every chef dreams of being able to walk into a kitchen and make it better—they have their vision, and dream, of what it could be. We enlarged the kitchen and added a pass-through design and a customizable Hestan suite of equipment. For example, we can put a stove or range or a grill anywhere in the kitchen. In terms of production we were capped at 45 covers before; now, sky's the limit.

EA | How did the expansion influence the style and range of food you offer to guests?

JT | I brought back Nate Kargman, who worked at Plato's a few years ago, as chef de cuisine. We create classic dishes with local ingredients and cutting-edge techniques, and we want to be as local and seasonal as possible. Nate has been working with Farm Runners, so 90 percent of the produce on our menu is regional and constantly changing based on availability. It won't change the

entire menu, but we're obsessed with items that were picked one or two days ago. We want to serve tomatoes that have never seen the inside of a walk-in cooler. This fall, we'll feature items like bison osso buco, pork cheek sancocho, venison with mead-glazed winter squash and chokecherries.

EA | What about the desserts?

JT | Aleece [Alexander, Plato's pastry chef] has her own space now. Before she shared her kitchen with banquet operations. Now she has the biggest pastry kitchen in Aspen.

EA | Aleece, how do you see your menu evolving given your new digs?

ALEECE ALEXANDER | Since this entire property is designed around artwork, the desserts will also be more visually interesting; we're fortunate there's so much inspiration surrounding us. We'll still have things in the Hefner Lounge like coconut cream pie and seven-layer cake, but Plato's will have more creative desserts like a Bayer-inspired Black Forest and olive oil cake with caramel mousse. We want to surprise our guests at every turn and that's illustrated in the desserts.



Alexander's playful desserts look more like sculpture than sweets.

EA | What's the one thing you hope guests will take away with them, after dining at Plato's?

NATE KARGMAN | Most people are usually overwhelmed with the view. We want to elevate the setting with amazing cuisine that complements the entire region and experience here.

JT | We want to become that iconic restaurant that people feel they must visit. We want it to be the perfect meal, in the perfect place—a place where someone who is dining on venison can watch a deer walk by. That's actually happened. | **eA**

GO FIND IT!

Plato's Restaurant
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Herbert Bayer "art" cake.