

They already made hotel dining a hit in Durham. Now can they do it in downtown Cary?


Drew Jackson : 7-8 minutes : Invalid Date



Cary's Mayton Inn reopened this summer after a makeover. Its former restaurant, The Verandah, has been turned into Peck & Plume. Baxter Miller

The last decade has done wonders for hotel dining. The rise of boutique hotels has helped shake the stigma of the continental breakfast, replacing it with restaurants and bars that sometimes lead a city's dining scene.

In the Triangle, hotel dining is beginning to catch on, boosted by popular restaurants in Durham. Now one hotel looks to push the trend to Cary.

 This story is a subscriber exclusive

This summer, a The Mayton was unveiled in Cary, rebranded from The Mayton Inn and reopening [after new owners bought the historic property out of bankruptcy](#), put money into renovations and, recently, opened a new restaurant, Peck & Plume.

The Mayton is now owned by Cary developers Bill Zahn, George Jordan III, Jordan Gussenhoven and management group Early Bird Night Owl, which will run the hotel and restaurant. The group of buyers closed on the hotel last June for \$8.1 million.

'A gathering place'

Craig Spitzer, who owns Early Bird Night Owl with Craig Shipley, said dining will be a centerpiece of the hotel.

“Independent hotels are more interested in creating a unique experience,” Spitzer said. “It’s not about serving the same cheeseburger here that you’d find in a Marriott in Topeka, Kansas. We’re trying to be a destination with the community, not just with hotel guests, but those who live and work in the area.”

Spitzer said the name Peck & Plume is meant to capture the two sides of the restaurant’s plans for dining. The peck is the casual snack and a drink side if you’re feeling, say, peckish, and plume is the more buttoned up and polished full service dinner. The intent, Spitzer said, was to appeal to diners as they needed, whether for a weekend or an hour.

“We wanted to create a gathering place,” Spitzer said. “It wasn’t just a place to stay, but that would welcome friends and neighbors.”



The Mayton Inn is a four-star boutique hotel in downtown Cary. Richard Barlow Photography CharlotteFive

Veteran Triangle chef Steve Zanini returns to the Mayton for a second stint to lead the Peck and Plume kitchen. Whitney Gilliom is general manager.

“The food was always well-regarded,” Spitzer said of Mayton. “Chef Zanini does a lot of things really well. He’s passionate about infusing international flavors into classic dishes and paying attention to sourcing ingredients and spices.”

Peck & Plume will be an all-day restaurant, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, plus a weekend brunch. The menus are mostly versions of the classics — biscuit and gravy, blueberry pancakes and avocado toast at breakfast, sandwiches and bowls at lunch, plus duck quesadilla, fish tacos and a double burger that also appears on the dinner menu.

Dinner is more elevated, with raw North Carolina oysters, bourbon chicken liver mousse with sweet and sour blueberries, a grilled pork chop with tamarind and field peas, and a smoked tomato shrimp and grits.

Dining destination

When it opened in 2015, The Durham had a lot of things working to its advantage in convincing people to think of a hotel as a dining destination.

James Beard-winning chef Andrea Reusing was the opening chef, and led the kitchen until departing the hotel last summer. Reusing's food at the Durham won wide and instant acclaim, named one of Bon Appetit's 50 best new restaurants in the country and News & Observer dining critic Greg Cox's Restaurant of the Year in 2016.

"We thought the best way to ingratiate ourselves to the community would be to gain exposure through our food and beverage experience," Spitzer said.

The Durham also debuted with a rooftop bar, a rarity in the Triangle at the time, serving small plates, an oyster happy hour and cocktails. Spitzer said they hoped the rooftop would draw people from Raleigh or Chapel Hill, but were surprised when they came from even farther away cities like Greensboro and Winston-Salem.

"The rooftop is our calling card," Spitzer said. "We didn't realize how far and wide people would come. ... The timing was such that we were part of creating downtown as a more accessible destination."

Cary attraction

For the Mayton, Spitzer believes there are a few new attractions in Cary, particularly the \$69 million park under construction next door.

"We're thrilled to be adjacent to the downtown Cary park and aesthetically wanted to nod to the park and bring the outdoors inside," Spitzer said.

But he also expects the Triangle's growing tech and business industry to have an impact. With Epic Games expanding down the street, and Google and Apple adding new local offices, Spitzer expects some of those workers to move into downtown Cary.

Part of the draw, he thinks, will be the wave of new restaurants, bars and breweries in the past few years, including Pizzeria Faulisi, Hank's Downtown Dive, Sidebar and Bond Brothers. Spitzer hopes Peck & Plume can add to that downtown trend.

"It's going to be spectacular," Spitzer said. "The park is going to create the kind of regional draw that doesn't currently exist in downtown Cary. There's a really strong wave of support, a momentum in a lot of places, to create something cool in the downtown in their community."



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Drew Jackson writes about restaurants and dining for The News & Observer and The Herald-Sun, covering the food scene in the Triangle and North Carolina.