

The Circular restaurant to open at Hotel Hershey on April 23: A sneak peek

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Burgers and fries in the Hotel Hershey?

This isn't your grandmother's [Circular Dining Room](#).

The new restaurant, the Circular, opens on April 23 - [four months after the Circular Dining Room closed](#). It disposes of the stuffy air of its formal predecessor. The relaxed dress code (resort casual, i.e. shorts, torn jeans not allowed) and altered menu are not the only changes.

The entire room has been given a makeover, one that harkens back to the original restaurant that Milton Hersey constructed in the 1930s. The painted mural on the ceiling - introduced five years ago - has been removed, replaced with white paint. The change opens up the space, brightening the whole room and calling one's attention to the room's original fine detail including balconies, metalwork and intricate stained glass windows. The old gaslight-esque lights that have been added throughout the room aid in the lightening effect.

At the center of the dining area sits a "theater," an area that doubles as a bar and dessert preparation area, giving the guests a chance to see the hotel's pastry chefs in action. It also carries on the tradition of the original dining room, which featured a dance floor in the center - something for guests to watch in between bites.

The Circular is the baby of Shea Design's partners Tanya Spaulding and David Shea.

"John [Daly, the food and beverage director] said 'We have a real challenge for you out here and the challenge is an institution. How do you take an institution and make it into a vibrant, lively place without screwing it up?'" Shea recalled.

The two did their research and dug into the restaurant's history. Hershey, Shea said, was an innovator for the restaurant business with his revolutionary circular dining room - up until then most dining areas were rectangles. The circular shape was inspired by Hershey's desire to not have a single bad seat in the place.

Shea shared a similar concern.

"It sat at virtually every chair in this place to make sure there is no bad chair," he said.

Hershey would be proud.

The room now has long wooden surfaces spreading out from the center which act as buffet tables for breakfast. The surfaces include the latest in induction technology and will heat up to keep food at the appropriate temperature.

After breakfast the surfaces add to the decor as furniture. "A beautiful piece of furniture, I might add," Daly said.

There are now also two private dining rooms within the Circular, which can be reserved for an additional fee. One lies in the midst of a wine cabinet, affording the inhabitants a certain amount of privacy.

There are no tablecloths on the cherry and mahogany wooden tables - all American made - simply because they aren't required.

"There's enough dignity in the way things are set up up you don't need tablecloths," Shea said.

The new setup, which includes tables with pop-up eaves, can now seat more people than before. Last year's configuration could only fit 215, this new set up can seat 245.

Circular continues the hotel's dining room tradition of having one lone circular table by the window on the far side. This was Milton Hershey's table, his go-to whenever he ate at the restaurant. The Circular will be putting a plaque on the wall nearby to notify diners of its special status.

Those lamenting the end of the Circular Dining Room should not bemoan the end of fine dining, according to the Circular's designers.

"Fine dining hasn't died, its changed," Spaulding said. "It's becoming dining on your own terms."

Customers can choose their own sides for the meal as well as how they want to eat. They can choose to order just dessert or just appetizers or just drinks - whatever they want goes.

"The customer is driving the experience, not us," Daly said.

There's a lot to experience too. The menu includes Circular Dining Room favorites lobster bisque, cocoa dusted scallops. There also will be peanut butter pie, Daly said.

But the new signature dessert will be a flaming chocolate fondue, which comes with dippable rice krispies treats, fruit and house made marshmallows.

Appetizers include a salt roasted beet salad with goat cheese, arugula, grilled asparagus and soy buttermilk poppyseed dressing. Small plates include the aforementioned scallops, lamb sliders, 21 day dry aged New York Strip, veal porterhouse.

Executive Chef Ken Gladysz is a fan of the halibut dish. "I think the halibut dish is very light, very flavorful. It has a lot of components to it," he said.

The cocktails at the restaurant will be Prohibition-themed and include six traditional, six contemporary and six chocolate drinks.

The contemporary drinks include a Blind Tiger - which is named for a kind of Speakeasy. Made with mezcal, hibiscus and pink peppercorn tinctures, caramelized pineapple puree and fresh lime juice. The cocktails also also inspired by Hershey's life and passions, including one called the Traveller which is named after Hershey's love of journeying across the globe.

All the bartenders at the Circular will be certified mixologists, so they will know the ins and outs of making the perfect cocktail.

The approximately \$2 million renovation has given the restaurant a completely new feel. It's far from a redecorating job, more of a reconstruction. And though it has changed, Shea, Spaulding and Daly are confident it will continue to attract fans of the old restaurant due to maintaining the original space's feel.

"The legacy will carry on," Shea said.