



100 year old hotel  
comes back to life

# The Elms Opens Its Arms Again

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Article Rachel C. Murphy | Photography Angela C. Bond

The imposing façade of The Elms has stood in Excelsior Springs since 1888. It burned twice, only to rise from the ashes, bigger and better than before, most recently in 1912. Its spring water brought people from around the world to enjoy its health benefits. Until it began to fall into disrepair, it was the pride of Excelsior Springs.

That pride is about to come roaring back to life. With the recent acquisition of the property by Wide Waters, General Manager Eric Busick says that they are bringing the hotel blazing back to its former glory, taking care to preserve and revive the building that sits on the National History Registry. A \$17 million dollar renovation effort is making the property more eco friendly and bringing back the luxury for which it was once known.

Its place on the registry means that care had to be taken to remain true to its roots. Working with historic renovation consultants, Busick and his staff have seen the hotel's original colors literally come back to life. Original paint schemes have been revived, the original tile flooring featuring the Elms crest has been patched and the iconic neon sign is now intact, shining out to the downtown Excelsior Springs area.

Busick says that the community of Excelsior Springs has been invaluable. Hardhat tours have been available to locals throughout the renovation process. "This hotel is a part of people's lives in Excelsior Springs.



They've celebrated birthdays here, had weddings, taken prom pictures. We want them to be a part of what we're creating here," he says.

Guest rooms have been open for use for the past month, outfitted with flat screen televisions, and sleek split armoire pieces to maximize the space in each room. Open, airy floorplans for Queen and King standard rooms are accompanied by access to the outdoor hot tub and salt water swimming pool. Microfiber linens and towels combine luxury and energy efficiency in their lower water waste in cleaning.

But what allure is a renovated hotel if you live in the area? How about a world-class destination spa and fine dining restaurant that will compete with any in the metro area?

The restaurant, 88 at The Elms, is helmed by Executive Chef Stephen Dwayne Cameron, after working with Chef Michael Smith. He leads a

similarly talented team, with sous chefs hailing from Bluestem and The American. His philosophy is to use local and seasonal produce, changing the menu often. Raised bed gardens have been added to grounds to supply as much of the kitchen's produce needs as possible and fresh fish is flown in daily.

"We've gone from a dining room to a restaurant. This restaurant can stand up against any culinary destination in Kansas City," says Busick.

The menu certainly doesn't look like warmed over hotel dining room fare. A peach griddled salad with whipped goat cheese or a sea scallop ceviche will raise the bar for hotel cuisine in the surrounding area.

Busick says that the renovation of the spa is going to be the most dramatic change. Spa director Kevin Snedden, formerly of the Argosy Hotel and Casino spa, is excited about the complete overhaul of the bottom floor.



Formerly, treatment rooms were located on three different levels of the hotel. They have now been consolidated to the bottom floor, in what Snedden can only describe as a European destination spa experience.

Upon entering, a reception desk greets guests with information about services, plush bathrobes and slippers. Soothing natural wood tones create a calm environment designed with relaxation in mind. And that's just the reception desk.

The centerpiece of the spa is the grotto, a co-ed spa room modeled after the Turkish baths. A circular room features a variety of water elements, including a steam shower, dry and wet saunas, hot tubs and a cold plunge shower. Signature scrubs will be available for people to try on themselves and chaise lounges will be available for relaxation.

Snedden says the purpose of the Grotto is two fold. "We want people to come and try things out, take it slow and let themselves relax before they go into one of our signature facials, massages or body wraps. This also gives people who are shy about other services a chance to ease into the spa experience," he says. Use of the Grotto is complimentary with any spa service or \$55 on its own.

Once they are acclimated, the sky is the limit for services available. The spa is staying true to its roots for the time being, offering only holistic and organic treatments, without medical spa options. In fact, outside of their house made scrubs using local herbs and flowers, the spa will use the Aveda spa line. "We feel that it's just truer to who we are to focus on holistic remedies at this point," says Snedden.

For the men who may balk at the idea of a facial, joint rooms are available for all services, even down to body scrubs featuring Vichy showers. "We've found that the menfolk are a lot more likely to come in for a service if they know that their wives are a few feet away," he laughs.

For the numerous weddings that take place on the grounds, the spa also offers enough manicure/pedicure and hair styling space to accommodate large wedding parties in the same room. Girls' nights out are easy to plan when there are 8 manicure and pedicure stations available.

This historic building is proving that it will survive, no matter what life throws at it, and it will do so with immense style. With the renovations nearly complete, The Elms is finally coming into its own, and growing into the destination that it used to be. As the spa comes to fruition and the harvest crops creep onto the menu, Kansas Citians now have a new get away, very close to home. NL



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