

The and Streamline Club, Credit Bureau, and Union Station is now occupied by Cedd Moses' Imperial Western Beer

CEDD MOSES RESURRECTS THE GATEWAY TO LOS ANGELES

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When the first train engine rolled into Union Station in 1939, it was to much fanfare, with parades on Alameda Street and hundreds of diners and travelers celebrating shoulder to shoulder in the new Fred Harvey Restaurant in the grand building adjacent to the newly christened Los Angeles depot.

The Fred Harvey Company was the country's first food chain, with restaurants and hotels alongside railroads from Florence, Kansas, to the Grand Canyon starting in 1876. As travel to the west grew, so did the Harvey Houses.

The company employed an all-female staff throughout its food halls. Known as the “Harvey Girls,” they came from across the country to Los Angeles, drawn by ads seeking “women 18-30 years of age, of good character, attractive and intelligent” and promising a generous salary for the times — \$18.50 per month plus room and board. They were housed at the station and subject to a strict curfew. It was a safe way for adventurous young women to discover the West under the protective arm of Fred Harvey.

Their conservative starched brown and white uniforms consisted of a skirt that hung no more than 8 inches off the floor, covered by a crisp white apron, “Elsie” collar, black stockings and black shoes. Hair was restrained in a net and tied with a regulation white ribbon. No makeup of any kind was allowed and chewing gum while on duty was prohibited.

The Harvey Girls signed on for a year at a time. If they broke their contract — usually to get married — they forfeited half their base pay.

Union Station became the “Gateway to Los Angeles,” bringing thousands of GIs to the city en route to their outfits at Camp Pendleton, Fort Hunter Liggett and other bases on the West Coast and beyond. And they were hungry. The Harvey House was serving more than 800 meals an hour and about 100,000 passengers daily in the vast 11,000-square-foot eating hall and boasted a 45-minute meal turnaround and food to go.

The place was always packed and buzzing, with at least 10 impeccably dressed Harvey Girls tending to the constant flow of servicemen and other travelers. The room had a lunch counter and could fit about 300 people. The menu included shad roe and kidneys; for 85 cents you could get a nice plate of braised calf sweetbreads on toast, with potatoes, vegetables and a salad. The popular plate of sliced oranges was 15 cents.

The expansive art deco Navajo space was designed by Southwest architect Mary Colter. One of the few female architects of her day, she designed many of the Harvey properties as well as a series of works in Grand Canyon National Park.

Entrance to the Imperial Western Beer Co., punctuated with original Gladding McBean tile.;
Credit: Danny Liao

As more and more guests flowed through the enormous Harvey House doors, GIs ramping up for WWII needed a place to hang out between duties to just smoke and drink. By 1941, to accommodate all the traffic that was going through the station, the restaurant's outdoor breezeway was closed off and transformed into the Streamliner bar.

Named after the City of Los Angeles Streamliner passenger train and also designed by Colter, the bar was built in the streamline moderne design, with curved walls, amber glass, intimate booths and floating ceilings.

A Manhattan was 55 cents, and on special it was 15 cents. Considered a luxury drink, the mint julep cost 65 cents and big spenders could get a shot of 17-year-old bourbon for 80 cents. Domestic beers were 30 cents a glass, Guinness stout 50 cents.

When the station was built, it was designed for 7,000 people, with 33 trains in and 33 trains out.

But by 1967, with the advent of the car, freeways and LAX, rail travel was dying. There were eight trains in and eight trains out every day. One historian said, "You could have had a gunfight in the main tunnel and nobody would know because it was empty." The Harvey House closed, its doors never to reopen. For 50 years, it was used for parties and film shoots, but nobody really knew what to do with the space.

Together with his creative team at 213 Hospitality, Moses has restored the space to its original magnificence and transformed it into the Imperial Western Beer Co. (named after the legendary Southern Pacific train of the 1930s) and brought back the Streamliner.

"The bones of this space were already beautiful — we didn't want to touch them," Moses tells *L.A. Weekly* from the bar, which has replaced the Fred Harvey lunch counter.

"It was just about restoring those bones and putting new infrastructure into the space and new furniture that still fits the integrity of this space but allows it to function in the 21st century as a beer hall, brew pub and cocktail bar.

"When we took the space, it had been sitting empty for 50 years. It had basically been discarded; nobody knew what to do with it. It was historically significant, so you couldn't change anything in terms of the kitchen space. It didn't make financial sense for a restaurateur to take the space over because the back of house was over 6,000 square feet and modern kitchens can't operate like that."

Working with partners Eric Needleman of the Spirited Group, who is on the board of the L.A. Conservancy, and former Marine Brian Lenzo of Blue Palms BrewHouse, Moses saw the potential for a brewery. They brought in Devon Randall, one of a handful of female brewers who helped catapult San Diego's craft beer trend to the rest of the state. "Every beer she brews is a Picasso," Lenzo says.

Equipment for the brewery is located in the underground tunnel that winds through Union Station. The grain comes in via the rails, is ground and then funneled up to the brewery. Moses said plumbing was a logistical nightmare, but only one part of the four-year restoration project.

"When I was growing up, you didn't go downtown unless you had jury duty or were in finance, and you probably wouldn't stay for dinner," Randall tells *L.A. Weekly* as she pours a Travel Bug Gose sour from the tap. "It's gotten to be more and more of a gathering spot for people from all over the city rather than a place to avoid."

It's a dream come true for the award-winning brewer, who was born and raised in Santa Monica and also worked alongside Moses in opening Arts District Brewing Company in 2015. She wants to see L.A., which is better known for its cocktails, emerge as a beer town.

"There are young kids coming through the door knowing nothing *but* craft beer," Randall says.

"There was someone I was talking to across the bar, who said he had never tried macro beer. He'd never had a Budweiser or a Miller or anything like that. He had only had craft beer because his older brother was into craft beer. That's how he started learning about beer, and he's 22. It's like someone who's never had McDonald's because they had better options."

It was a four-year labor of love for Moses, whose handsome father dated a Harvey Girl before meeting his mom in the old L.A. days. The elder Moses died at the beginning of this year, just missing the grand reopening of his old stomping grounds.

"To me it's a love letter to our city. We felt responsible to bring this back in a great way and hopefully do the space justice," Moses says. "My only regret is that my father wasn't here to see it."

It took almost two years and a quarter million dollars to restore the cork ceiling alone. Historic preservationists were commissioned to come in restore it per historic code. Work on the rest of the space had to be suspended until that was all done.

"It was a horror story," interior architect Janel Wright says of the room's condition when she first stepped foot into the building.

"Union Station has been undergoing a renovation itself, and there are unusual materials through the station that we really don't use anymore. Since this was a restaurant space, unlike the terminal where people are walking through, people would sit for hours smoking cigarettes and

cigars; all the dust and soot had built up on the ceiling over years, plus the smoke from the lunch counter.”

The team brought it back to its original beauty through a very painstaking process.

“We got the landlord to let us go in and meticulously and delicately do what they did to the rest of the station and start peeling away,” Wright says. “What was different about this space was grease all over the ceiling from the restaurant cooking. We methodically went in and cleaned each and every cork tile on the ceiling. We were bowled over when we saw the actual colors of the ceiling, vibrant colors that hadn't seen the light of day for 50 years.

“The ceiling was cleaned bit by bit, tile by tile, scaffolding by layer of scaffolding. The unusual thing about the ceiling in this space is that because it's art, it's not a flat surface. So scaffolding gets scooted over a few inches every time a little bit more.”



Credit: Danny Liao

After much meticulous cleaning, the team headed by Casing Restoration rediscovered many of Colter's loving details, like a band of color around the historical lights that are hanging down.

They thought that band of color was black and were shocked to find that it was actually a beautiful teal that coordinated with the ceiling.

“Mary Colter made great use of the teals and vibrant colors, and it was amazing to have all the muck taken off and have those colors exposed once again,” Wright says.

All the original booths have been reupholstered, and great care was taken not to disrupt the original Colter geometric tile floor. The amazing design looks like a jigsaw pattern up close and a Navajo blanket from the mezzanine looking down.

“You can't compete with that floor,” Wright says. “The biggest thing we were challenged with was how we impact the space as little as possible. When you have to put in a modern kitchen and a modern bar, there are a lot of things to consider.

“We had to take the new bar and put it in a modern form in the footprint of the old lunch counter within a half-inch so as not to damage the floor any more. So we designed a very complicated metal infrastructure that would allow us to move around inside and then enough room to create a cabinet in the middle that will hold the gigantic light fixture. Everything from having to cut historical tiles to feeling really bad about drilling, we had to have tiles re-created to patch areas and a color match process.”

Wright says the most profound change was in the old kitchen space, which is now the brewery.

“In order to have a functioning brewery, we had to add gross ton weight to this. So, while we put metal in the basement to support it, the crazy thing is we had to painstakingly go through and take out each individual floor tile one by one, pack them up and bring them into storage.

“But the bar area in the main room was by far the most complicated piece. It was the idea of trying to figure out how to fit all of what we needed to do operationally and aesthetically into that space and still let the space do the talking. The real challenge was to not bring anything new in there. We wanted to make everything look like it had been there a long time. Putting anything new in there was a real gamble.”



Streamline bar; Credit: Danny Liao

Walking into the Streamliner is like stepping into the train car of a glamorous time machine to the 1940s.

The architecture in the 2,300-square-foot Streamliner bar is all original and also designed by Colter. The booths are the original, just reupholstered. The scalloped walls, glass mirrors and floating ceilings are original. Only the lights in the ceiling were changed from white neon to LED pink, to match the teal interior. The bar and the bar die wall are completely original, copper all the way to the floor. The bar top is new but the shape is historic. The footprint has not changed. The space is dimly lit, sexy and seductive.

“Our cocktail program is built for speed, low prices and high quality,” says Eric Alperin, who has taken over conducting duties at the Streamliner and also worked with Moses on the Varnish, the speakeasy hidden in the back of the historic Cole's Restaurant under the tutelage of the late cocktail guru Sasha Petraske. “We've chosen our favorites and streamlined them.”

Aside from the Tequila Daisy, all drinks are under \$10 and come in templates. “The quick and the strong” are the basics, chilled below zero — gin or vodka martini, Manhattan, negroni and a gimlet with house-made lime cordial. “Blended but better” is icy cold and made with an immersion blender: mint daiquiri, whiskey sour and piña colada. “The fresh and tall” include a Tom Collins, Moscow mule, Streamliner gin and tonic and rum and cola. All are topped with house sodas and citrus granita. The Streamliner old-fashioned is a twist on the original, with bonded bourbon, bittersweet powder and essential oils.

“We took a lot of inspiration from the streamline movement,” says bartender Max Seaman. “At that time they were stripping away the frills and design excesses from art deco to preserve great design but use modern technology to bring luxury amenities to a wider audience. They were optimistic about technology, the future and improving people's lives.”



Chef David Lentz; Credit: Danny Liao

Taking cues from Grand Central Station in New York and the stunningly renovated Union Station in Denver, Moses says he can't imagine a grand U.S. train station without good oysters.

For him, the only logical choice was bringing in David Lentz from the Hungry Cat to take charge of the food menu.

“When I saw the space, I was really blown away and quite honestly shocked that it sat dormant for such a long time,” Lentz says.

“It was a no-brainer. I jumped at the chance. Cedd initially had ideas and one component was shellfish, which I've done for a large part of my career. Unfortunately, a lot of train stations aren't so great with their dining options.”

Gone are the shad roe and kidneys. Lentz's menu is largely shellfish-based, and with a newly installed smoker also offers pork ribs, fish tacos and whatever goes well with beer. Lentz is experimenting with a variety of sausages and other smoked meats on the ever-evolving menu. Oyster varieties from both coasts and Santa Barbara uni are featured, as well as plump, house-smoked mussels.

“It's an iconic space and we want to preserve the history,” Lentz says. “But moving forward with the beer program here, the bar program is amazing; we want to do the same with the food. Elevated service combined with great hospitality. Whether it's somebody who's riding the train daily, or somebody on the Metro, walking by or going to the Dodger game, we want to provide a great experience.”



Harvey House at Union Station; Credit: Security Pacific National Bank Collection/Los Angeles Public Library

A lot of credit for the rebirth of the station and the old Harvey space goes to Metro, which had the good sense and business acumen to buy it in 2011 for \$75 million for 42 acres and hire Ken Pratt as director of Union Station Property Management in 2013. He says it was the real estate deal of the century.

“I really have to say thank you to Metro for the support and allowing me the freedom to do the right things here,” says Pratt, who commutes on the train to and from Orange County every day. “They've allotted an additional \$46 million to put it into a state of good repair and bring it up to speed today. It was really derelict and was not the place that people wanted to frequent. And today it is.”

The station has a lot of family memories and sentimental significance to Pratt, who remembers taking the San Diegan to Santa Ana when he was a kid to visit Uncle Buddy after having a family lunch at Philippe's.

“At that time, we still ran steam engines,” Pratt recalls. “The 3751 was the locomotive, a big black behemoth of a machine sitting on the platform chugging and breathing. Then you got on the train and the bell begins to ring. You would hear the release of the air brakes and the jerk of the cars begin to move and you're off on your adventure. I swear to God, still today, you can hear that engine sound.”

With their shared love for the city of Los Angeles, the combination of Pratt and the 213 Hospitality Group was a match made in renaissance heaven. Moses is the definition of hospitality with a passion for detail. If you meet him at the bar just once, he's the kind of guy who will remember your favorite drink and what you ate.

“Cedd Moses is known for his abilities as a restaurateur and hospitality, but he also has a real care — not a manufactured one but a deep-seated one,” Pratt says. “He's very sincere about what happens. They took this on with an eye to making it a magnificent place to be proud of. Not just as their facility but our facility. His business partner Eric Needleman and Cedd were engaged and involved and committed to doing the right thing for the property for our mutual customers.”

The project cost between \$4.5 million and \$5 million and was funded by the Spirited Group Opportunity Fund (Cedd Moses, Eric Needleman and Mark Verge, whose own Los Angeles roots also run deep).



Harvey House at Union Station; Credit: Security Pacific National Bank Collection/Los Angeles Public Library

Pratt makes a point of walking the station grounds every day, taking in the beauty and rebirth of the Gateway to Los Angeles. His dreams are not just of the past but of the future as well. One hundred thousand people travel through the station daily now, and that's only expected to grow. With the upcoming Olympics and Metro Rail to LAX, in five years, it's projected to be 200,000.

And yet stories of the past still make him choke up.

“One day I'm walking by the huge glass doors that lead into the Fred Harvey. There was this very elderly gentleman pressed up against the glass with his hands cupped, and he's bent over looking in,” Pratt recalls.

“To the right of him was his very elderly wife, to the right of her their elderly children. Then the adult grandchildren and a slew of great-grandchildren.

“So I walked up as this guy was peering through the glass and asked, 'Hey, have you ever been in there?'

“He stood up, looked at me and said, 'I had a beer in there in '42.' So I said, 'Would you like to go inside?' He says, 'Damn right, I would.'

“So this 90-year-old man stepped back as I got my key out to open the door. This old enlisted Marine from Iowa steps back, squares up — a good 50 or 60 years dropped off that guy — and strode in when I opened the door with his entourage. He marveled and looked around and talked

about sitting over there. He talked about the guys who came with him on the enlisted troop train from upstate New York, through Ohio and Michigan. A kid from Florida, a guy from Kentucky.

“Yeah, I was a Marine going down to Pendleton for training and some of the other guys were going up to Hunter Liggett, other guys were going to the north islands for the navy,’ the old man reminisced. He talked about going to the Pacific, his adventures there, the guys who made it back and the guys who didn’t.

“He said, ‘When we all got here it was winter and it was so warm. For guys from upstate New York and Iowa, it was blissful. It was warm, it was sunny, there were palm trees and every one of us said, we’re coming back.’”

It struck Pratt like a ton of bricks — that was the story of Los Angeles.



One of David Lentz's shellfish platters; Credit: Danny Liao

The migration started after the war and resulted in the population of the San Fernando Valley, the San Gabriel Valley, the Westside, South Bay, Central Los Angeles down into Orange

County. No longer fearing the Wild West, visitors back east telling stories of palm trees and perfect weather and everybody wanted to come to California by the droves. That started the explosion and economic tidal wave that developed into Southern California.

And thanks to Moses and his passionate team at 213 Hospitality, there will be plenty of future stories of Los Angeles as well, as more commuters are leaving the car at home and choosing to travel to Orange County, San Diego and Santa Barbara by rail with Union Station as their hub.

“I’m an Angeleno and I love this city,” Moses says. “I’m all in on this city and I’ve invested my life savings in helping bring back downtown and making it great again. I love the soul of this city. I get offended when people make claims that Los Angeles is superficial. I take that personally. We are a city with layers of soul and history and full of people who are committed to making it a great city in all the years to come.”

Imperial Western Beer Co. and the Streamliner bar, 800 N. Alameda St., downtown; (213) 270-0035, imperialwestern.com, thestreamlinerbar.com.