

Like Champagne Powder

by Paul Suter

The guest experience at the new base area, combined with on-mountain additions, promise to enhance an already perfect day at Steamboat.

It's never good when finding the base area of a ski resort is as difficult as navigating a double-black-diamond ski slope, but that has been the case at Steamboat since the resort installed its gondola and gondola building during the summer of 1970. Getting from the transit center to the resort's gondola building to start your ski day was a physical and

mental endeavor, catching guests in a proverbial maze. Needless to say, it wasn't an experience visitors to the resort during the past five-plus decades welcomed or enjoyed.

With that history behind them, the **Steamboat Ski & Resort Corporation** (along with **Alterra Mountain Company** and **East West Partners**) is well underway with a \$135 million Master Plan Development that will not only improve the traverse from the transit center to the base area but transform the entire

base area into a "champagne powder" kind of guest experience. Once complete, the base area will include an après ski plaza, new restaurants and bars, new lodging, a ski beach and an ice rink (which will become a turf field during the summer for concerts, games, events, farmers markets and more). It will certainly rival the invigorating feeling people get when they're on the mountain skiing or boarding aloft crystalized snowflakes. So much so, that many might choose to stay at the base rather than hop aboard the newly relocated gondola for a run down the slopes.

With a design and construction team that includes **Saunders Construction, Gensler** and **Design Workshop**, the transformation is happening in three phases, with the first phase scheduled to wrap-up by Thanksgiving. Work during the first phase has included:

- Demolition of the gondola and snow sports school building, totaling approximately 65,000 square feet of space and requiring the removal of more than 500 truckloads of material.
- The relocation of the Steamboat Gondola base terminal to a point about 300 feet uphill from the base area, where it is less intrusive to the guest experience while providing easy access to skiers and snowboarders.
- The installation of escalators and stairs from the transit center to the base area, providing a direct route with plenty-of guest friendly wayfinding and direction.

Leading-the-way to the improved guest experience is the Gold Walk, named in recognition of Steamboat's rich history of Olympians (98 total, including Buddy Werner, Skeeter Werner and Billy Kidd, the three of whom have been featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated). The Gold Walk provides a direct route to the base area, removing the frustration and confusion many people began their ski day with.



Gondola Square view from SE | Design WorkShop



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| 1. EXISTING ENTRY PLAZA | 4. KIOSKS | 7. SKI BEACH |
| 2. GOLD WALK | 5. ICE RINK | 8. RELOCATED GONDOLA |
| 3. ESCALATOR + STAIRS | 6. SLOPE SIDE PLAZA | |

Steamboat | SCHEMATIC SITE PLAN

DESIGNWORKSHOP

Now completed the Gold Walk is lined with a 90' x 8' art wall, made from Corten steel (a material that provides a weathered, rusty look). The wall is perforated and backlit with images reminiscent of the ski town (including horses, Olympic skiers and a western heritage).

“When you see the wall and Gold Walk, you’ll know you’re in Steamboat,” notes Becky Zimmerman, president of Design Workshop, the firm working on the Gold Walk and steel wall. **“People will instantly see the mountain and the plaza area and realize the inviting interface between the two, highlighted by the incredible mountain views.”**

Design Workshop has also been highly involved in the new plaza

area, which will include all of the great destinations and amenities listed above, as well as three large and distinctive “landscape islands” – shaped in the form of moguls -- that will include aspen trees, flowers and other landscape design materials intended to soften the look and feel of the plaza.

“We’re thinking of every guest in every season, whether they’re visiting in the summer or winter months, to make sure they have the best experience possible,” said Zimmerman.

Echoing Zimmerman’s thoughts are **Gensler Architects** Adam Ambro and Jonas Phillipsen who are leading architectural design efforts for the new base area. The vision for the new base area will build

off of the overall experience of Steamboat, providing an authentic look and feel that relates to the western heritage of the town. This will be done with “more humility of materials” that reflect a rancher-spirit. Heavy timber construction, stone work, subtle grade changes and close attention to how the new buildings interact with the public and pedestrian flow will be key. There will also be a commitment to sustainability and reducing the carbon footprint of the new base area.

Ambro and Phillipsen agree that the entire team will always be looking for new and better ideas during the design and construction process, and finding ways to make a great guest experience even better.