



What's New In Aspen This Ski Season? A Lot

By: Larry Olmsted

Aspen is one of the most famous ski towns in the world, as much a luxury brand as a destination, and for as long as I can remember, the town and its namesake ski resort have stuck to an "if it isn't broke don't fix it" strategy where very little of note changes. Every year I write round-ups of important expansions, additions and changes at major ski resorts for a variety of media outlets (read my latest What's New in Skiing piece here at Forbes), and in the past three decades I can't recall ever having occasion to write a What's New in Aspen story. Until now.

I went back there just before the busy Christmas week and skied the big new terrain expansion on the first day it was open. I also checked out the other newsworthy happenings around town. Collectively, these represent the biggest changes here in the past 40 years. If you have not been to Aspen in a while, it might be time to think about going back.



The Forbes 5-Star Little Nell hotel has long been one of the world's most acclaimed ski-in/ski-out luxury hotels, and is one of only two 5-stars at Colorado ski resorts. Its Element 47 restaurant (named for Silver, the reason Aspen was created as a mining town) gets 4 Stars, and again, is one of only two 4-Star food winners at Colorado ski resorts (there are no 5-Stars). The hotel has more than 20,000 bottles in its cellar and a dozen certified sommeliers on staff, and has won Wine Spectator's Grand Award of Excellence since 1997, was in Wine Enthusiast's Hall of Fame and has been nominated for the James Beard Foundation's Most Outstanding Wine Program six times.

The Nell is also owned by Aspen Skiing Company and is the only true ski-in/out hotel at Aspen (though many are quite close), with a great ski concierge. Guests of the Nell also have automatic access to Aspen's "First Tracks" program, which allows them to sign up and ride the gondola early to enjoy a run on freshly groomed corduroy before the resort opens to the public.



The Little Nell has long been the top pick for those who can afford it. But for this season, the hotel did a significant upgrade of what may have been its weakest link, the spa and fitness facility. The new spa is still small but has a unique "all-suite" design, and since there is no locker room per se, each treatment room has its changing room and steam shower, and two also have saunas. The spa menu includes several new signature treatments by renowned aesthetics and anti-inflammatory pioneer Dr. Barbara Sturm. The adjacent gym is also brand new.

Even more luxurious is the Residences at the Little Nell, 26 large and extremely well-appointed two-to-four-bedroom fractional ownership units in a separate adjacent building, rented out through the hotel but run as a sort of boutique hotel of its own. Rooms in the hotel run 450 to 850 square feet, while the Residences span 1,700-4,000. All of the Residences just got a complete design makeover by Rottet Studio for this season, including new gourmet commercial style kitchens. Guests get access to the amenities of the hotel, including room service and ski concierge, but also have their own very extensive rooftop area with multiple jetted hot tubs, outdoor grill and full bar service, and a gym that puts every other hotel gym I have seen to shame. It includes rare features such as Pilates reformer machines and multiple brands of beloved interactive bikes and treadmills including Peloton.

Because the Limelight in Aspen is also owned by ASC, its guests get to sign up for First Tracks as well, and while it is less than five minutes by foot to the mountain's gondola plaza, the hotel has several house cars for rides to skiing, as well as shopping, dining and free airport transfers. I had stayed in the Limelight previously and quite enjoyed it, but the entire hotel was fully renovated last winter, so it feels like new. The upgrades included the lobby, bar/restaurant area, gym, pool, and all guest rooms and suites. Rooms are large and residential in feel with kitchenettes.