

## Art and food meet inside The Kitchen

Fine Dining restaurant will feature a different creative each month.

By Julie Kukral Feb 6, 2019  0



Star Valley photographer Christopher Rok and his wife, Ruzena Rok, hang "Into the Narrows" at The Kitchen on Friday.

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The experience of dining out includes much more than just the food you're eating. It's about the music, the staff, the decor.

"When you dine out you dine with your senses," Fine Dining Restaurant Group founder Gavin Fine said. "The whole restaurant experience is about so much more than how a dish tastes. At the heart of it, hospitality in itself is its own art form."

The Kitchen, one of the Fine Dining Group's six restaurants, launched an art initiative this month that will marry the culinary arts with the visual. Every month from now through April the restaurant will feature a local artist on its walls, starting with Star Valley photographer Christopher Rok.

The Kitchen has hung local art on its walls on a loose rotational basis since its opening. Artists have found that showing at restaurant is a great way to get their name out and sell their work, Fine Dining Communications Director Kendra Alessandro said.

“We found that it was a really great outlet for people to not only showcase their work, but there are several pieces of art that have been purchased from the walls,” Alessandro said.

The idea to establish an ongoing partnership with local artists was inspired by the Wildly Creative campaign, a mostly Instagram-based effort spearheaded by the Center of Wonder and Center for the Arts that aims to tell the stories of Jackson’s thriving creative community on a local, regional and national level.

Participating in the campaign got the Fine Dining Group thinking about food more specifically as art.

“We did an Instagram takeover with [Wildly Creative] several months ago, and it was showing that there’s so many elements to food — it’s the taste, it’s the smell, it’s the ambiance of where you are, but it’s also the presentation — and all of those elements are art in and of themselves if you look down at it,” Alessandro said.

The new initiative will elevate the arts on display and also give local artists a free platform to showcase their work. Most galleries can take upwards of a 50 percent commission on works sold within the gallery, so it’s rare for artists to be able to showcase and sell work in a public venue without having to give up a cut.

Rok moved to Star Valley from the Virginia/Maryland area two years ago. For 31 years, he worked as an engineer for the Army, but photography has always been a side passion.

“We picked Chris because his style kind of aligned with the feel of The Kitchen,” Alessandro said.

Though photography won’t be the only medium to adorn the walls, Fine Dining liked his clean, contemporary style to complement the restaurant’s similar atmosphere, Alessandro said.

Taking inspiration from Ansel Adams, and the fact that he is partially color blind, Rok is drawn to high-contrast black and white landscape photography, particularly of his new home in the Mountain West.

Black and white photography is “more the composition and the emotion that arouses in you, and from the time I was young person, Ansel Adams has been a hero of mine, so I’ve read about him for over 40 years now,” Rok said. “That’s what I’ve always been drawn towards. The dark skies, the stark contrast. It’s just what I’m into.”

Rok’s work will be on display until March 4.

The Kitchen is taking submissions for the March featured artist. If you’d like to submit your artwork, email images to Javier Dominguez Gutierrez at [javier@jhfinedining.com](mailto:javier@jhfinedining.com) by Feb. 13.

For now The Kitchen is planning to run the local artists series through April, with the option to extend it longer throughout the summer. The deadline for consideration to be the April artist is March 14.