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The Buildout – The Tuxedo Room

Along the way to creating a snazzy supper club that harkens back to the 1930s, the founders of a new Grand Center restaurant discovered a Jazz Age gem hidden in the basement.

When workers accidentally broke through a wall during construction of the Tuxedo Room, they found a room that wasn't sketched on the original blueprints. Inside was a cache of 200 women's shoes, Griesedieck Bros. beer bottles, a hidden stairwell, a trapdoor and a 1930s Globe-Democrat newspaper advertising a luxury six-bedroom apartment to rent for—gasp!—\$60 a month.

They had stumbled onto a Prohibition-era speakeasy.

“Everybody who sees it comes to the same conclusion,” says co-owner Brett Cervantes, former operator of Café de France and son of late St. Louis Mayor Alfonso Cervantes. He hopes to hire a historian to research the past life of the space; for now, what's being called the Speakeasy Wine Cave will be shrouded in a bit of mystery.

That room and some of the memorabilia (minus all but one pair of shoes; workers threw the rest out as junk) will be part of the \$1.1 million restaurant co-helmed by executive chef Anton Keller, former executive chef at New York's United Nations Plaza Hotel and Hotel Nikko Mexico. The pair aim to recreate the lush red-gold panache of the supper clubs and Broadway theaters in the 1930s.

“We have this vision of bringing this theater district back to the way it was,” Cervantes says. He and partner Reginald Dickson want to spark redevelopment in the area—and they want to do it with grand élan.

Guests will be greeted by beefy doormen, costumed cocktail servers and a hostess and her poodle—both sporting tuxes and top hats. Celebrity cutouts crafted by Grace Hammond peek from the second-story windows of the restaurant, which overlooks the Fox Theatre. The menu embraces classical, fusion and contemporary-with-a-twist cuisine, including an eight-course “Around the World in 80 Minutes” dinner boasting dishes from several continents.

“We’re going to keep it theatrical,” Cervantes promises. “We’re enhancing the opportunities to make this a destination.” —Shera Dalin