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Central Park Boathouse is back just in time for spring.

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The Central Park Boathouse is back — hipper and more water-resistant and just in time for a late spring that finally has sprung.

The Instagram-worthy lakeside eatery near the park's Fifth Avenue and East 72nd entrance will reopen Saturday after a \$2.9 million face-lift that forced it to close for three months.

“It was tired after 18 years,” said owner Dean Poll, who took over the restaurant in 2000. The renovation also satisfies a big part of Poll's obligation to the city — to provide capital improvements to the 1954-vintage structure.

Also known as the Loeb Boathouse, the stone, brick and wood venue always had magical views of the Central Park West skyline and passing gondolas.

But it had gotten creaky from age, heavy traffic and the wear and tear that comes with being on the water.

Executive chef John Greeley will be back with a crowd-pleasing American menu that includes southern and coastal influences. But the restoration by architect Peter Niemitz, who also tweaked Poll's steakhouse Gallaghers, adds gentle luster to the dining rooms, bar and fast-food annex, Express Cafe.

Furniture, finishes and lighting are new, as are the muted colors chosen to make the venue better fit in with its surroundings.

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Customers will find a Boathouse that's airier and more contemporary than its last iteration. The makeover also includes improved sight lines and a buzzier mood from raising the number of seats in the main dining room from 160 to 185. Some 30 new high-top seats offer full lake views from an intermediate level between the dining room floor and the bar.

The retractable glass wall that rolled open in good weather now opens vertically to relieve stress on the floor, which was originally made of wood. "It once got flooded when the lake came inside," Poll recalled ruefully. "We had to fill it in with cement and linoleum." The new floor is tile.

The glass is properly insulated for the first time, so "it will be toasty inside even when it's windy on the lake," Poll said.

An expanded, now ADA-compliant mahogany bar will serve more customers.

Extra computer terminals for staff in the dining room and bar will alleviate customers' long waits for service — "people were frustrated," Poll admitted.

"Aesthetically, it's all going to be more appealing. It will feel like a porch overlooking the lake," Poll said.

The reboot isn't only for fun.

The added seats and improved efficiencies will make it possible to serve even more people, Poll said. "The more we take in, the more money the city makes."

Contrary to the common notion that the Boathouse has a lease, it operates under a license agreement with the city's Department of Parks & Recreation.

The contract, which has 14 more years to run, requires Poll to put in \$6 million in capital upgrades over the term.

The redesign covers about half of that; the rest will be spent on the Boathouse's outdoor patio and bar, which require Landmarks Preservation Commission approval and will take another year, Poll said.

The Boathouse pays the city the greater of two numbers: an annual fee of \$1.407 million that rises over time to \$1.702 million, or 7.2 percent of gross annual receipts, up to \$22 million, and higher percentages of revenue above \$22 million.

"We have exceeded our minimum every year," Poll said proudly.

