

BAR WORKS

WORK SPACE WITH VIBE

Jack's restaurant gets new life as Bar Works co-working space

One of San Francisco's most historic downtown restaurants has been sold. But instead of becoming a new eating place, the former Jack's will live again as a new-age, tech-centric office space from Bar Works, a company that operates three such venues in New York City.

"It's important for us as a company to be out there," said Bar Works managing director Franklin Kinard from New York. "If you're not going to go in the San Francisco market, you're just not serious in establishing yourself in the shared-work space."

"By going after a landmark building, we felt it was a dramatic way to announce ourselves to the marketplace. It makes a statement."

Whether that statement will ring loudly depends on whether Bar Works can distinguish its space from the many co-working spaces that offer a place to plug in, take meetings and wet your whistle. WeWork, which has raised \$1.4 billion, has six San Francisco locations with private and shared offices, including one a block away from Jack's. Its startup-like amenities include self-serve bars with beer kegs. Galvanize's San Francisco campus on Tehama Street has a ground-floor cafe open to the public. Workshop Cafe on Montgomery Street charges \$2 to \$3 an hour for desk space and power. And from the same era as Jack's, there's the Mechanic's Institute, whose library has offered a shared space to work long before the "co-" got tacked on.

The multistory building at 615 Sacramento St., best known as Jack's, has been a restaurant since 1864, making it the second oldest such business in San Francisco, after Tadich Grill, which opened in 1849. Jack's has had a storied history through various owners, from rebuilding after the 1906 earthquake to being named "the finest restaurant in the city" in Doris Muscatine's seminal 1963 San Francisco book, "A Cook's Tour of San Francisco."

"It's one of the most beautiful restaurants in the city," said John Konstin, owner of John's Grill. Konstin owned Jack's in the late 1990s, and gave it a significant remodel prior to selling it for \$2.6 million to Bay Area chef Philippe Jeanty. "Jack's is special. It's part of the city."

Jeanty reopened it in 2002 as a French bistro named Jeanty at Jack's. That restaurant closed in 2009, and has been dark for seven years while Jeanty looked for a buyer — a delay that he chalks up to the funky, nontraditional restaurant layout of three floors and a mezzanine.

"It certainly is not an easy layout to operate," said Jeanty. "We used to have food runners and literally that's all they did — go up and down the stairs."

Now, it will live again — but for the first time in its 152-year history, it will not be a restaurant. Instead, it will house a different sort of jacks.

Bar Works purchased the 6,000-square-foot building for \$3.55 million. The company plans to reopen the building by the end of the year, with 400 work spaces designed for freelancers, travelers and telecommuting employees. Bar Works hopes to open more spots in the Bay Area within 18 months.

"For what Bar Works does, which is efficiently serve the individual or small team, San Francisco is really tight as a market right now," said Mark Gilbreath, CEO of LiquidSpace, a company that connects

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available office space — including at Bar Works, one of its partners — with itinerant workers. “In San Francisco, just as in New York, the co-working movement has absolutely gone mainstream and is enjoying tremendous demand.”

At New York’s Bar Works locations, day passes cost \$30; monthly memberships range from \$400 to \$600, comparable to shared desk space at WeWork or Galvanize. Alcohol is offered as well, and the San Francisco outpost of Bar Works is in the process of procuring Jeanty at Jack’s Type-47 liquor license, which will allow for cocktails and spirits. Food will also be offered, but specifics are still to be determined.

Yet food and drink offerings, be it a coffee or a martini, are often secondary for the Bar Works clientele, which is focused on fast Wi-Fi and laptop outlets. “In our case, the bar is more an aesthetic than a functional thing,” he said.

Kinard said that Bar Works will make a concerted effort to maintain the vintage look of the space, including the memorabilia. It’s a preservationist sentiment that may ease some worries about the continued erosion of San Francisco history.

“What the cable car or the Golden Gate Bridge is to San Francisco — it’s something like that,” said Konstin of the legacy of Jack’s. “At least it will stay.”

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