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Food & Lifestyle

Seattle-area restaurateur to bring upscale eatery to Vulcan's Lake Union Piers



Lake Union Piers is located at 901 Fairview Ave. N. in Seattle's South Lake Union.
COURTESY OF VULCAN REAL ESTATE



By Egan Ward – Reporter, Puget Sound Business Journal
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Story Highlights

- Bernie Garcia signed a 20-year lease for Cantina Monarca at Lake Union Piers.
- The upscale Mexican restaurant and tequila lounge is slated to open in summer 2027.
- Garcia's family operated Moctezuma's Mexican Restaurant across the Puget Sound region for decades.

After decades operating his family's restaurant business across the Puget Sound region, restaurateur Bernie Garcia is finally making his move into Seattle, and he's doing it in a big way.

Garcia is bringing Cantina Monarca, his upscale Mexican restaurant and tequila lounge concept, to the Lake Union Piers development. He has signed a 20-year lease for an 11,000-square-foot waterfront space, a commitment he said reflects his confidence in both the city and the project.

The restaurant is expected to open in summer 2027.

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"We're not just investing in another restaurant, we're investing in the city that I grew up in and that I believe in," Garcia told the Business Journal. "We're super excited to execute on a vision I've had my whole life and create something truly exceptional."

Garcia's roots in the industry trace back to his family's Moctezuma's Mexican Restaurant business. His father opened the first Moctezuma in Tacoma in 1978, and the family later expanded to Gig Harbor, Silverdale and Tukwila.

Garcia took over the business in the 2000s and launched the first Cantina Monarca in Bellevue's Lincoln Square South in 2022. Today, the restaurants are housed under Garcia's Bellevue-based Elev8 Hospitality Group.



Bernie Garcia is CEO of Elev8 Hospitality Group, which includes Cantina Monarca, Moctezuma and Grandeza Spirits.

BERNIE GARCIA

Garcia said he's been looking for the right opportunity to enter Seattle for years but never found a space that matched his vision.

His expansion comes at an uncertain time for Seattle's restaurant industry, which continues to grapple with high labor costs, shifting customer habits and a continually evolving regulatory environment.

"I know there's a lot of turbulence and challenges going on in Seattle," Garcia said. "But in any kind of challenging environment, there's always some opportunity. We've been in the business a long time and weathered plenty of ups and downs, and you know what, it's made us stronger."

Cantina Monarca will become the third restaurant tenant at Vulcan Real Estate's Lake Union Piers development, joining the longtime staple Daniel's Broiler and Benihana, which plans to open in 2027.

Cantina Monarca's space will require a full build-out, though Garcia declined to disclose the project's estimated cost. The restaurant will have 8,300 square feet of interior space and 2,700 square feet of outdoor patio space, according to Vulcan.

Los Angeles-based Gulla Jonsdottir is the architect, and a general contractor has not yet been selected.

The 5-acre Lake Union Piers property was formerly Chandler's Cove before Vulcan redeveloped and rebranded it in 2022. The company envisioned the site as a premier waterfront dining and retail destination. Its eight-figure renovation included upgrades to four 1980s-era buildings, improved pedestrian access and a reconfigured parking layout.

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The property now contains 60,000 square feet of retail space. Although it reopened in late 2024, leasing activity has been slower than anticipated. Today, Daniel's Broiler and The Cove, a wine bar from Ackley Brands, are its only retail tenants. Service-oriented tenants include Worth Avenue Yachts, Northwest Yacht Brokers Association and Hampton Yacht Group.

Chicago-based restaurant and entertainment chain Pinstripes previously had plans for a 17,700-square-foot space in the complex. Those plans fell apart after the company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last year.

Cantina Monarca will occupy a portion of that former Pinstripes footprint, while roughly 6,000 square feet will remain available for lease.

Garcia said the location presents an opportunity to help revitalize an iconic but currently quiet waterfront area, citing its views, proximity to downtown and South Lake Union, and easy access to Mercer Street.

"I saw how lively this area used to be and today I see the enormous potential it has," he said. "As more tenants come in, I think you're going to see that energy come back and I mean, what's better than margaritas and the waterfront?"

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