

CASINO *Style* 2019

Non-Gaming Amenities for Integrated Resorts • \$10

A GGB publication

Rockin' Renovation

The Guitar Hotel at
Seminole Hard Rock
Hollywood is the
first of its kind

Player Preference

What resonates
with guests for
non-gaming
attractions

Sycuan Success

How a San Diego
tribe stepped up
to destination
resort

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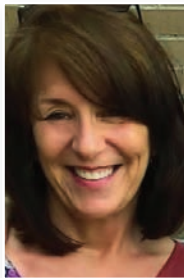
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Style Equals Substance

Marjorie Preston, Editor



Every so often, you'll hear scholarly discussions of form versus function, style over substance, and the clash of art and commerce—as if these are mutually exclusive concepts.

Once a year, in the pages of *Casino Style*, it's our pleasure to delve into the design side of gaming—what some may call the superficial part, the “wrapping” that conceals the essential working parts.

But the more I think about it, the more I believe that, if placed on a scale, style and substance (or form and function, or even art and commerce) would have roughly equal values.

Consider the work of the architects, designers and manufacturers in these pages.

These resorts and the spaces inside them—and even the furnishings and fixtures inside the spaces—are pleasing to the eye, and often very beautiful. In part, we love to look at them because of their symmetry, the underlying mathematical balance behind all artistic patterns.

In these structures and spaces, form and function, like clasped hands, make for a stronger whole. Just as the nuts-and-bolts foundation supports the tower that underlies the pleasing edifice, all are part of the same equation, and all are indispensable.

In these structures and spaces, form and function, like clasped hands, make for a stronger whole. Just as the nuts-and-bolts foundation supports the tower that underlies the pleasing edifice, all are part of the same equation, and all are indispensable.

Take our cover story on the new Seminole Hard Rock resort in Hollywood, Florida. The hotel's guitar-shaped design evokes the kind of response elicited by provocative art: It's amazing. It's audacious. It's impossible to overlook.

The newly expanded Sycuan resort in San Diego County generates a completely different reaction: relaxation, anticipation, and the expectation of elegance and comfort specific to its Southern California locale.

Also in these pages: the latest dining and restaurant trends from Paul Heretakis; the value of working with a purchasing agent from Carl Long; and amenities that boost the buzz of a resort from Bryan Wyman. You'll

hear how entertainment has changed—and how it's stayed the same—and learn why themed events in the gaming resort deepen loyalty.

One of my favorite parts of *Casino Style* is Building Excitement, in which we take a look at new or newly refurbished resorts around the world, inside and out. A special report on expansions in the tribal gaming sector

demonstrates the growing significance of this industry, which supports whole nations of people.

That's a lot of substance in this edition of *Style*. We hope you enjoy it.

A GLOBAL GAMING BUSINESS PUBLICATION 2019

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The views and opinions expressed by the writers and columnists
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Copyright 2019 Global Gaming Business LLC.
Henderson, Nevada 89014

GLOBAL GAMING BUSINESS is published monthly by Casino Connection
International, LLC. Printed in Nevada, USA. Postmaster: Send Change
of Address forms to: 901 American Pacific Dr, Suite 180,
Henderson, NV 89014

Official Publication





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BUILDING

Lap of Luxury

• MGM Cotai, Macau •

MGM Cotai opened in February 2018 in Macau, but it was not a finished product at that time. Over the last 18 months, a \$100 million theater, additional restaurants, VIP gaming areas and other non-gaming amenities were added to the mix.

But it wasn't until the Mansion fully opened in early 2019 that the facility began hitting on all cylinders. Like its cousin in Las Vegas, the Mansion caters to the highest of the high rollers. As in Las Vegas, you won't find it on a map of the property.

The Mansion in MGM Cotai is tucked away to avoid prying eyes and assure privacy for its special guests. It features 27 ultra-luxury villas ranging in size from 215 square meters to 570 square meters each. They all come with dining lounges, balconies and separate entrances, and elevators for direct access to the rooms.

MGM Resorts Chairman and CEO James Murren explained that, with the Mansion open, the company is becoming a major player in the premium-mass market in Macau.

"We needed to get everything up and running," Murren told investors in conference call. "The Mansion is now online and all the villas are now available, so we're getting really positive responses for that. And that's now allowed us to move into another segment that we've really not been able to penetrate (in the past). The progress of adding value to that segment is actually going well."

"In excess of 20 percent of the (premium-mass) business for the quarter is directly attributed to the Mansion as new business, so that's really the critical point for us."

The property's CEO, Grant Bowie, says the Mansion has special significance for the property. "We are excited to see the ramping up of MGM Cotai," he said. "The Mansion offers exclusive luxury to the next level and helps us be better-positioned in the premium segment."

Murren said the company will continue to grow its premium mass segment while also boosting its Macau market share. According to analysts, MGM China took its share to 10.2 percent in the third quarter of 2019, up from 9 percent in the previous quarter and just 7 percent a year ago.

"Once you start getting towards the main summit, it starts to build, and we're starting to see continued strength in that premium-mass business coming into the fourth quarter," Murren said. "There's still some business transitioning out of VIP to mass, but really what we're focused on is making sure that the product is right."



MGM Cotai continues to receive international kudos on its design. The Kohn Pedersen Fox-designed building won the top spot in the annual Emporis Skyscraper Award program; MGM Cotai, the enormous \$3.4 billion casino-hotel-resort in Macau, designed in collaboration with Wong

Tung & Partners Ltd., was selected by the jurors as the best new tall building.

The judges cited the building's "innovative design."

"The unique structure is based on the idea of nine Chinese jeweler's boxes stacked upon each other, forming two interconnected towers," they stated. "The asymmetrical design and golden coloring create a dynamic and glamorous appearance, which fits the atmosphere of Macau."

"MGM Cotai also offers the 'Spectacle,' a multi-functional area with the world's largest free-span, grid-shaped glass roof."

—Patrick Roberts

WHAT: MGM Cotai

OWNER: MGM China

SIZE: 35 Stories, 1,400 rooms and suites, 200,000-square-foot casino

BUDGET: \$3.4 billion

OPENED: February 2018

ARCHITECTS: Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, Wong Tung & Partners Ltd.

Art direction in the Mansion by MMAD



Hail to the Queen

• Emerald Queen Casino, Tacoma, Washington •

The Emerald Queen Casino balances the eye-catching flash of a Las Vegas-style resort with memorable references to Puyallup tribal culture.

The new facility relocated the tribe's gaming operations to a highly visible urban site along Interstate 5 near downtown Tacoma, Washington. The full-service 310,000-square-foot gaming facility includes 100,000 square feet of slots and table games, five food and beverage venues, two parking garages with direct access to the gaming floor, and a 21,000-square-foot, 2,000-seat event center.

The lobby provides guests with an impressive entry and features with expansive ceilings, elegant lighting elements, culturally informed design finished with sleek materials.

The project utilizes an innovative and unprecedented solution to fitting a large gaming facility gracefully into the urban fabric. Due to site and infrastructure constraints, the gaming floor and amenities are strategically placed four levels above the ground floor, spanning over city streets and supported structurally by two parking garages.

Emerald Queen Casino reclaims lost space above the restrictive city grid, effectively modifying the footprint of traditional gaming. It breaks the rules of traditional gaming design and paves the way to a new future for urban tribal gaming facilities.

The casino also positions itself as one of the major players in the gaming industry by incorporating daylight wherever possible to maintain guests' connection to the natural world—even on the gaming floor.

These approaches create a breathtaking building, highly visible from the highway, with panoramic views of downtown Tacoma and the culturally significant Mount Rainier and Puget Sound.

The design team collaborated with Puyallup cultural leaders to develop an interior design concept that honors and tells the story of this relationship between culture and tribal land base. Interior elements subtly weave in and draw influence from the textures, shapes and colors of the mountain, river, forests and sound that define Puyallup tribal land.

"We reference tribal history from Mount Rainier down to the Puyallup River to Puget Sound," Cuningham Group Principal Brett Ewing said. "That was our baseline, the thread we followed through the building, using very subliminal colors and textures. We use colors and textures and linework in a way that subtly emulates a river and reflects it in a tasteful, subliminal way."

Traditional and contemporary Puyallup art, patterns and language are also incorporated into the design. From the bold black and red exterior to the organic textures that give life to the interior, a powerful, modern and resilient Puyallup culture is expressed.

—Edward Healy

OWNER: Puyallup Tribe

DESIGNER/ARCHITECT: Cuningham Group Architecture, Inc.

INVESTMENT: \$60 million-plus

Smoky Mountain Majesty

• The Shops at Harrah's Cherokee, North Carolina •

Experientia Development Partners are in the pre-construction phase of a \$110 million, 233,000-square-foot retail, dining and entertainment promenade at Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort, nestled among the majestic Smoky Mountains near Asheville, North Carolina.

The Shops at Harrah's Cherokee sit at the main entrance of the resort and are adjacent to its new 720-room hotel and convention center, featuring 100,000 square feet of meeting space.

The Shops at Harrah's Cherokee will offer a diverse mix of retail, dining and entertainment experiences to draw guests from as far as three hours away. Experientia Development Partners will leverage the resort's embedded foot traffic and local tourism visitation to create a super-regional draw, including retail, dining and entertainment options that can't be found elsewhere in the Southeast. Exceptional customer service, convenience and a blend of regional and national tenants will combine to make this one of the area's most exciting retail destinations, drawing traffic from the upscale Atlanta market as well as Charlotte, Asheville, Bristol and Knoxville.

Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort is situated at the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and Blue Ridge Parkway, the busiest national park in the country with more than 11 million visitors annually.



In addition to the local draw, Harrah's Cherokee is tied to the Caesars Rewards marketing and reservation system, and is one of the most respected names in the gaming industry.

—Edward Healy

OWNER AND DEVELOPER: Experientia Development Partners North Carolina, LLC

OWNER: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

ARCHITECT: Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates, Inc. (SRSS)

OWNER'S REPRESENTATION: Gilbane Building Company

PRECONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR: AnderCorp

INVESTMENT: \$110 million

Rock Is Rising

• Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Atlantic City •

The saga of Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City came to an end in October 2014 when owner Carl Icahn shuttered the building. It was the nadir of the city's casino industry. Several other casinos closed, leaving only seven. Things looked pretty grim for the Boardwalk.

Jim Allen's interest was piqued. As chairman of Hard Rock International and a resident of the Atlantic City area, Allen recruited a couple of minority partners. Together they pulled the trigger, and Hard Rock purchased the former Taj in March 2017. But the race had just begun.

SOSH Architects welcomed the role of architect of record, leading the transformation of the hotel, casino, entertainment venue and restaurants in conjunction with Jeffrey Beers International for all podium design and Wimberly for hotel interiors. In less than a year, the team transformed the once-closed casino into a modern, vibrant and energetic entertainment destination.

The newly renovated property boasts an expansive gaming floor with 2,100 slots and 120 table games, a beautifully appointed high-limit gaming space, wood ceiling coffers with custom chandeliers, and glass column memorabilia cases to showcase Hard Rock's priceless collection.

The Hard Rock Cafe was centrally located within the property in a new 400-seat venue with improved indoor and outdoor stages, panoramic views of the ocean and direct Boardwalk access.

Hard Rock Live at Etes Arena was revamped to accommodate 7,000 guests. In addition, the new hotel and casino also features 2,000 renovated guest rooms and suites, 150,000 square feet of meeting and event space, an indoor pool, nightclub, marketplace, spa and VIP lounges.

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City opened on June 28, 2018. A little



more than a year later, it became the second highest-grossing casino in Atlantic City. Since the opening of Hard Rock and its neighbor Ocean Casino Resort, the Atlantic City casino industry has bounced back and is thriving.
—Patrick Roberts

WHAT: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Atlantic City, NJ

OWNER: Hard Rock

International

ARCHITECTS: SOSH Architects

SIZE: 4 million square feet

BUDGET: \$500 million

OPENED: June 2018



Ahead of the Game

• Miami Valley Gaming & Racing, Lebanon, Ohio •

Miami Valley Gaming & Racing is set to start growing again, with a \$100 million expansion project.

The Lebanon, Ohio racino, owned jointly by Delaware North and Churchill Downs Inc., is proposing to add a hotel, restaurant, parking garage and additional space for gaming machines.

The racino originally opened in December 2013 with 1,500 video lottery terminals; it now has more than 1,900 VLTs. The proposed expansion would add up to 250 additional gaming stations, bringing the total units in operation to about 2,200, while increasing the gaming floor space by 10,000 square feet.

"It's no secret that, with our continued success, we've been looking at the feasibility of a major expansion project for some time now," said Domenic Mancini, MVG president and general manager. "We're looking forward to

working with our state and local leaders to turn the proposal into reality."

The expansion project is expected to be completed in the first half of 2021. MVG currently employs more than 450 workers and is seeking to fill nearly 50 full-time and part-time positions, including buffet and fine dining cooks, dishwashers, special event attendants, security officers, IT network and system engineers and gaming technicians.

The proposed hotel will have 194 rooms, while the parking garage will have spaces for approximately 1,000 cars. The hotel will allow MVG to expand its market beyond Cincinnati and Dayton by attracting business from major cities within a few hours' drive, such as Columbus and Indianapolis. For the past several months, MVG has experienced parking constraints on busy weekends and holidays, and the garage will help address that, Mancini said.

Thalden Boyd Emery, an architecture firm based in Missouri, designed the original racino and has been retained to design and develop this expansion project.

In addition to its inventory of gaming machines, MVG has four restaurants, two bars, a 5/8-mile harness racetrack with indoor grandstand, and racing simulcast center.

—Edward Healy

OWNERS: Delaware North & Churchill Downs Inc.

ARCHITECT: TBE Architects (Thalden Boyd Emery)

INVESTMENT: \$100 Million

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Luxury Reimagined

• The Spa at Cache Creek Resort, Brooks, California •

The four-diamond Cache Creek Casino Resort, in California's Capay Valley, is constantly refining its non-gaming amenities. The latest example at the resort, owned and operated by the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, is The Spa at Cache Creek Resort, recently expanded and redesigned by HBG Design.

Drawing abundant inspiration from the surrounding agrarian landscape of valley and river, the design elegantly welcomes guests to the full-service spa experience with a rejuvenating palette of French gray, lavender and neutral tones, organic textures, a Himalayan salt wall to calm the senses, and whimsical lighting elements designed to enchant.

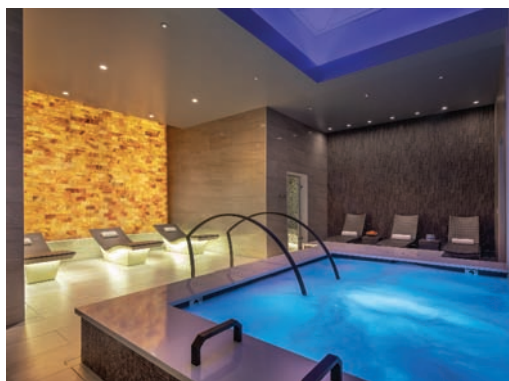
The subtle palette blends seamlessly with organic upholstery textures on custom-made furnishings and linen-like wall coverings, creating a light and airy setting. Fifty-four different types of high-end tile accent the spa to add intricate detail and touches of timeless glamour.

A focal point in the ladies' spa area is a custom oral-motif mosaic tile wall derived from a water-color piece by San Francisco Bay area artist Jen Garrido. Commissioned photography of the Capay Valley is featured throughout to create cohesion with the resort and awareness of the spa environment as a distinctive place of retreat and escapism.

Originally built in 2004, Cache Creek Resort's spa required a major redesign to meet the demand of the new 459-room hotel expansion at the resort, also designed by HBG Design.

Designers were challenged to transform and double the size of the existing 5,000-square-foot spa space into a 12,000-square-foot luxury spa layered in ambience, richness of texture and sensory experience. Offering a high-end, elegant residential feel and comfort, it enables guests to relax and be pampered in 11 treatment rooms, a full-service salon, and separate men's and women's lounges and aquathermal areas featuring whirlpools, steam rooms, saunas and cooling showers.

The treatment corridor features a river rock border and porcelain wood-look planked mooring. Dimensional wall tile continues along the hallway and into the treatment rooms, where light lavender and warm gray hues mix with brushed brass, adding a touch of luxury. Upgraded lighting features provide inviting and comfortable spaces.



Within the ladies' and men's wet areas, designers created a luxurious shower experience that fully meets strict California water conservation standards.

The team designed a water system with a combination of showerheads and body spray types controlled by diverters, to not exceed more than 2 gallons per minute between all showers. Working closely with the lighting consultant, designers were able to specify energy-efficient lamping that adhered to the California energy code.

Spa reception elegantly welcomes guests with book-matched marble-look porcelain slabs and a coffered ceiling clad in silver leaf wall covering.

—Frank Legato

OWNER: Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation

DESIGNER AND ARCHITECT: HBG Design

CONSULTANTS:

Spa Consultant – Blu Spas

Aquathermal Consultant – Design for Leisure

Art Consultant – Julie Coyle

Structural Engineering – Desimone Consulting Engineers

M/E/P Engineering – NV5

Lighting Consultant – Illuminating Concepts

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Davis Reed Construction

Happy Anniversary!

• Mystic Lake Center, Prior Lake, Minnesota •



It was some anniversary present.

When the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community's Mystic Lake Casino Hotel opened the Mystic Lake Center in 2018, it celebrated the property's first 25 years of operations.

Welcome to the encore. Two years later, the project is a big hit, drawing visitors in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul region to visual splendor.

Developed during WorthGroup's master plan of the entire 1.5-million-square-foot resort, the new Events Center and Hotel elevates the guest experience to a new level of sophistication. Guests are greeted in a three-story, 400-foot-long glass atrium leading to 70,000 square feet of versatile, tech-centric meeting space.

This first impression for patrons has been a lasting one, according to Bryan Hamlin, partner and chief design officer for the Denver, Colorado-based WorthGroup, which delivered the \$104 million project.

"On opening night, we heard comments that this design is so compelling, and as guests descended into the pre-function space, they made the decision on the escalator to book the space for their upcoming events, even before viewing the actual ballrooms," he says. "This has enabled the property to offer guests an unsurpassed meeting and event experience at Mystic Lake Casino within a versatile, functional design."

Hamlin says Mystic Lake offerings are so diverse, the owner created a separate interactive website to showcase and market the product.

The entire project is pleasing to the eye, Hamlin asserts.

"Utilizing expansive areas of glazing, the overall design concept dissolves typical physical

barriers between guests and nature,” he says. “It creates unexpected and continuous visual connectivity to beautiful panoramic views of the surrounding landscape and the property’s Meadows Golf Course.”

Hamlin also touts the transformative power of natural light. Guests within the entire 25,000-square-foot pre-function space enjoy natural light and continuous views of the changing seasons, while remaining comfortable through the use of 11,000 square feet of SageGlass electrochromic glass.

The sculptural design fuses architecture and interior design into a dynamic first expression of the future vision for the property as it begins its next 25 years of success, Hamlin says. “Sweeping forms of natural materials interweave with elegant illuminated chandeliers along the flowing lines of the ceiling 30 feet above the pre-function floor,” he indicates.

Cattails moving in the wind along the lake’s edge are translated into the motion of the building’s front façade. Raindrops on the lake’s surface and their rippling patterns of motion in the water are sculpted into circular forms of glass and light, floating within the pre-function space as chandeliers.

The guest’s entire journey, from the entry corridor to the pre-function space to the angled sun bay windows of the guest rooms, maximizes views of the earth and sky.

—Dave Bontempo

OWNER: Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
SIZE: 267,000 square feet
COST: \$104 million
DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE: The WorthGroup



Book It!

• The Book at Bally’s, Atlantic City •

One aspect of the sports-betting future arrived via The Book at Bally’s, which had its official coronation on the first Sunday of the NFL season.

It was a dream come true for fans who wanted a Vegas-style sportsbook in Atlantic City. The large-scale Book unleashes betting enthusiasm, with every NFL game being played at the same time. The large screens provide visual euphoria. The sportsbook, by far Atlantic City’s largest, has all the elements that inspire wagering largesse. Similar in size to the sportsbook at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, it carries a similar sense of indulgence. It also features the largest single viewing screen on the East Coast, a 98-by-18-foot high-resolution LED TV.

The Book offers an immersive, socially driven experience for sports fans with more than 15,200 square feet of sports betting space. The venue includes five private Fan Caves, available for private reservations with capacity for up to 24 people. The private rooms include high-resolution televisions that can be split into three different screens. Caves also include game consoles including an Xbox, as well as table service and food provided by Guy Fieri’s Guy’s Bar-B-Que

Joint, as well as AC Snack Shack.

The primary viewing area features 102 seats, 30 VIP seats, and seating for 28 at the bar rail, which will offer the latest video poker slots. The Caves increase the capacity to 280.

In the main viewing area, this facility has modernized the sports betting room concept. Leather chairs are comfortable and recline. Drinks can be placed on the arm rest. Significantly, there is generous leg room between the rows. The Book caters both to hardcore fans and casual observers, inviting an experience lasting several hours. Food and drinks can be purchased.

Giant screens enable games to be viewed either from the back of the book or simply walking in the area. The ability to attract viewers to the sportsbook area via the large screens is one of the most subliminal—and under-publicized—aspects of an exciting establishment.

There’s even a self-service beer wall.

This room is the brick-and-mortar be-all-to-end-all for Atlantic City sports wagering. If it ever adds a mobile-gaming component, it may corner the entire sportsbook market in Atlantic City.

—Dave Bontempo



WHAT: The Book at Bally’s
GRAND OPENING: September 8, 2019
SIZE: 15,228 square feet
ARCHITECTURAL TEAM: R2 Architects
CONSTRUCTION: Weatherby Construction
SEATING CAPACITY: 280
COST: \$7.5 million

A Walk in the Clouds

• The Strat Las Vegas •

Since it opened in 1992, the Stratosphere in Las Vegas has been known for its iconic “space needle.” At more than 1,140 feet high, it’s the tallest spire of its kind in the United States.

In 2017, Golden Entertainment acquired the Stratosphere, renamed it The Strat, and undertook a multimillion-dollar phased upgrade that’s now almost complete. The new look of the resort—which remained open throughout the upgrade—was meant not only to delight visitors, but to enliven the whole north end of the Vegas Strip.

The Strat’s former facade was “very imposing,” almost fortress-like, says Suzanne Couture, vice president of interior design for the Friedmutter Group, which was charged with reimagining and redesigning the iconic property. “We opened up the façade, pulled out some obstructive landscaping, and created a pedestrian-friendly plaza that’s much more inviting.”

Super-high-definition LED monitors also animate the exterior, along with playful sculptures, including “Look!” by Blaque Metal Works, three modernistic figures that seem to gaze, astonished, at the spectacular SkyPod. Bold new signage is white on a field of “Strat blue,” a crisp sky color chosen by Golden Entertainment CEO Blake Sartini.

“We’re telling a story of being above the clouds,” says Couture. “The tower is one of the only opportunities in Las Vegas where you can be that high up, and we wanted to capitalize on that. When you’re looking at the casino, you see tones of glowing blue, amber and bronze, all coming together.”

Inside, molecular light fixtures resembling clouds serve as wayfinders to guide guests through the resort’s various levels. Hotel rooms and suites got “a very nice facelift” with new furniture, drapes and finishes, plus a complete technology upgrade.

The comprehensive remodel also included the casino floor and the famous rotating restaurant, Top of the World, atop the spire, which gives diners a panoramic view of one of the world’s great skylines.

“We added a new palette, new custom carpet, and new furniture throughout for a fresher, lighter look,” says Couture of the glass-walled restaurant. “The color story there is almost ethereal, with tones of silver, light blues and pale bronzes to elevate that amazing view.”

For the fearless, the SkyPod is a literal jumping-off point. The SkyJump thrill ride lets daredevils climb into jumpsuits tethered to cables and leap into the air from a height of more than 800 feet.

There are plenty of “Instagram moments” in store for visitors to The Strat, says Couture. “So far, the response has been tremendous,” she adds. “We’re excited to continue with many other venues across the property.”

—Marjorie Preston



PROJECT: The Strat Hotel, Casino & SkyPod
OWNER: Golden Entertainment
DESIGNER: Friedmutter Group
ART CONSULTANT: Kevin Barry Fine Art
SIGNAGE: Young Electric Sign Company (Yesco)
“Look!” Sculpture: Nick Stiley, Adin Fly and James Talbert of Blaque Metal Works
INVESTMENT: Approximately \$100 million



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Wildhorse Resort Expansion (Rendering)
Pendleton, OR

ON THE
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Miami Valley Gaming Expansion (Rendering)
Lebanon, OH



Cher-Ae Heights Expansion (Rendering)
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• Encore Boston Harbor •

A new Wynn resort is always something special. Though the principal of the company isn't around anymore, the attention to detail found at Encore Boston Harbor is comparable to any other facility in the Wynn Resorts portfolio.

In fact, Encore Boston Harbor has select features found in all Wynn Resorts properties. The entryway carousel is also found in Las Vegas and Macau and is the "wow" factor at Boston Harbor.

The signature curved escalators take visitors up—instead of down, as they do in Las Vegas—to the Garden Café, the perfect place to overlook the lobby and people-watch.

Visitors to Encore Boston Harbor will recognize Sinatra, the upscale Italian restaurant that pays tribute to the Chairman of the Board. Start with Frank's Clams and work your way up to Ossobuco "My Way."

The property offers several Asian dining options including the familiar Red 8 or the new and intimate Mystique with a view of the Boston skyline.

The 600 rooms and suites are designed to impress every guest, from the "standard" Premier King to the ultra-luxurious Two Bedroom Residence, with more than 3,500 square feet of living space and views to the horizon. The amenities and technology in the rooms make a stay here comfortable and plugged in.

The 200,000-square-foot casino comes complete with more than 3,000 slots and 160 table games. It's bright and airy, with lots of elbow room. A mezzanine contains a large poker room, and the private high-limit area gives customers seclusion at the center of the action.

Parking is a breeze with a 3,000-space garage and lots of surface lots. And parking is free now, after an experiment with paid parking during Encore's opening months. The property can be reached via public transportation, shuttle services from major places in Boston and even a Harbor Shuttle that arrives at Encore Boston Harbor by water.

But it's the outside of Encore Boston Harbor that really wows visitors. The Harborwalk is a 7.5-acre park that follows the Mystic River. The site of Encore Boston Harbor previously held a chemical plant that operated for more than 100 years; Wynn Resorts spent \$60 million cleaning up the land, returning the waterfront to its natural state.

Harborwalk contains art installations, benches, lush gardens, an expansive event lawn, picnic park, viewing decks and shoreline paths. The view of the river and the city are spectacular. Turn around, and the signature curved glass building of Encore Boston Harbor beacons.

Encore Boston Harbor quickly became the gem of the Massachusetts gaming industry, and competes very comfortably with other New England and East Coast casinos. With the design and construction process and licensing hearings in the rearview mirror, Encore Boston Harbor is poised to bring the special brand of Wynn hospitality to the Bay State.

—Patrick Roberts



WHAT: Encore Boston Harbor

OWNER: Wynn Resorts

ARCHITECTS: Wynn Design & Development, DREAM Collaborative and Jacobs Architecture

CONTRACTOR: Suffolk

SIZE: 24 stories, 600 rooms and suites, 210,000-square-foot casino

OPENED: June 2019

BUDGET: \$2.6 billion



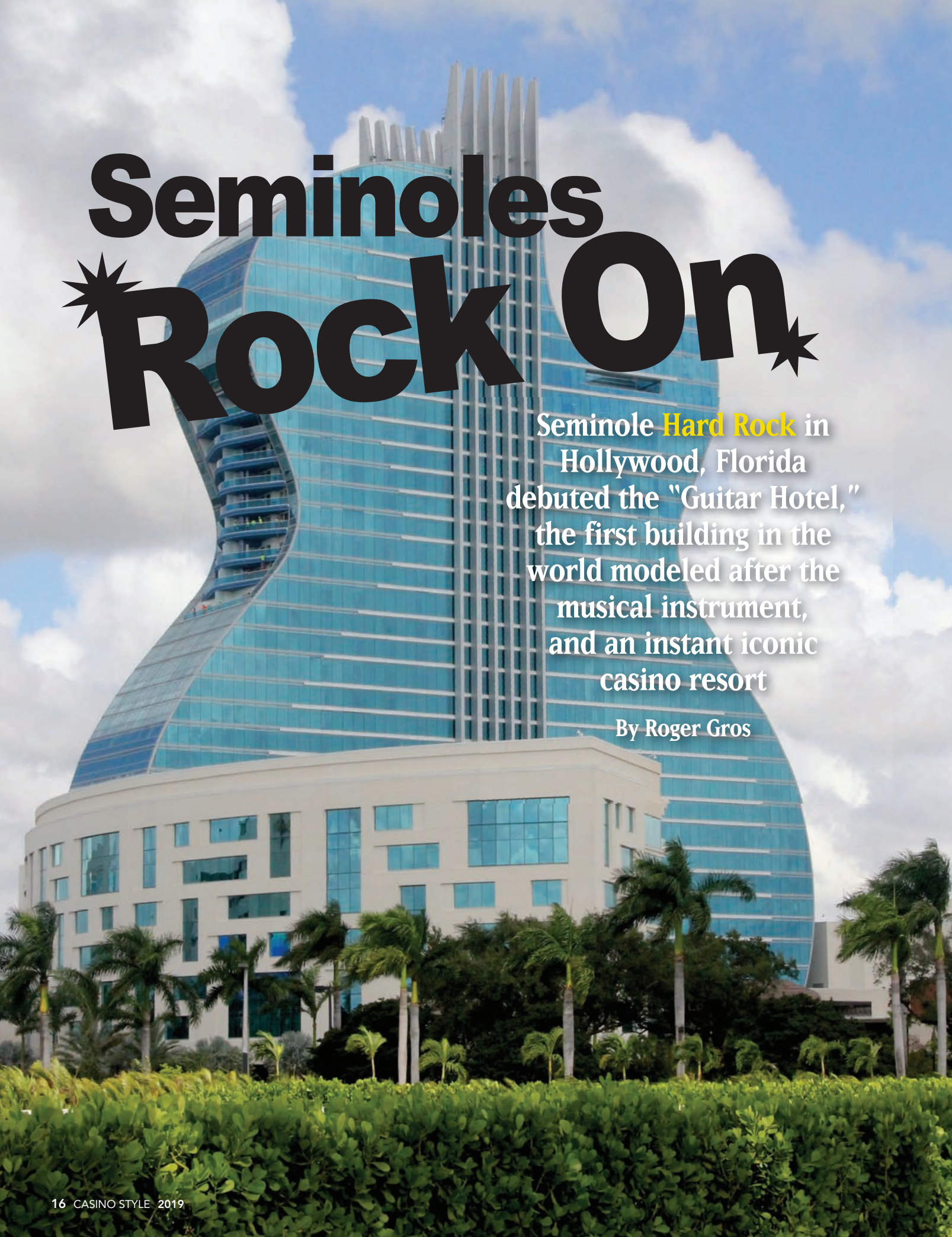
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A photograph of the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, Florida. The building is a tall, curved skyscraper with a blue glass facade and a white base. It has a unique, guitar-shaped design. The sky is blue with white clouds. In the foreground, there are green bushes and palm trees.

Seminoles *Rock On*

Seminole **Hard Rock** in Hollywood, Florida debuted the "Guitar Hotel," the first building in the world modeled after the musical instrument, and an instant iconic casino resort

By Roger Gros

When Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen approached the Seminole Nation tribal council about buying Hard Rock International in 2007, he was excited about the possibilities but warned them that there was a lot of work ahead.

“When I came up with the idea to buy Hard Rock,” he says, “I explained to the tribe that this is a long-term commitment. It will take time to grow the brand. This hotel has become the iconic statement of that relationship. The tribe owns Hard Rock and we’re creating something we want the whole world to see. And now the brand is coming up on its 50th anniversary.”

Hard Rock International, chaired by Allen, is experiencing a growth spurt.

Gaming expansion has been one of the core elements of Hard Rock’s strategic thinking since the hotel and restaurant chain was acquired by the Seminole Tribe.

Hard Rock currently is comprised of 259 venues, including owned and licensed hotels, casinos, shops and cafes, in 75 countries. The company also owns the Hard Rock Cafe on the Strip (but not the off-Strip Hard Rock Las Vegas, which is being rebranded under new ownership as a Virgin casino hotel).

“The original facility was beautiful and we had a lot of success with it, but we wanted to create something that was more of an integrated resort—something more than just a locals casino. That was the goal, and the budget mirrored that thought process, and hopefully the guests will love it.”

—Jim Allen, CEO, Seminole Gaming

Image is Everything

The most dramatic evidence of the growth spurt was presented in October when the tribe’s original casino, Seminole Hard Rock in Hollywood, Florida, unveiled the company’s most dramatic project to date: a guitar-shaped hotel, appropriately named the Guitar Hotel. It’s the first building in the world with that shape, and it comes complete with LED “strings” that literally touch the sky—30,000 feet up.

Allen’s hotel vision took more than 10 years to come to fruition, but the building is quickly becoming an icon in South Florida, attracting thousands of curious visitors on opening day—including a star-studded cast of guitar smashers, Hard Rock’s signature celebration that opens all its properties.

Steve Peck is an associate principal with Klai Juba Wald, the architects of the project, and was involved from the start. He says Allen’s idea of a guitar-shaped hotel was first taken as a concept, not a complete reality.

“We did a bunch of renderings that were referencing guitars. The hotel was just your standard square hotel, and then we added fins, and those fins gave the profile of a guitar,” he explains.

But Allen wanted to be a little more literal.

“Jim asked, ‘What if we just went big? What if the entire hotel is in the shape of a guitar?’” says Peck. “We didn’t say no, but we told him that there would be a premium cost to do this.



Johnny Depp was just one of hundreds of celebrities who gathered to celebrate the opening of the Guitar Hotel

At night, LED lights soar 30,000 feet high to light the way to Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood



“So we got a contractor and found out what the premium would be and brought it back to him.”

Allen wasn’t dissuaded by the extra millions that it would cost.

“We’re in South Florida,” he said. “This is the headquarters of Hard Rock International. We’ve got to go big.”

Allen believes that this \$1.5 billion expansion elevates the Seminole Hard Rock to a destination resort level.

“The original facility was beautiful and we had a lot of success with it, but we wanted to create something that was more of an integrated resort—something more than just a locals casino,” Allen explains. “That was the goal, and the budget mirrored that thought process, and hopefully the guests will love it.”

Design and construction of such a building was complicated and time-consuming. Strict Florida building codes—including a 450-foot height limit due to the flight path of nearby Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood Airport and high wind resistance standards—had to be addressed.

Klai Juba Wald, which also designed the original Seminole projects in Hollywood and Tampa, brought in interior designers the Rockwell Group and landscape designers EDSA. They also retained New York-based DeSimone Consulting Engineers to put the puzzle together. Allen remembers a conversation with the founder.

“(Owner) Vince DeSimone called me and told me I lost my mind,” laughs Allen. “But he did a great job as usual.”

DeSimone accomplished the difficult task, which at times required support columns at wildly different angles, so as much as 40 degrees.

The project completely changed even the existing Hollywood Hard Rock casino, which remained open throughout the three years of construction. The result is more than 1,400 rooms and suites, 195,000 square feet of gaming space, a 13.5-acre pool and lagoon experience with overwater cabanas, an ultra-luxury spa and fitness center that spans 42,000 square feet, more than a dozen restaurants, multiple bars, an elegant spa and many other non-gaming amenities, including a new 7,000-seat live performance venue, Hard Rock Live.

Allen compliments the guests who continued to arrive despite construction barriers.

“Our customers have been so loyal and tremendously supportive of what we do here,” he says. “But they were very patient. One day a wall was here, the next day it’s over there. We moved restaurants around, we moved roads. So to put all this major construction behind us is great for the property but more importantly for our guests.”

Detail-Oriented

Peck says the secret to the success of the Guitar Hotel was paying attention to details.

“You have to get through approvals and the building department,” he says. “You have to make sure that the structural drawings are being met. You have to make sure that we’re not having dead-end corridors, because the shape of the tower requires a few other considerations.”

The siting of the building was determined by the height, which was limited due to FAA regulations. And the shape of the building determined how many rooms it would accommodate, with the goal of around 300.

“We took the floor plate, we systematically went from level 4 all the way



The existing casino floor at Hard Rock Hollywood was totally redesigned and expanded



If 7,000 seats can be called intimate, it’s the new Hard Rock Live! theater



The standard room at Hard Rock Hollywood is anything but standard

up to 33, and with that comes the number of keys,” Peck says. “But we go by modules, not necessarily keys. As we went up, we put a matrix together, and by way of the fluctuation of the guitar tower, when it goes from wide to narrow to medium—I call it the hips, and the waist and the shoulders.”

At the “waist” there are some spectacular suites with balconies, but on the top floor is where the real “wow” factor kicks in.

“We have two pools and two suites on level 33,” he explains. “The suites are probably over 3,000 square feet. They’re symmetrical, one side of the tower to the



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"We said that we're going to have a wonderful opportunity for the customer to look over to Miami, to look over to Fort Lauderdale, to have a pool right at their feet, and that's exactly what we did."

—Steve Peck, Associate Principal, Klai Juba Wald

other, and we said that we're going to have a wonderful opportunity for the customer to look over to Miami, to look over to Fort Lauderdale, to have a pool right at their feet, and that's exactly what we did."

Food and beverage was a focal point of the expansion, and Peck says attention was paid to every kind of customer.

"They had multiple interests in trying to carve out signature restaurants for every level," he says. "So, it's everything from the food court to high-end steak and seafood. And over the course of time, we developed all these restaurants that covered every taste and wallet in the market. There is every gamut in this place, and we just methodically picked away at each restaurant, one at a time, got our team together. There are bars and nightclubs. We all collaborated to come together one at a time. While not every one of these 20 restaurants happened at the same time, they were all ready on opening day."

Retail wasn't ignored either. A promenade hosts an eclectic variety of merchandise and services—including the traditional Hard Rock gift shop.

"It's a really good mix of locals and people who have been involved with the tribe," Peck explains. "Maybe one tenant has something up in West Palm Beach, maybe it's a handbag store or a sunglasses shop. Seminole Gaming put that all together. Our role was to talk to the owners, determine what their budget is, and we're going to build this out as fast as we can."

"As part of the master plan, the Rockwell Group out of New York City was the one who put that whole retail section together. It's got a serpentine layout; it's not a straight shot. It's got high walls and low walls. Anything below 12 feet was open to design, and of course, the whole thing is entirely covered with a skylight. So the days of dark casinos are a thing of the past. This place is flooded with natural light, and it's very comfortable for a demographic that enjoys shopping and walking and looking."

The "wow" factor of the arrival is a feature called the Oculus. Peck says it took a long time to design because there were a lot of considerations.

"We committed to a diameter of about 140 feet," he says. "Over time—meaning at least three years, if not four or five—concepts came together. Rockwell Group has a subsidiary called Lab, and they're more on the technical nature of things. We decided that it would be water, projection, fire, music, entertainment, a show on every hour. We had countless meetings on how to pull this together. And every time you come up with a scheme, it comes with a new budget. The fire was value-engineered out. It didn't make it. There was a concern that the largest fire display in the world was going to be a little bit concerning to the fire department."

"For the water, we worked with WET, out of Burbank, California. People know WET by way of the Bellagio fountains, and we worked with them to come up with a concept and to pursue it and to push it and to engineer it and to see how it would come together. Other than fire, they incorporated the other aspects, as well as the programming content to do a show. So there's projection, there's music and it's all choreographed. We knew we were going to make a commitment to the Oculus, and we knew that it was important because it was at the front door."

The true gem of the property is the Oasis Tower, a low-rise building that



The Oculus is a water feature that welcomes visitors to Hard Rock Hollywood



The SwimUp Suite in the Oasis Tower is the ultimate in luxury



The retail promenade features an eclectic selection of merchandise

overlooks the pool and the Guitar Hotel.

"There are three components in the Oasis Tower," Peck says. "The first component is the first floor. It's a single-loaded corridor, which means the entire corridor is on one side of the building and it's serpentine-shape. Every room on the pool side is a suite—your own private villa, you walk out the door, you have two chaise lounge chairs, and you just walk down into the pool. And there's eight of those. On the second level and up, it's two-sided; now it becomes a double-loaded corridor. There are rooms on one side, and there are rooms on the other. The rooms on the pool



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On the horizon is a casino in Gary, Indiana, a proposal to build a project in Rockford, Illinois, and a second tribal casino in California. Internationally, Hard Rock is one of three finalists for an integrated resort in Greece at the former Hellikon Airport near Athens.

side—every one of them—from floors 2 through 8, has a balcony. Some people would say that that is actually the better tower to stay in.”

But the star of the show is the pool, for which Peck credits the design team at EDSA.

“They schemed together all the pieces and the parts to have multiple pools,” he explains. “We have a VIP pool, with a swim-up lake, and a general pool, which is for the customers staying at the hotel. We’ve got the swimming lake, which is three acres in and of itself. We’ve got a swimming river, we’ve got an area for a stage and outdoor concerts. There are multiple waterfalls. We’ve got cabanas that are literally built by the tribe, based on 400 years of construction, and those are what we call the ‘chickee’ huts. And then we have the Bora-Bora experience—20 cabana structures that we built from scratch. Every one of them includes 360-degree pools with a six-inch wet deck, a four-foot pool, and your privacy. Each of them has its own restroom. They are side-by-side, and you’re not going to get a better view of the tower, from that location.”

Hollywood and Beyond

But Hollywood Hard Rock is only the latest in new and improved facilities. Two weeks before, Hard Rock completed an expansion of the nation’s most profitable casino, Hard Rock Tampa. The following week, Hard Rock Hotel Los Cabos opened in Mexico, and in early November Hard Rock Sacramento at Fire Mountain debuted. (See page 24.)

Allen says the Tampa expansion was important to a casino that is one of the most successful in the country in terms of gross gaming revenue.

“We just did an \$800 million expansion of the Hard Rock in Tampa,” he says. “And it came out great. There are those that think Tampa is prettier than Hollywood. They’re different architectural palliates, but at the same high level of quality, materials, fit and finish. What we created in Atlantic City certainly made a major statement in that market. It’s what we’ve been doing for a long time, but

it’s certainly different than the traditional Hard Rock Cafe.”

A year earlier, Hard Rock Atlantic City opened, just nine months after the purchase of the former Trump Taj Mahal was completed. Just recently, the property became the second-highest performing casino in the market.

But although Allen is proud of the property itself, he isn’t happy with Atlantic City and New Jersey government.

“Candidly, we’re disappointed in Atlantic City,” he says. “There’s no other way to say it. I received so much criticism for putting half a billion dollars into this project. We didn’t go borrow that money. Seminole Hard Rock Entertainment wrote a check for \$510 million in cash. There’s no debt on the facility. We do have minority partners who worked with us. There were all kinds of promises that Trenton and CRDA and the city made. And none of them were kept. I think Atlantic City is in worse shape today than it was two years ago. And that’s a shame.”

Allen traces this Hard Rock growth spurt to management changes made several years ago.

“We were really able to restructure the company,” he says. “We expanded the hotel and casino divisions. We never want to forget the cafes and the relationships with our franchise partners, but the restaurant business is very difficult on a global basis.”

On the horizon is a casino in Gary, Indiana, proposals to build casinos in Rockford, Illinois and Bristol, Virginia, and a second tribal casino in California.

Internationally, Hard Rock is one of three finalists for an integrated resort in Greece at the former Hellikon Airport near Athens.

“We are competing in Athens,” Allen says. “Three submitted, but we’ve been told verbally that only two have qualified to be the finalists, ourselves and Mohegan Sun. We respect Mohegan. I worked directly for Sol Kerzner when we built it, so I know what was created there back in 1995. We know their facility and respect them, but we have a lot more experience internationally. We’re in 75 countries around the world and have been doing that for almost 50 years. We have vast



experience working with local culture, government, currencies. When the dollar is strong people think that's good for our business. The opposite is true; it's better when the dollar is weaker. When companies haven't experienced that, it's a learning curve. There's no learning curve with Hard Rock International."

Hard Rock has also won a bid to build an IR near Barcelona in Catalonia, although Allen admits that with political upheaval in Catalonia, the company has more work to do.

Allen says the guitar theme will be replicated in Mexico City and possibly in Japan, where the company has been laser-focused on the Hokkaido prefecture. While it's not the biggest region in Japan, Allen says it's still a worthwhile effort.

"My analogy has always been, everyone who trains for the Olympics wants to win the gold medal," he says. "But there's nothing wrong with a silver or a bronze. We felt we had a better chance to plant our flag in Hokkaido than either Osaka or Tokyo, so we've spent a lot of time working with local government, vendors and communities."

Meanwhile, Hard Rock International has its eyes on the Las Vegas Strip, and the timing would appear to be right for the global gaming and hospitality giant to make a move.

Eldorado Resorts, which is buying Caesars Entertainment, has said at least one of Caesars' eight destinations on the Strip is likely to be sold after Eldorado completes its \$17.3 billion acquisition of the gaming giant sometime in the first half of 2020. Observers have identified a number of well-known Caesars names that could wind up on the block: Bally's and

Planet Hollywood, to name two, and possibly Paris.

In a recent interview with Bloomberg Radio, Allen said the Strip is "certainly" on the company's radar. "We look at this as a great opportunity for our brand."

Allen said he finds Planet Hollywood "very interesting" and believes Bally's also is "one of the possibilities," given it's located on "one of the most legendary corners" on the Strip.

Allen explains to *GGB* that although interesting, the rights to the Hard Rock name in Las Vegas still have to be clarified, and nothing will happen until the original Hard Rock Las Vegas, never a part of Hard Rock International, closes for renovation and rebranding to a Virgin hotel in February.

Still, a Las Vegas presence for Hard Rock seems to be inevitable.

"I think it would be good for them," says Michael Parks, senior vice president of real estate giant CBRE and a member of its gaming group. "With Las Vegas being one of the most recognizable leading markets in the world it shows they're a true player in the global gaming arena."

Brendan Bussmann, a partner with Global Market Advisors, says a Strip asset could give Hard Rock a "leg up" as it competes for one of those highly coveted licenses.

"Nevada still holds the gold standard of that (gaming) regulatory structure, (and) the Japanese have definitely signaled throughout this process that they want a strong regulatory market," he says. "Anyone licensed here can operate in a much more meaningful way in Japan."

The reason for the Hard Rock success is simple, according to Allen.

"We've got the best balance sheet in the business," he says. "And we've got the support of a great tribal council that encourages us to invest and make the business stronger."



The Long and Winding Road

Persistence pays off for California tribe with a Hard Rock casino hotel near Sacramento

By Roger Gros

The Estom Yumeka Maidu Tribe of the Enterprise Rancheria never lost hope in the 17 years that it took to persuade the state and federal governments that the tribe indeed met the criteria to open a casino in California. And the end of that road arrived in late October, when the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain debuted to rave reviews.

And to make it all the more sweeter, the tribe employed another tribe, the Seminoles of Florida, to help build and operate the casino.

"This project is the first of its kind, with two tribes joining together to bring this integrated resort to life," Enterprise Chairwoman Glenda Nelson said at the grand opening. "We are proud of our partnership with Hard Rock and the Seminole Tribe, and we are enthusiastic to continue collaborating to provide guests with an unparalleled entertainment destination experience."

Mark BIRTHA, the highly respected gaming executive chosen by Seminole Gaming to lead the Sacramento project, said it was a very emotional day.

"The tribal members were literally pinching themselves," he said. "This is something that they have been dreaming about, and to see it come to life has been extraordinary. And what has been more satisfactory for me was to hear how they considered themselves very fortunate and blessed to have the vision to partner with the Seminole Tribe of Florida to bring the Hard Rock here."

The experience was similar for the Friedmutter Group Architects, which had been working with the tribe for many of those 17 years. Suzanne Couture, vice president of interior design, says there were many partners, investors and master plans along the way, but until Seminole Gaming came along, nothing had jelled.

"We could see how excited the tribe was to have an internationally recognized brand added to the mix," she says. "This was a huge turning point for them, and allowed them to see where they were going to be able to position themselves inside of that market. We knew it was real once that relationship was built."

Luckily for Friedmutter, they already had a relationship with Seminole. Joe Emanuele, Hard Rock's senior vice president of design and construction, once worked for Friedmutter, so the respect is mutual. Bob Dollar, senior vice president with Friedmutter, says it was the perfect fit.

"We consider ourselves to be an extension of Hard Rock," he says. "We try to work almost as their in-house architects and designers. We listen to them. We go to all their meetings. We're hearing the program and the design direction evolve as it's happening."

BIRTHA says Hard Rock Sacramento has raised the bar in a crowded gaming market.

"Along with the recognizable brand," he says, "we've opened up this building at \$450 million-plus with absolutely amazing finishes and a great product. It is truly an integrated destination resort with all the services and amenities and the quality that you would expect of an IR."

Dollar says the first thing that changed when the Seminole partnership was



Hard Rock and tribal officials celebrate the grand opening of Hard Rock Sacramento with the traditional "guitar smash"



inked was the addition of a hotel.

"In that market, you've got many existing properties within a 50- or 100-mile radius or, with many different names that have been established over the years," he says. "But with Hard Rock, they were confident they could fill the hotel rooms."

BIRTHA says the idea was to give visitors a wide range of experiences.

"We wanted to offer all of the amenities including hotel, gaming, food and beverage, meeting space, entertainment, spa, pool... so that people would come here not only to have the gaming experience but also a non-gaming experience," he says. "And that's where the industry has evolved into. And putting the Hard Rock brand on the property appeals to a large number of people who may not have gaming-specific needs. So we wanted to have a size and scope that would cater to everybody in the marketplace, whether they're coming here to play slots or tables or they just want to have a great meal and stay in a great hotel to have a weekend getaway. We wanted to have more than slots in a box."

Like all Hard Rock properties, Sacramento has several "wow" features.

"The marquee board we have out front, it's just so dynamic and exciting," he says. "It's definitely a Kodak moment—or an Instagram moment these days. People walk in the door, and there's another wow factor of the exploding guitar on the ceiling. The extraordinary finishes of the property just create a real wow experience. And it's those authentic experiences that rock what we deliver."

Developing those "wow" factors was a true collaboration, says Couture.

"For the exploding guitar, we worked with a variety of people and organizations," she says. "The decorative lighting and audio-visual elements extend all the way through from the main entry to the Hard Rock Cafe feature bar. The exploding guitar has fire-like colors on it, and licking flames coming out of it. It's just an amazing decorative light fixture piece that we really developed with Hard Rock and all of their great design resources that they have in house along with custom fabricators. We showed every element to the tribe along the way and got their feedback and input on it."

Most important to the tribe and to the casino was instilling the corporate culture that has been made famous at every Hard Rock facility, whether it be a cafe, a hotel or a casino.

"We want to save the planet, take time to be kind, and all the other mantras Hard Rock has become known for," says BIRTHA. "We bring those things to life, and I think our employees here since the opening get to experience it. They had a lot of fun. They work hard, they get to know the brand. We bring our corporate people in from all around the world. What is important to the Hard Rock brand, to the company, to the vision, to the philanthropy that we do to community relations and the focus on delivering these incredible experiences, is not about selling commodities. We sell experiences."

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Taste Is Trending

Top 5 food & beverage trends influencing restaurant design today

By Paul Heretakis

Food and beverage trends come and go, influenced by market conditions, labor, food costs or hopefully the desire to be unique and different.

Las Vegas once defined dining trends and food programs; there was no hotter market. Restaurant design, ultra lounges and menus were all re-defined and changed the way we ate across the globe. Las Vegas influenced the world. Our current trends are not as ambitious, but they're still relevant.

Fast Casual Everything

The labor market influences dining more than any other factor today. Labor shortages and union costs both affect how food is cooked and presented. Fortunately this has brought us the food hall, which is far preferable to the food court that existed for so many decades.

Food halls can take on the look of fresh markets, food trucks or mini-restaurants that bring the cooking out front to the people, with ingredients prepared in a healthy manner right before your eyes, cooked to order. These areas tend to

be very active and exciting—think Block 16 at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas or Eataly (above) in New York. They are totally visually stimulating—you want to be there and be part of the excitement. They don't come off as low-cost dining options, but feel much more upscale and appealing.

Localized upscale food trucks have taught people that great food can come from little places, and that's translated well to the food halls. Exciting food served in exciting environments! It's a win for everyone.

The Hidden Restaurant

Beauty and Essex at the Cosmopolitan as well as Greene St. Kitchen at the Palms are great examples of the “hidden restaurant.” Beauty and Essex is concealed behind an anonymous back door in a pawn shop, while Greene St. is accessed through a graffiti-decorated arcade. They both set the mood that you're about to enter a new and different dining experience.

The design and concept carry through to the dining rooms, so you get caught up in the experience. What would it be like to dine in a former pawn shop? Or an arcade from yesteryear that a graffiti artist friend helped to redeco-

rate? These are fun and unexpected ways to dine. The concepts can skew either high-end or more approachable.

These offerings also give marketing departments great opportunities, since they aren't your typical dining establishments. Because they're somewhat hidden, the message needs to get out. Otherwise you'll never find them, and miss out on a special evening.



Dinner and a Show

Once again, we'll mention the highly influential Cosmopolitan, which is often on the cutting edge of trends. Rose. Rabbit. Lie. is a great example of an experiential supper club that perfectly balances entertainment and dining. The food is great, and everyone walks away entertained and feeling good about the evening.

A new supper club will open at the Bellagio shortly, called the Mayfair. Supper-club entertainment can vary, including tableside magicians, trapeze artists, dance vignettes and acrobats. The activities can take place in cages, overhead or built into the wall; the key is to have multiple focal points scattered about the dining room. It's great fun for couples and larger groups, and really makes for a more open and social dinner.

The design of such interiors can be moody, with purple lighting and misting smoke, or more upscale and traditional like the Rabbit. At times the show events change the room's appearance and everyone is expected to stop and watch. Other times, they're just background visuals. A DJ usually accompa-

nies the effects and helps the evening flow with highs and lows of energy.



Rose. Rabbit. Lie. is an experiential supper club that combines entertainment with great food

Another Local Restaurant in Vegas

The new trend is to take a restaurant with a good reputation in the hometown you live in, put it in the Xerox machine, blow it up and out, and put it on the Las Vegas Strip. Why? I don't know. Why would I hop on a plane and go to the same restaurant 10 minutes from my home?

There was a time when the industry would invent new menus, beverages and experiences. Then, as designers we'd be challenged to create spaces that were new and original. Fix, Aqua and many others turned the design world upside down. New materials, detailed ceilings and open facades challenged designers and paved the way for us to think differently and to push the boundaries.

Those were the days that Las Vegas and Dubai would compete for the cover of design magazines each month. Proudly, most months Las Vegas graced the covers with the most beautiful spaces ever designed. Money was no object—the only thing that counted was giving the customer an incredible memory to take home and carry them over until their next trip back.

Everything Small Is Big Again!

Small-format restaurants are a big hit and offer guests greater variety and experiences. Wynn and Galaxy in Macau both do this very successfully. Ramen bars for 12, yakatori for 20 and a small French cafe for 45 people are the norms. Galaxy has more than 85 restaurants and bars, and most have fewer than 75 seats.

The lines are long, but the food and designs are worth the wait. In such small spaces design can let loose. You can spend a week there and never eat your way through the property's restaurants. Some are focused on female retail shoppers, others on bridal parties only, with all the flowers made of delicious sweets. Such focused food and design can really make guests feel special.

Celebrity Chefs

It's a trend that's been around for a while and just won't die: the celebrity chef. As long as you have Facebook, you can brag to your friends how much better your life is than theirs because you're at a certain restaurant. It's too bad the designs aren't as nice as they used to be in those chef-driven restaurants. So live in the moment, not online. The food is better.

Our challenge is to set the trends, not follow them. We must challenge ourselves to strive for the new and different. Push the boundaries. Focus on the guests. Exceed their expectations. If we make them dream about their next trip to Las Vegas, we'll always be relevant and desirable.



Food superstar Gordon Ramsay recently opened a "Hell's Kitchen" experience at Caesars Palace



Paul Heretakis, RA, vice president of Westar Architects, has more than 30 years of experience overseeing hospitality design, integrated resorts and mixed-use master planning projects throughout the world. His focus and direction has established Westar Architects as a key player in hospitality design as he continues to work with many of the largest gaming companies in the industry. His portfolio includes more than 1,000 casino, restaurant, retail and hotel projects throughout the U.S., Europe and Southeast Asia, many of which have been featured in industry books and magazines.

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BINGO to Boffo!



The Sycuan hotel received a rare four-star rating from AAA just after opening



The expansion of the Sycuan casino outside of San Diego is like coming home for the tribe

By Dave Bontempo

What an ascent. Cody Martinez chuckles, recalling the childhood root beer float memory.

It sprang from the concession stand of the bingo hall, where he'd grown up on the Sycuan reservation near San Diego. The drink held a dreamy enticement, the barometer of scoring big.

"The bingo hall was right in my backyard," he indicates. "Sometimes after school when the bus had dropped me off, I was able to get one of those root beer floats. That was a unique thrill for me. You know, we have a strong sense of community here, and I'd say there are at least two dozen employees still around who remember me during that time. They have seen me grow up from being a school-age kid."

And now look. Three decades later, the boy became Chairman Martinez, 38, and head of the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation. Early this year, the group he leads unveiled a major casino expansion on the land where the bingo hall once stood as its cornerstone.

There is 500,000 square feet of additional property space, 60,000 of it earmarked for gaming. There's an award-winning 12-story hotel, a pool, cabanas and night life.

The innovative project cost roughly \$226 million, transformed the gaming identity of the tribe and features, among other amenities, several new restaurants.

That's a lot of root beer floats.



The extensive pool area, complete with a lazy river, has delighted guests since the Sycuan grand opening

We are learning new things as we grow into being a destination resort, a switch from being a hometown gaming house.”

—Cody Martinez, Chairman, Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation

Bold Strides

The expansion marked Sycuan as a high-profile player in population-rich Southern California. Targeting local and regional markets, this move reflects recent trends of bringing Las Vegas to California, thus retaining a lucrative patron base via glamour-laden staycations.

The tribe went full scale. It employed HBG Design, the renowned architecture and design company based in Memphis with an office in San Diego and a coveted niche in tribal-gaming circles.

The rollout changed the pace of operations, comparable to a major sport in which the speed of play intensifies. Raised stakes and enhanced stature mark this transition to a major stage.

The new era produced several gaming puzzle pieces.

“When you get into the region with Pechanga and other major resorts, we don’t have the idea that we will directly compete with them but we can be the premier gaming resort in San Diego County,” Martinez says. “We are an all-inclusive gaming resort, and will give you an excellent reason to drive two or three hours and stay with us.

“We are thrilled with the expansion and we will continue to strive to be aggressive,” he adds, assessing the property’s first six months of post-expansion performance. “We are learning new things as we grow into being a destination resort, a switch from being a hometown gaming house.”

By renovation standards, this was massive. An amount exceeding \$100 million is considered a decent-sized venture. This total could actually build a facility from scratch.

The large operation breeds a delicate juggling act. On the financial side, higher expenses accompany more profits. In the operations realm, bells and whistles share space with peace and quiet. Slot-playing boomers blend with app-driven millennials.

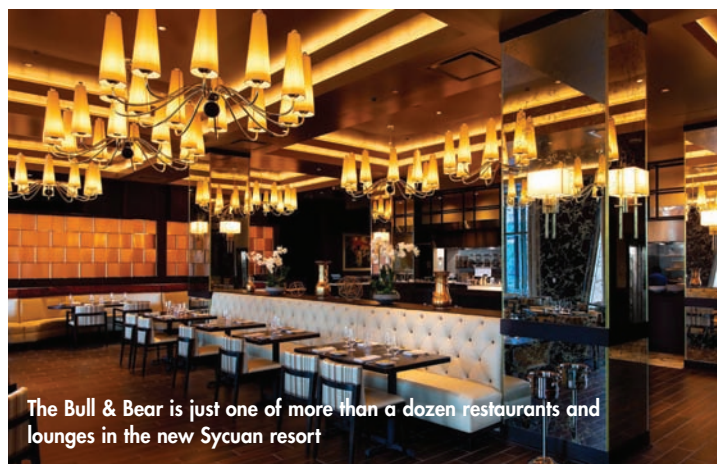
“We are trying to find the sweet spot,” Martinez indicates.

That sweet spot, denoting balance, is worthwhile. The restaurants, pool and upscale hotel lure an amenity-driven demographic, while the property seeks to retain core clientele.

“We want to attract gamers who might normally not come, and they may want to bring their kids,” Martinez says. “At the same time, you don’t want to alienate the traditional customers. We don’t want the gaming floor turned into a playground.”

Martinez knows that the 55-and-over crowd remains “the base of the cake,” but that slot revenues can’t be counted on as the main driver forever.

There looks to be room for everything. The 12-story hotel was well received, obtaining a rare AAA Four-Diamond Inspector rating awarded to less than 7 percent of hotels inspected by AAA. The balconies with views overlooking the mountains, along with the pools, cabanas and swim-up bars, suggest non-gaming affluence. Yet there are also many opportunities to play, grab food quickly and not miss a beat.



The Bull & Bear is just one of more than a dozen restaurants and lounges in the new Sycuan resort



The food court at Sycuan eschewed national brands in favor of local San Diego eateries

How It Was Built

Sycuan tapped the services of a trusted partner to orchestrate the vision. HBG Design was lead resort planner, designer and architect-of-record for the Sycuan Casino Resort expansion project.

“We began our relationship with Sycuan in 2008, when the firm was hired for the large-scale renovation of the Sycuan Casino,” says Dike Bacon, HBG Design principal.

“The casino renovation completed in 2012, and that project set the stage for Sycuan’s recent expansion and current success,” he adds.

This one was substantial. Bacon says the project included the 12-story, 300-room, 57-suite hotel tower adjacent to Sycuan’s existing casino.

Highlights include a new four-acre, palm-tree-lined pool complex with a resort-style adult pool experience including cabanas, an open pool deck along with a bar and grill and a swim-up bar, gardens, a lazy river, and a dedicated family pool. The new gaming space added 350 gaming machines. Innovative dining, retail and entertainment venues emerged. The sports bar has been repositioned into a brew house focused on local craft beer. Meeting and conference space, a full-service spa and fitness center are also part of the expansion.

Capitalizing on the idyllic climate of its mountain location in El Cajon, Sycuan began billing itself as a staycation getaway to local and regional guests after the renovation completed.

“While gaming remains central to its operation, the Sycuan expansion has opened an array of revenue-generating opportunities for Sycuan and helped fulfill a need for more distinct guest experiences—such as poolside concert events, meetings and conferences, and chic indoor/outdoor dining with a sophisticated California vibe,” Bacon indicates.

Some of that vibe is the Elicit Edge Bar, a posh, edgy craft cocktail lounge, Bacon asserts. It is designed for late-night mingling.

Eastern design influences complement the fresh hand-rolled sushi and small-

plate cuisine offerings. Low wooden ceiling planes and warm tones in carpeting and lighting create intimacy in the open space, which serves as lounge, cocktail bar and sushi bar.

Tribal culture mixed well with business sense on this venture, according to HBG experts in the interior and exterior sectors.

"The strength of the planning and design scheme lies in its ability to create a new image and front door for the property," says Shawn Hobbs, HBG Design principal and the lead architectural designer for the expansion project.

Western expansion adjacent to the existing casino allowed for maximum flexibility to meet future growth and development goals, he indicates.

From an exterior vantage point, the hotel tower is a welcoming beacon building energy and excitement for guests, Hobbs says. It rises monumentally, conveying the spirit and vibrancy of San Diego's surrounding mountain valley.

"The hotel's architectural form is derived from aspects of Sycuan culture and history and contextual influences found in the Southern California region," he adds. "A classic butterfly roof caps the hotel tower, reminiscent of the outstretched wingspan of the red-tailed hawk, a symbolically significant element in Sycuan culture."

The new porte cochere anchors the central area between the existing casino and new hotel tower expansion, and continues the celebration of the natural environment in form and different stone and metal material. The porte cochere structure derives its circular, staggered form from the tail feathers of the red-tailed hawk, fashioned by a copper standing seam roof and wood-look aluminum finishes in rich medium cherry tone.

Inside Magic

Rob Jurbergs, HBG Principal and interior architect of this project, says Sycuan officials utilized sophisticated planning.

"Even in the elegant interior hotel lobby space, the dramatic two-story video wall behind the hotel registration desk brings the outdoors in by providing opportunities for changing visual content including vivid imagery of regional landscapes," Jurbergs says.

Guests are welcomed through the central "hub" porte cochere, which provides them with a convenient connection to all areas of the property.

Radiating from the entry hub are the new hotel, new casino, and entertainment venues, as well as the existing casino and parking garage.

Jurbergs says Sycuan officials had a long-term view of this expansion.

"During early design visualization workshops with Sycuan, 'timeless design,' 'elegant,' 'sophisticated,' 'neutral,' 'natural,' 'warm' and 'design that is not too trendy' became the frequent words and common visual themes selected by stakeholders," he says. "Trendy designs become dated quickly and need renovations more often. Sycuan is mindful of costs, so durability and maintenance were huge concerns. Sycuan worked to make strategic long-term investment decisions, so the property did not require major renovations year over year to update or replace design elements as they grew stale."

This project will look fresh for a long time.

An Academic Perspective

Dr. Kate Spilde provides a scholarly and integrated overview to the expansion. The San Diego State University professor is an endowed chair of the Sycuan Institute on Tribal Gaming, teaching and managing the nation's first four-year degree program in tribal casino operations management.

Much of her work focuses on providing support for tribal governments to direct their casino gaming revenues toward nation building or rebuilding efforts. Spilde has addressed audiences around the world on tribal matters, and finds significance in the Sycuan Tribe growth.

Spilde cites the expansion's dual role of luring visitors and attracting cus-



"With an integrated resort, amenity offerings increase in importance and gaming activities decrease. These integrated resorts have incredible hotels, restaurants, golf courses, spas, convention and meetings spaces, entertainment spaces and many other opportunities for peak experiences."

—Dr. Kate Spilde, Endowed Chair, Sycuan Institute on Tribal Gaming, San Diego State University

tomers in the facility's backyard. The major California population base is a good target for patrons who want to enjoy accommodations and amenities far better than they'd have in their own homes.

"Tribal governments and operators in Southern California have now been in the business for 30 years and know this market very well," Spilde says. "Many of the properties in Southern California are adding or expanding their hotel offerings to keep guests on property longer, in a luxury environment, and ideally retaining those players who used to drive to Las Vegas."

"There are several impressive integrated resorts in Southern California," Spilde adds. "Sycuan joins Viejas, Pala, Rincon, San Pasqual, Pechanga and others who have invested heavily in the evolution of their properties from repeater-market properties to fully integrated resorts."

This evolution represents the next phase in the casino life cycle where customer draw power evolves, Spilde asserts.

"With an integrated resort, amenity offerings increase in importance and gaming activities decrease," she says. "These integrated resorts have incredible hotels, restaurants, golf courses, spas, convention and meetings spaces, entertainment spaces and many other opportunities for peak experiences."

Spilde believes Sycuan's evolution from repeater market to integrated resort, highlighted by the addition of the hotel, will extend the stay of day-trippers.

This expansion, in classic tribal efficiency, reflects prudent growth. Properties rarely speculate on the market future by spending exorbitant money to anticipate business.

"Tribal gaming expansion is very deliberate, in my experience," Spilde indicates. "There are often limits set by tribal-state gaming compacts and, of course, by tribal concerns about balancing return on investment with return on community. What I mean by that is that tribal leaders tend to be more conservative than a business investor would be since they are very cognizant of investing tribal government and community dollars, not just business funds."

"The purpose of the tribal business, in this case the casino and resort, is to generate governmental revenue. There is really no option of failure as there would be for a traditional business where the company can go bankrupt, shut down or change its name. Tribal governments invest in gaming as a means to strengthen their governments, support their communities and invest in nation-building so they have a different framework for evaluating expansion investments and expansion returns."

Spilde, who grew up in northern Minnesota, appreciates tribal dynamics in Southern California. It represents different means to a similar end.

"Tribal government gaming has been transformative there (Minnesota) in many important ways such as creating employment, strengthening tribal sovereignty and stimulating business diversification," Spilde asserts. "There is strong return on community there, in my opinion. But the scope of gaming and the scale of the return is much more subtle than it is here in California, where the tribal communities have the means to make major investments both on and off the reservation. Both areas are great examples of tribal government gaming in action, but they are very different stories of tribal gaming success."

In some areas, success is rooted in bingo halls. In others, it is in a sprawling resort.

Here, it is in both.

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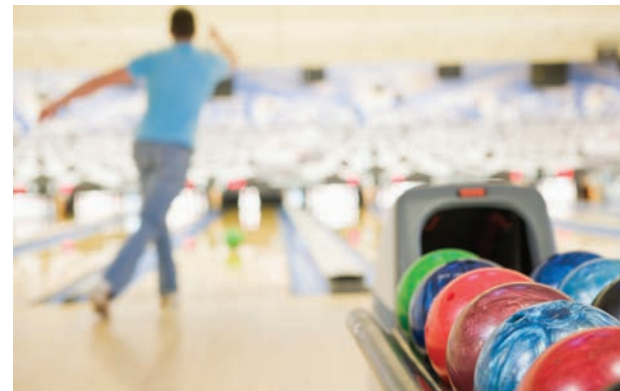


Voice of the Customer



A survey of casino amenities by the people who matter

By Brian Wyman



In 2018, in the 24 Las Vegas “Big Strip Casinos”—those generating more than \$72 million of gaming revenue—non-gaming revenue made up more than 65 percent of total revenue. By contrast, in 1990, non-gaming revenue comprised just over 40 percent of total revenue on the Strip.

Hardly an accident, this shift in revenue mix is the result of a concerted effort by Las Vegas resorts to emphasize that Las Vegas isn’t just for gambling. With the proliferation of regional markets, many customers can now gamble near home. But Las Vegas is more. When you come to Las Vegas, you come for the *experience*. The restaurants. The shows. The clubs. The sin that made Sin City famous. And hey, since you’re here, maybe you’d enjoy trying your hand at one of our fine games of chance.

Indeed, despite the expansion of legal commercial and tribal gaming into more than 40 states, Las Vegas has weathered the storm (and a global recession). McCarran Airport continues to see record numbers of passengers, and resort revenues have never been higher.

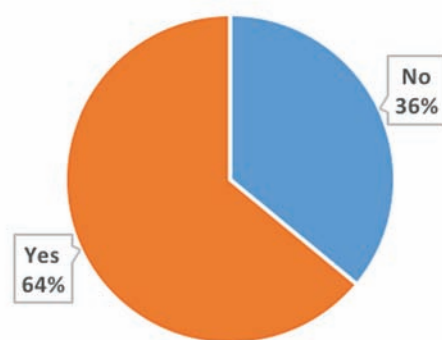
It should come as no surprise, then, that casinos and resorts across the country are seriously evaluating their amenities offerings. Even—maybe *especially*—outside of Las Vegas, properties are looking to diversify their offerings, differentiate themselves from competitors, attract new guests, and give their existing guests renewed reasons to visit. They are finding these reasons in the form of new and updated experiences, many of which reside off the gaming floor.

A core component of our business is consumer research, and another is helping clients perform highest and best use assessments for land parcels or underutilized areas of casinos and resorts. We’ve found blending the two—surveying guests when assessing best use of space—to be highly informative. Seeking the voice of the customer in these projects has resulted in several unique and successful outcomes. With that in mind, we conducted a survey of 500 adults who visit casinos so that we could share actual player views in this article. We asked respondents several questions about their perceptions, opinions, and usage of amenities, and we share some of the highlights here.

We asked our survey respondents whether the addition or refresh of certain amenities would change their casino visitation. Only 36 percent of respondents

said “none of the above.” In other words, 64 percent of respondents claim they would change their casino behavior based on amenity addition, an indication that our guests are looking for newer, better, more exciting things from us, and we have an opportunity to drive our core business by providing them the experiences they want.

Would the addition/update of any of these amenities change your casino visitation?



The Resort Pool

One of the first things we asked in our survey was the top reasons respondents visit their local casinos. Not surprisingly, gambling and dining took the top two places. Entertainment (shows, concerts, etc.) and retail/shopping tied for third.

However, when we asked about the reasons respondents visit Las Vegas casinos, we saw additional amenities become significant. Gaming, dining and entertainment again occupied the top three positions, with shopping following in fourth. Shopping was immediately followed by pool/spa and sportsbook.

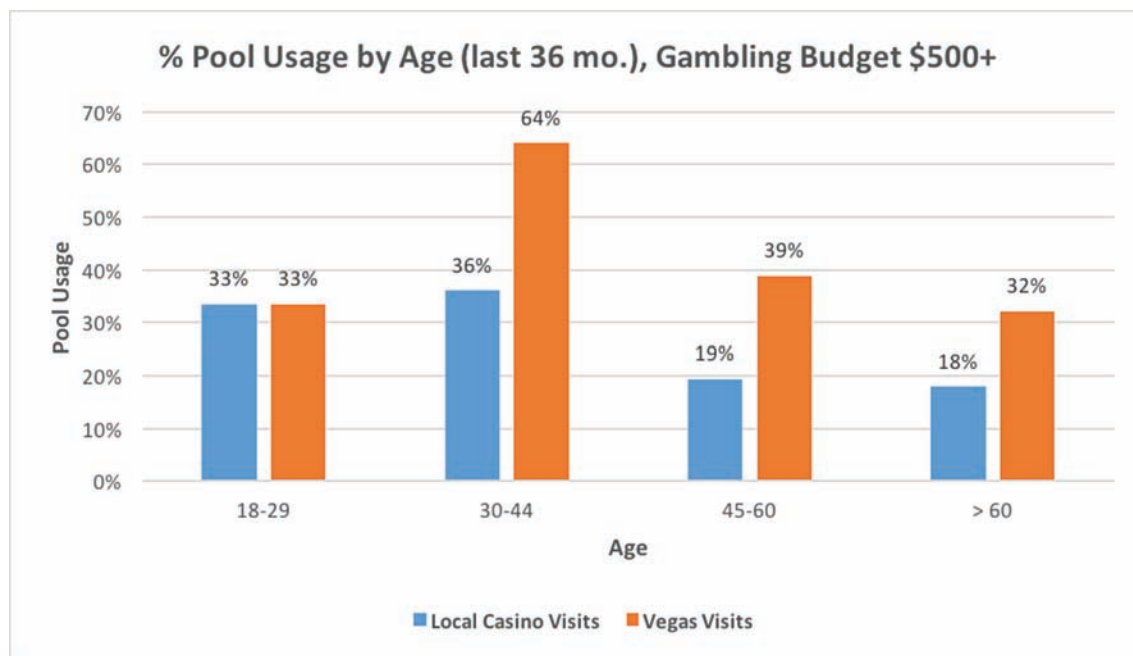
64%

of respondents claim they would change their casino behavior based on amenity addition, an indication that our guests are looking for newer, better, more exciting things from us

Understandably, the caliber of the entertainment in Las Vegas is much higher than that at a regional casino, and it makes sense then that entertainment might distance itself from retail. But the addition of the pool, spa and sportsbook suggests opportunities for regional casinos to provide experiences that guests are seeking when they visit Las Vegas. Las Vegas' weather makes for a lengthy pool season, and its nightclub-centric visitation allows for the transformation of a "pool" into a "day club."

But looking at the large disparity between those who had used the pool on a trip to a Las Vegas casino in the last three years and those who had used the pool on a trip to a casino locally in the last three years, we see an opportunity to provide a higher-caliber, resort-oriented pool experience at larger regional casinos.

For the chart below, we restricted to "core" gaming guests, those whose daily gaming budget exceeds \$500 (we expect a \$500 budget to approximate \$100-\$200 ADT). We expected to see a gap in the younger crowd, those whom we know are drawn to the experiential pool parties in Las Vegas. Surprisingly, what we actually see is a gap in the 30-plus crowd, a gap that extends to even our oldest guests.



Sportsbook

With the Supreme Court's overturn of PASPA in 2018, sports betting has been at the forefront of gaming expansion nationwide. Sportsbooks are a viable amenity today in several states, and within the coming years we expect more than half of U.S. states to legalize the game. We see vast interest in sports betting.

In prior work on the topic, we found 40 percent of respondents likely to make at least one sports wager in the next 12 months if it were legal, regulated, and accessible in their area. While this may seem high, we've spoken to many seemingly unlikely bettors who say they'd bet on their college team's rivalry game, on a game they are attending, on the Super Bowl, on an NCAA tournament bracket contest, and so on.

Additionally, in the current survey, 18 percent of respondents list sports betting as one of their top three reasons to visit a Las Vegas casino, and 4 percent of respondents identified sports as their primary form of gaming when they visit Las Vegas. Sports bettors skew younger and male, a decidedly different demographic than the traditional slot player. And with the bulk of the betting volume being mobile (where allowed), sportsbooks are truly amenities and should be designed as such.

Movies and Bowling

I live in Las Vegas. In typical Las Vegas fashion, the movie theaters and bowling alleys I go to are in casinos. Movies and bowling are usually a family outing for me, so they aren't accompanied by gaming. On the other hand, I do take into account my ability to earn and burn comps when selecting my destination, thereby tying my movie theater and bowling decisions into my gaming decisions.

This didn't resonate with the survey respondents, however, when we asked about their behaviors and expectations. Only 12 percent had been to a movie at a casino in the last three years, and only 8 percent had bowled at a casino.

Moreover, only 16 percent expected a casino to offer a movie theater, and only 12 percent expected a bowling alley. Even fewer expected that they'd be able to use comps on movies and bowling.

Echoing my own experience, less than 5 percent of moviegoers and bowlers reported being likely to game on the same trip. While this doesn't make movie theaters or bowling alleys poor choices of amenities to add, it increases the need for a strong integration with the loyalty program to really make the connection between gaming and the amenity. Programming the outlet with adult-only events may also increase the gaming crossover.

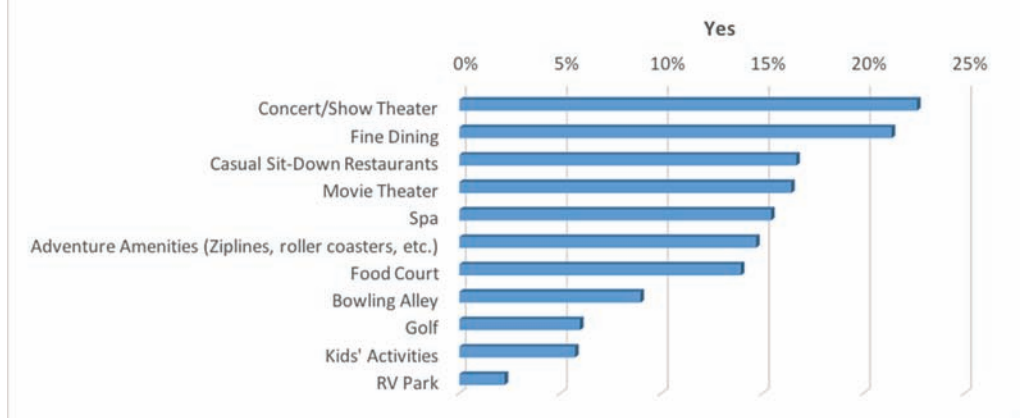
Dining

In the age of the celebrity chef, we'd be remiss not to discuss dining as an amenity, and the survey delivered a few interesting findings. First, we asked about "food court"-type dining, "sit-down casual," and "fine dining," in an effort to avoid the more common industry terms like QSR and fast casual.

Thirty of the 500 respondents informed us via free response that we had omitted "buffet" as an option, and they felt that a buffet was an important part of their casino experience. While 6 percent sounds small, it is a very large number to agree unprompted via free response, which many respondents skip anyway. Casino-goers love a good buffet.

Additionally, when asked whether the addition or update of dining options would cause respondents to change their casino visitation, 21 percent said that

Would the addition/update of these amenities change your casino visitation?



fine dining additions/updates would change their visitation. The trend of celebrity-branded restaurants and experiential dining resonates in a casino environment. Slightly fewer, 17 percent, said that casual sit-down restaurant additions/updates would change their visitation. This gives the indication that even a refresh of existing F&B concepts may provide some re-energizing of the database. We compare these values to a sample of other amenities in the chart above.

Lastly, when asked *why* they eat at the casual restaurants in a casino, 52 percent cited “convenience (I was already at the casino),” 36 percent cited the ability to use comps, and interestingly, 32 percent cited “ability to gamble before or after.” In other words, nearly a third of casino restaurant-goers are coupling their dining decisions with their gambling decisions. Instead of a local restaurant, they are driving to the casino for the restaurant-casino combination, when they may not otherwise have gone to the casino or the restaurant. Less than 15 percent cited proximity to their homes as a driver.

Amenities of the Future

We tried to get a sense of some outside-the-box amenities that our survey respondents would like to see. Suggestions ranged from theme parks to dispensaries/cannabis lounges, the latter being suggested several times. Activities for kids were often cited as desirable as well. Only 8 percent of respondents expressed interest in seeing an esports arena, but this number is around half of the number that expressed interest in a sportsbook, which we thought was impressive given that there is clearly wider recognition and understanding of the latter than the former.

Not surprisingly, interest in esports degrades with age, from 16 percent in the 26-35 age range to only 2 percent among those 60-plus. Somewhat surprisingly, we found no significant differences in gender interest in esports, with 8 percent of our female respondents and 9 percent of our male respondents expressing interest.

Around 13 percent of respondents expressed interest in TopGolf, compared to only 10 percent of respondents that reported golfing at a casino and just over 5 percent that said the addition of a golf course would change their visitation. Today, we're seeing not only full TopGolf facilities but TopGolf Swing Suites at several major casinos throughout the country.

Swing Suites provide a TopGolf experience on a simulator for private, indoor, all-weather enjoyment that can be integrated into a bar or lounge. This provides a more rounded entertainment environment for the golfers while generating interest in the product from other bar-goers.

Another amenity we asked about was the “anti-nightclub”—a bar, lounge, or social space that serves as a complement to an ordinary nightclub, instead providing a lower-key, more intimate atmosphere. A whopping 35 percent of respondents expressed interest in such a space, with one even remarking that “I enjoyed that ‘anti-nightclub’ option for sure! I love the idea of more lounge areas and low-key bars at a casino. Nightclubs are generally too loud and crowded and not my favorite. I would like having more intimate options.”

So, What's Next?

I'm often asked what it's like to live in Las Vegas. Implicit in the question is always a tone of “How can you deal with *the Strip* all the time?” And as every Las Vegas local has politely done a thousand times, I explain that Las Vegas is a beautiful Mountain West city that just happens to have a pretty well-known tourist district, one that really doesn't affect me on a day-to-day basis.

Sure, we do occasionally visit the Strip for a nice dinner or to meet friends visiting town. We go to TopGolf. We take the kids on the monorail, to the shops, or to see the Bellagio Fountains. We see a headlining comic.

But more often, we go to local casinos to gamble, to watch movies, to bowl, to have dinner, even to have a *Jeopardy!* watch party in the bar and cheer on our friend James. We enjoy the amenities. We get into routines, and we build loyalty to the casinos we enjoy—they become *our* casinos. But, allegiance can be fickle. New restaurants open. The new movie theater has wide seats and beverage service. It's 115 degrees outside—did you hear about the new Swing Suite?

So, what does this all mean? With the plethora of casino and resort options, guests require thoughtful updates and innovation to stay loyal. As casinos and resorts seek to provide the latest and greatest amenities to their guests, the winners will be those that stay ahead of the curve, the ones that adeptly mix the latest and greatest with the tried-and-true classics.

Brian Wyman is senior vice president of operations and data analytics for The Innovation Group.



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Party On!

Themed Events That Reward Players (and Properties)

Special events with a theme are overwhelmingly popular, in and out of the casino space. Here's why.

By Marjorie Preston

In a 2017 poll conducted by *Meetings & Conventions* magazine, 87 percent of event planners said they “always or sometimes” used theming to spice up their gatherings.

And for good reason. Certainly, themed events are fun for guests. And simply choosing a theme makes it easy for planners to manage countless related details—from the food and drink menus to the décor and table settings to the music, activities and giveaways.

And of course, a well-executed themed event in the casino resort can deepen loyalty, invite return visits, and boost patronage on the gaming floor.

Here's a for-instance. Every year, the Orleans Hotel & Casino, just off the Strip in Las Vegas, has staged its popular Viva Las Vegas Rockabilly Weekend. This inspired celebration—it actually lasts four days—is so popular, last year tickets sold out in seven hours. The Orleans routinely negotiates special room rates for Rockabilly guests at other hotels in the neighborhood—all in mid-April, one of the city's most sluggish tourism periods.

“Rockabilly takes over the entire casino,” says Mike Musicaro, vice president of marketing and operations for Boyd Gaming, which owns the Orleans. “We have a car show with hot rods from the 1950s. We have the '50s music. We piggyback a slot tournament on the weekend, and continue that theme all the way through. Players love it.”

Stardust Memories

Orleans has a full calendar of such events; Musicaro and his team plan them up to a year in advance, and weave in new events as needed. “It's kind of a juggling act—you have the natural business, the cash business, and you don't want to displace that. You look for pockets of opportunity to stage a special event, and tying it in with a theme is even better.

“We can have our cake and eat it too,” he says, “getting the rooms occupied with known gamblers.”

Whatever the market, events of all kinds liven up the shoulder seasons, neutralize slumps and activate midweeks, says Musicaro. A signature event at the Orleans is a Stardust reunion/slot tournament that enables loyal longtime players to “see old faces and resume old friendships.”



Viva Las Vegas Rockabilly Weekend at the Orleans draws hot-rod enthusiasts, '50s music fans, and retro-fashion lovers

When the party's over, guests will remember if all the touchpoints—the music, the food, the surroundings—were aligned and memorable.



Simply choosing a theme makes it easy for planners to manage related details, from the food and drink menu to the decor and table settings to the music, activities and giveaways.

Of course, many holidays are a natural reason to party. The recent New Year's Eve bash at the casino employed a "Big Top" theme, complete with a ringmaster, stilt walkers, acrobats and clowns.

Some events are designed less to pull in new guests—who are, after all, an unknown quantity—than to delight loyal players.

"Quality counts," says Musicaro.

During Rockabilly, for example, which books up a year in advance, the casino "carves away about 100 rooms for high-end players. We fill up almost 2,000 rooms," says Musicaro, "and we don't want to grow it anymore because we're at capacity."

Among attendees—including many from Europe, China, Japan and Korea—the drink of choice is none other than Pabst Blue Ribbon.

Adding a personal touch, in addition to eblasts and evites, many guests are personally invited by their favorite hosts, Musicaro says. "They pick up the phone and make the reservations. They make sure the room is in tip-top shape and that the guests are welcomed with their favorite wine or beverage. They make sure any issues are resolved right away."

No wonder Rockabilly is now in its 23rd year.

Wheels of Fortune

When Randy Reedy first joined Valley View Casino & Hotel in San Diego County, California, he says the slot tournaments there were "boring as hell."

"I went to the general manager and said, 'Do you mind if I go buy a costume? I'll keep it under control—I just want something to liven it up.'" He did just that.

As vice president of slots, Reedy transformed the tournaments into costume parties for grownups. Guests who dressed up in accordance with the given theme—as hippies, beach bums or Christmas elves—became eligible for special perks and recognition.

Owned and operated by the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, Valley View attracts throngs of guests with its slot tournaments and ongoing events like a monthly car giveaway. Players must earn a certain number of points to qualify. Though 60 people will participate in the big drawing, 2,500 will show up. As a result, revenues "are probably 20 percent more than the normal Friday," says Reedy.

An annual watch giveaway is also tremendously popular, with top-tier players lining up to win Cartier and Movado timepieces. "When we

open, I'll probably have 100 people already in line," says Reedy. "But I'm not making a penny when they're standing in line, so we issue up to 1,400 numbers so they can go play until we start calling them back. It's a really good, profitable event. That Saturday or Sunday could see a 50 percent profit margin."

Though the casino's prizes are super-sized, he notes, ultimately the books must balance in the property's favor. "If the rewards are bigger than the wallet that's coming in the door," he says, "you've outspent your profitability."

At his special events, Reedy continues to sport the nutty costumes, and encourages others to do the same. He's even been known to prowl the property decked out as a pimp, in a purple suit with a bright green shirt and hat. "You name it," he says. "They've dressed me in just about anything you can think of."

The Right Touch

Julia Carcamo, head of Louisiana-based marketing consultancy J. Carcamo and Associates, says themed events must be wholly aligned with a property's brand. If you're throwing a luau, it has to be *your* brand's version of a luau, or toga party, or disco night, or country hoedown. Otherwise, don't do it.

Think of a brand as your "guardrails," she says. "If you have a family-friendly brand, you're not going to do a 'Girls Gone Wild' event. That's a drastic example, but don't do something that's incongruent with your brand identity."

Don't cut corners, either, even if you think you can. During boxing events at Wynn Resorts, for example, "we used to host the media, and everything in the media room was designed to give them a brand experience," including a fabulous food spread, Carcamo says. "These guys were huddled over their laptops, checking stats and filing stories; we could have gotten away with serving them popcorn."

"But the food and beverage program was so much part of our brand identity, to do that would have been unthinkable." The journalists "really noticed the difference."

Planning a themed event "is not throwing a dart at a dartboard or doing something predictable," she says. And to succeed, an event should "touch all the senses."

When the party's over, guests will remember if every touch point—the music, the food, the surroundings—was aligned and memorable.

Swag that Brings the Swagger

Q&A with Paul Gordon, Rymax Senior Vice President of Sales

Rymax Inc. is the gaming industry's premier incentive provider, with on-target gifts for players, employees and corporate partners.

One of the most surprising giveaways in its collection? The legendary Polaroid camera.



Paul Gordon

For the unenlightened, this handy-dandy item, invented in 1947, was the first camera to spit out an full-color image on the spot. Better still, the photographs developed in real time, taking shape as the photographer and subject looked on.

In the smartphone/selfie/Insta-everything era, why is the Polaroid camera a coveted gift?

"It's a fun item, like those single-use throw-away cameras you used to get at weddings," says Paul Gordon, Rymax senior vice president of sales. "It's actually hot among millennials, who love instant gratification."

It's also a fairly low-cost investment, on a scale that also includes elite fashions (Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen), tech devices (Apple, Boss, Bluetooth), fine jewelry (Tiffany, Swarovski, Breitling), even household appliances (Dyson, Viking, Mikasa).

Casino Style: Do guests expect to walk away with so-called swag, the goodie bags you pick up at the end of an event?

Gordon: Casinos back in the old days used to give away tchotchkes—everything from muffin tins to logoed items, and eventually players didn't want them anymore. They want what they feel they're owed, what they've earned—branded products they would see in the store and want to buy.

What gifts are in demand, and for what players?

Rymax preaches segmentation and concentration—reward all players in proportion to their value. Players who spend a lot of time at the slots or tables or however they're accumulating their comp dollars want to walk away with something that resonates. They're going to use that Michael Kors handbag for the next year at least, and that watch for 15 years. So the trophy

value also has residual value from a profit-and-loss standpoint. (High-end) products make a tremendous amount of sense if you look at the amortization of that cost to the loyalty of the player.

"Made in the USA" matters in some parts of the country. The environmental piece, sustainability, is important. Rewards are also dictated by the economic situation. When the economy is robust, unemployment is low and 401Ks are great, people are more apt to redeem luxury items. As the economy tightens up, they go to more practical things. You have to have a very eclectic mix of products and be nimble enough to appeal to those needs during (fluctuating) economic times.

What amazes us is that people will redeem things they want but don't necessarily want to buy. A Dyson vacuum cleaner isn't the sexiest thing in the world, but everybody wants one.

Do elite brands matter more to women, or does their appeal cross gender lines?

Women are more cognizant of brands than men, who don't care if something was featured on the red carpet at the Oscars or some celebrity was seen using it. Not to say men don't appreciate a cool brand. Status is powerful. Sunglasses are always big.

Can you mention some Rymax rewards that really went through the roof?

Electronics are very strong, especially connectivity and smart devices. They drive a tremendous amount of redemptions.

Fashion has come up in a big way, too. As retail continues to shrink, the brands say, "Where do we go to build brand equity and drive sales?" We're doing programs with the biggest companies in the world, because you can really target based on income level, geographic participation, all those things. Ten years ago, fashion brands didn't see (incentive programs) as an important channel. Now it's critical.

What incentive product simply didn't click?

We brought a high-tech cooler on board. It sounded great, solar-powered. But at the end of the day, I think the price point was really too high at for what it actually did: keep things cold.



This MCM-branded leather tote retails for \$650



Tech goes over big with high-value players, like this Amazon Echo



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Growing the Business

Tribal gaming expansions continue, with no end in sight

By Patrick Roberts

The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), passed by Congress in 1988, was designed to give Native Americans a chance to participate in gaming businesses that were already legal within their states.

It started with bingo. Then gaming machines were developed that determined winners by virtual bingo cards. Later, as casinos spread across the country, tribes were permitted to offer full-scale casino gaming. (In Connecticut, the tribes got this right because the state had legalized “Las Vegas nights” for charity, and a court ruled that IGRA still applied.)

In the early days, tribes housed their casinos in inexpensive buildings—trailers, tent-like “Sprung” structures, or even converted warehouses. A few years later they added hotels, restaurants and a limited number of non-gaming amenities.

Today, the second and third wave of tribal gaming is under way. Once-small casinos have become integrated resorts, comparable to world-class facilities in Las Vegas. When it comes to reinvestment, competition—both with commercial properties and other tribal operations—has sometimes forced their hands. But the desire to offer more than just gambling is often a goal of these expansions.

In November alone, five tribes celebrated expansions or relocations of their current facilities.

Major Milestone

The Paskenta Band of the Nomlaki Indians celebrated the 25th anniversary of the tribe’s official restoration with a multimillion-dollar expansion and remodel of its Rolling Hills Casino in Corning, California.

Tribal Chairman Andrew “Dru” Alejandre said the expansion idea goes back to the change in tribal leadership in 2014, and management staff was hired with growth in mind.

“We were looking for a general manager with knowledge of expanding casinos,” Alejandre told the *Red Bluff Daily News*. “It will provide more opportunities for our community and for us in the tribe to give back to the community.”

General Manager Steve Neely said the expansion will increase the gaming



area by 40 percent, bring in two new restaurants, redesign and expand conference facilities, and give the entire casino a facelift. Rock & Brews and Fatburger restaurants will be opened in the remodeled facility; Neely said the addition allows the casino to offer something not found in this part of the state. Rock & Brews is expected to open in the summer of 2020 and Fatburger in January 2021.

Construction will take place in phases to allow the casino, which opened in 2002, to continue operating with minimal disruption. Completion of all phases is expected to take 14 months, with many of the changes in place during the summer of 2020.

“The 25th anniversary of restoration and recognition by the federal government marks a watershed date for our tribe as we look to the future,” Alejandre said. “The recent opening of our new outdoor amphitheater and our new partnerships with major food and hospitality brands solidified the tribe’s commitment to being a valued economic community partner for the North State.”

Through the Paskenta Nomlaki Foundation, the tribe has turned revenues from the casino into grants of more than \$6.7 million in Tehama County. Funding has gone to local medical facilities, the building of a Tribal Community and Senior Citizens Center, donations of fire and law enforcement resources and the creation of recreational programs in Corning.

The gaming area will expand to the east and south on the property to en-

close existing entryways and landscaping, Neely said. The main entryway and fountain will be removed and parking lots realigned to make parking and entry simpler.

A brewery and distillery will produce beer and spirits, crafted on-site and sold throughout the property (legislation passed in 2018 repealed a 184-year ban on production of spirits on tribal property). The tribe expects to announce the name of the establishment soon.

The entire facility will be modernized and rooms upgraded at both The Lodge at Rolling Hills and The Inn at Rolling Hills. A new coffee shop will be added along with a pizza restaurant and retail space. A ballroom and conference center will be the final phase of the project, the most versatile and largest of its kind in the area.

The project is expected to create an estimated 400 jobs during construction and up to 200 permanent new jobs post-construction. With occupancy rates at the casino's hotels around 99 percent throughout the year, Neely said the tribe could look at expanding existing lodging or adding a new hotel to the site.

Alejandre said tribal members are supportive of the expansion. "People are enjoying the opportunity for change and the direction the tribe is headed with their businesses."



Cherokee, community and casino representatives cut the ribbon on the new Cherokee Casino Tahlequah in Oklahoma

Moving On Up



The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has approved a plan by the Tule River Tribe of California to relocate its Eagle Mountain Casino from the current locale in Porterville, Tulare County, to a 40-acre parcel in the same community, near the Porterville Airport Industrial Park.

The site is less than 20 miles from the existing facility and will be considered an off-reservation acquisition, reported *Indianz.com*.

Moving the casino "would be in the best interest of the tribe and not detrimental to the surrounding community," said BIA Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney, announcing her decision to the National Congress of American Indians.

California Governor Gavin Newsom must also OK the plan, she pointed out. "A decision to acquire the approximately 40-acre parcel into federal trust will be made at a later date, when Governor Newsom concurs with the secretarial determination."

"After years of hard work," Chairman Neil Peyron told the *Porterville Recorder*, "the federal government moved the tribe's casino relocation one step closer to making this dream a reality."

Tribal Culture

Cherokee Nation Businesses recently opened its newest casino resort, Cherokee Casino Tahlequah in Oklahoma.

The venue showcases Cherokee history and culture, with artwork and design elements focusing on the legendary Cherokee 18th century warrior-turned-peacemaker Nancy Ward, also known as Nanyehi, and her cousin and fellow Cherokee leader Dragging Canoe, or Tsiyu. The facility also honors the Cherokee statesman and linguist Sequoyah.

The casino features mannequins of Nanyehi and Tsiyu in period clothing and artwork by 53 Cherokee artists. Historical Cherokee artifacts, on loan from the Cherokee Heritage Center, are displayed at the Chota Center entrance.

Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said, "The art, history and heritage of the Cherokee Nation is beautifully exhibited at our newest entertainment facility. Patrons can wander the entire facility and experience different aspects of Cherokee culture. We've amassed and displayed the works and crafts of master Cherokee artisans, and that collection rivals most art museums in the country."

Cherokee Nation Businesses Director of Cultural Art and Design Gina Olaya noted, "Through the involvement of such a vast amount of artists, Cherokee Casino Tahlequah provides a great view of the depth of talent we have within the Cherokee Nation. The entire location exemplifies our tribe's unique and beautiful culture and offers visitors the opportunity to learn and enjoy our history, language and heritage."

Venue names like the White Wolf Steakhouse and Ancient Oak Tavern continue the historic theme. The Chota Conference Center is named after the historic Overhill town, the Cherokee Nation capital from the late 1740s to 1788, believed to be Ward's birthplace.

Cherokee Nation Businesses' cultural art department staff and art committees select each piece of art displayed at every CNB property. They play a critical role in selecting culturally appropriate designs, materials, textures, colors, names and themes to accurately represent Cherokee culture, language and customs.



Angel Xpansion

In November, the Stillaguamish Tribe of Washington State celebrated the grand opening of its \$60 million expansion of its Angel of the Winds Casino, a project dubbed "Xpansion" by the casino.

The Xpansion debuted after almost two years of work. The project features new restaurants, an events center, two bars, a bowling alley, a remodeled gaming floor and a 575-space parking garage to the Angel of the Winds Casino.

"Just under two years after breaking ground, our 2019 Xpansion is now complete," said a post on the casino's social media. "Thank you to everyone who helped make this Xceptional milestone possible!"

The Rivers Run Event Center functions as a concert venue and conference space at the casino. Rocker Bret Michaels of solo and Poison fame put on the first show there, which was a sellout, according to a social media post.

The expansion added a total of 300,000 square feet to the property.

Groundbreaking

The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians of California broke ground in November on its new downtown Cathedral City casino.

In October, the tribe announced that the casino project had been green-lit, following federal approval allowing the land's status to be changed from fee to tribal trust for gaming purposes.

"We are excited to begin construction on this large-scale investment in Cathedral City," Tribal Chairman Jeff L. Grubbe said. "This project will create jobs, revitalize an undeveloped downtown property and support Cathedral City's economic development efforts."

The 13.6-acre project will provide an entertainment attraction in the heart of downtown Cathedral City.

Tribal elders celebrate the groundbreaking of the new Agua Caliente casino in Cathedral City, California



Rendering of the Agua Caliente casino in Cathedral City, California



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Have a Seat

The importance of comfortable and attractive chairs to a casino cannot be understated

By William Sokolic



Gasser Chair's Alto Series

Until the 1980s, your favorite slot machine in your favorite casino lacked a place to park your caboose. You wanted to drop coins into the slot, you stood. And you stood some more. You got tired, you went to the coffee shop for a respite.

"But as slots came to dominate casino revenues, casinos began to cater more to slot players," says Professor David G. Schwartz, associate vice provost, Office of Faculty Affairs at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and an expert in gambling history. "Rather than being a quick diversion, slots became something patrons would play for hours. Chairs became important for the overall gaming experience, because anything that enhances comfort is going to lead to a longer gambling session."

Remember that word: comfort. It's a key factor when it comes to casino chairs. Or any chairs, for that matter, whether in a restaurant, a lounge or a meeting room, but especially on the casino floor. Especially in front of a slot machine.

"What many people may not realize is every player's first interaction with the game is the chair. Not a player card, not the button panel, not the bill validator. It's the chair," says Joshua Corrick, chief commercial officer at Gary Platt Manufacturing, one of the leading providers of casino seating for more than 20 years. They create chairs for slots, table games, poker, bar-top and bingo, among

other areas.

Gary Platt and other specialized manufacturers design chairs to not only sweep players off their feet, but to make where they sit good for the body. Ergonomics, they call it.

Ergonomic features are paramount as the casino player cannot be compared to any other user of a chair or work station. The configuration of the playing station therefore has to be addressed accordingly, says Luigi Iulita, owner of StylGame, another chair manufacturer.

"We have found in casino after casino, in country after country, the more we focus on player comfort, the more we are able to directly impact increased time on a device, helping to drive revenue in both the slot and table games areas," Corrick says.

A number of factors come into focus when it comes to posture and positioning, says Kevin Buck, communications manager for Gasser Chair.

"You have to consider seat height, back angle, seat angle, foam density and how all of these properties interact with each other," he says. "You have to also make sure the player can easily interact with the machine. You do not want the customer to have to lean over to reach for the machine, so having the seat height just right is crucial. This is why having a gas cylinder, or a player-adjustable seat height is very common on the slot stools."

Durability and Design

But ergonomics and comfort are not the only dynamics at play.

"The most important factor for me is comfort, but followed by look, and finally durability," says Alex Alvarado, vice president of casino operations at MGM National Harbor.

When a casino buys slot machines, it can almost immediately check if it made a good purchase based on revenue statistics, says Kelcey Allison, CEO of GSL Gaming Group, distributor for MGR Casino Chairs. But quantifying a chair is not so easy. Casinos can only know if the purchase worked after months or years, he says.

"The chair must 'invite' the player, make him sit as long as possible and then play as long as possible," Allison says.

Indeed, hundreds of hours have been spent by researchers in understanding the relationship between the player and the chair.

"The cabinet designs from the slot manufacturers have greatly changed the way people sit and play slots now," says Jim Keranen, vice president of sales and marketing for Patir Inc., a Las Vegas-based casino chair manufacturer.

A slot chair is a functional piece of art from that perspective, he adds.

"Being that it is functional, what are the specific needs of the casino operators? How can we make their needs coincide with the designer's vision? How do we make sure these chairs will last for the next 15 years as well?" Keranen says.

Unlike other furniture throughout a resort, casino chairs are subjected to continuous stress, many times with poor use and washed with aggressive cleaning agents, MGR Global Sales Chief Guido Rizzo says.

Moreover, each chair operates in a 24/7 environment, says Lance Weiss, executive director of KGM Seating Division, which developed a proprietary blended two-part injection molded foam which adds to the overall comfort and durability of its chairs.

In addition to testing for durability, Gasser utilizes aluminum components that resist rust, designs modular stools for quick in-field service, and offers self-return swivels so the chairs are always facing the machine, Buck says.

Then there is uniqueness. "Casinos are requesting more custom slot stool designs that can create a lasting impression," he says.

At Gary Platt, artisans create the design from a preliminary sketch of a fully realized chair.

"Like all artists, our designers have a process, which starts by considering the comfort level and its relationship to time on the device," Corrick says. "We are very proud of how our creative teams work closely with our customers' design teams to create hand-crafted chairs."

Take the Flamingo in Las Vegas, a Caesars Entertainment property. The casino employs the Gary Platt GX2 model on all of the main-floor slots. Players in the high-limit salon sit on the Sonoma model, and visitors to the casino's bars can rest on the Monaco chair. The Flamingo transformation began last year with the Lido chair for the poker room.



Bells and Whistles

In today's environment—and in the future—seating becomes part of the experience.

"There are now seats with built-in speakers and even vibration motors to create a more immersive playing event, something mirrored in seating for video gaming and entertainment," Schwartz says.

The future could bring a union of the seat and cabinet with integrated chairs.

"We are working on anti-static, anti-bacterial and integrated cellphone charging seats," Allison says.

Manufacturers have utilized a variety of gimmicks including vibrating chairs, spin buttons, sound in the chairs and lighting, and these will be enhanced for the future. Also, memory and dual-density foam, flexible back plates, and screens in the back of the chair. In the future, expect wireless charging or electronic funds transfer through readers in the chair, says KGM President Jason Peters.

Gary Platt is incorporating several new technologies into its current sound chair platforms. "We have fully incorporated sound, lighting and a shaker for the chair, all to better create a complete gaming experience for the player," Corrick says.

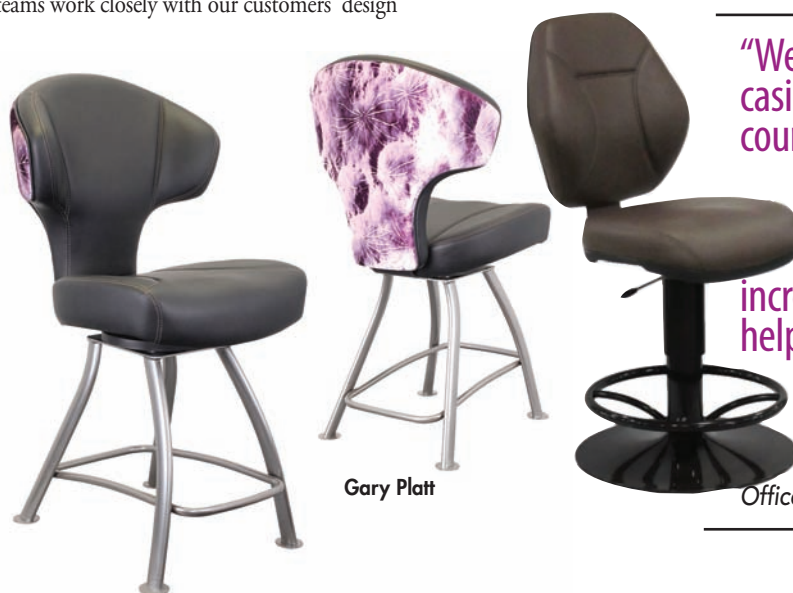
Some of MGM National Harbor's premium slot machines provide more "robust seating" encounters, including surround sound, as well as vibration and movement. "More immersive seats enhance the game and can ultimately make for a more enjoyable gaming experience," Alvarado says.

The integrated experience between the cabinet and chair has been increasingly of value to the player.

"There's more and more known technology going into the chairs, and it's fascinating to see things repurposed into a new function for the slot machine," Keranen says. "We believe that the sportsbook chair will evolve in the same fashion. This might be a little out there, but the slot chair industry has always been looking at how to make a home reclining chair that meets your dining room chair."

Operators might look to stadium-minimalism seats for the space-conscious casino. Or the high-limit room bringing further elegance with more lounge-style seating for couples. "The great part about working with our customers is learning the needs that their players pass on to them," Keranen says.

With the advancement of wireless tools, it will significantly accelerate the technology used in chairs. Peters says the goal is to find something to benefit the user without distracting them. "Radio-frequency identification takes advantage of new technology without the chairs having to be integrated through the floor or attached to the base," he says.



"We have found in casino after casino, in country after country, the more we focus on player comfort, the more we are able to directly impact increased time on a device, helping to drive revenue in both the slot and table games areas."

—Joshua Corrick, Chief Commercial Officer, Gary Platt Manufacturing



Tables and Seating

Much of the focus on chairs in a casino environment relates to slot machines because slots generate the most revenue. But chairs have their own affinity with certain table games, notably blackjack.

Patrons still stand while playing craps and to an extent, roulette. And for good reason.

“Mostly this is because of practical concerns. Placing bets in roulette would have players standing anyway, and shooting dice while sitting down would take much of the excitement out of craps,” Schwartz says.

Chairs for blackjack tables need to be solid, having a firm center of gravity, while being easy to slide into position and be very comfortable, Alvarado says.

Blackjack is more of a social game, with more interactions between players that can have an effect on play, Keranen says. “Think about when someone wins a jackpot on a slot machine; people stop and think, ‘Wow, that’s cool. Hope I win like that!’ Compare this to table games: ‘Look, we are all winning. Keep this streak alive.’ That drives other players to want to come join, hence, more seats are needed around the table for one game,” he says.

Blackjack players stay and play hour after hour, Corrick says. “If they aren’t comfortable or experience discomfort in their legs or body, they leave. Sitting in an uncomfortable chair leaves you feeling physically exhausted; you constantly move your legs, hips and back to make yourself more comfortable.”

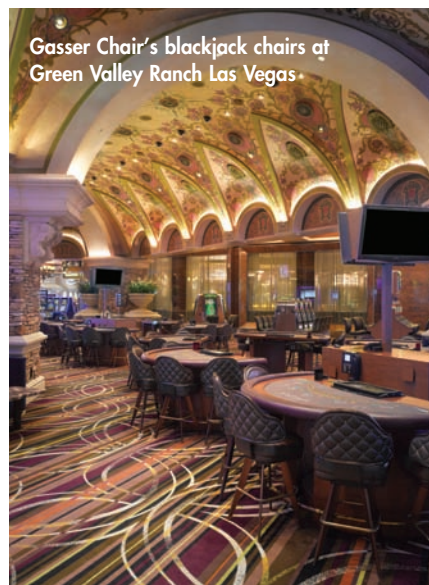
There’s that word again. Comfort.

Chair design differs when it comes to table games. Ongoing development of proper ergonomics based on posture of the player is a focus, specifically with table game patrons, as they tend to sit differently than slot players, Weiss says.

“We often see table game players leaning forward, whereas, a slot player is more likely to be leaning against the chair back,” he says.

As designers studied table games, they found that chairs needed to add different heights to ensure the participant is at the optimum height, Corrick says. “The result is much less fatigue to a player’s body or arms. Our research has also led us to create chairs with specialized lumbar support, keeping in mind that the players are leaning forward to reach the table.”

Says Weiss, “Table games such as blackjack require a more supportive seat



cushion design to relieve pressure because it is a higher chair. Additionally, we also want to consider different foam densities due to the player’s sitting habits.”

Chairs usually have shorter backs to not obscure the view, Buck says. “It’s not difficult to make a comfortable blackjack stool; it just takes a different approach.”

The foot rest location has to be relative to the seat top and not the floor, as the height is different for everyone.

Dimensions of the seats are also smaller than those with slots, Rizzo says.

The context of chair use with table games is very different, and the importance of the seat is not as crucial as for slot machines, Iulita says.

“It is in any case a determining factor that has a great influence on the gaming experience and can prolong the time spent by the player at the

table. The ongoing changes in the blackjack field, such as the digitization of gaming tables, do not change the needs of the player when it comes to seats.”

It’s no surprise that casino operators diversify their earning portfolio beyond gaming and into hospitality, whether meeting rooms, restaurants or bars. Chairs play a role in these arenas as well. “They want to give customers a reason to stay longer,” Corrick says.

For example, the convention area is notorious for horribly uncomfortable chairs, he says.

“We asked, why was it supposedly impossible to create a chair that was both easily stackable and comfortable, and the answer is, it’s not,” Corrick says. “Our Kopa model is living proof.”

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BONUS DISTRIBUTION: G2E 2020, Indian Gaming 2021.
Mailed with July issue of *GGB* magazine.

CASINOSTYLEMAGAZINE.COM



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How to Buy Big

Can smaller casino hotels get the benefits that a larger corporation does when buying in bulk?

By Carl Long

Gaming properties operate in an extremely competitive environment in which guest experience drives revenue and interior design plays a significant role in driving guest engagement. How can a casino or tribe deliver great FF&E (furniture, fixtures and equipment) design without breaking the bank?

The largest companies in the gaming industry have tried to do this in-house and been unable to succeed. And small companies are often overwhelmed by the effort required in the attempt.

Smart casino companies turn to experts to leverage the buying power and expertise of a large-volume FF&E and OS&E (operating supplies and equipment) purchasing company, like Purchasing Management International and PMI-Tribal Services (PMI). Buying big in FF&E and OS&E purchasing for new construction and renovation of casinos depends on product knowledge, sourcing expertise, and diligent, dedicated project expediting.

FF&E and OS&E project purchasing require extensive product knowledge, both from a usability perspective and a value perspective. Qualified purchasing companies can help owners and designers source product in a way that enables designers to push their creativity to the edge while still considering the challenges of the gaming environment.

Engaging a qualified purchasing company early in the conceptual development of a project will provide guidance on where to allocate resources and how to truly value-engineer FF&E. Typically, value engineering on the FF&E portion occurs too late, and leaves owners with no choice but to cut the budget. By engaging in conceptual budgeting early on, the casino development team can deliver great design. It can value-engineer the guest experience where the most value in the FF&E portion of a project budget is guest-facing and guest-engaging. Knowing how to do this requires an understanding of product costs, production sources, and time constraints. From there, projects large and small begin the process of getting the most out of their development dollars.

Once a conceptual budget has been established, a qualified purchasing company can begin sourcing product within the constraints set by the budget. A purchasing company with extensive experience in the gaming industry understands the durability required for FF&E in a casino environment.

Large-volume casino purchasing companies are well-informed in which products wear over time and which manufacturers provide the kind of durable, beautiful product required in the gaming environment. Large-volume purchasing companies have the resources to engage in global sourcing to find the best

products at the best prices, meeting both the design and performance requirements of high-design casino developments. To properly source those products, owners must direct their design teams to provide biddable specifications for all FF&E. This means even if a designer firm has a specified vendor as a baseline, it needs to be open to work with other qualified manufacturers.

Given the current volatility in the global manufacturing environment, having resources in multiple manufacturing locations reduces the global supply risk without compromising design or budget considerations. A large-volume purchasing agent will be able to provide an evaluation of multiple bids and insight into cost drivers, manufacturing location and capacity and available alternates across a wide spectrum of global project pricing information.

Once the product has been effectively sourced and ordered, getting the product to the project on time is another way a purchasing company delivers significant value to its clients. Buying big in this instance means the purchasing company has a method of purchasing management and expediting that leverages purchasing volume to move its projects to the front of the line. A purchasing company with established vendor relationships can move product extremely efficiently.

A purchasing company's expediting procedures must include diligent follow-up with the vendors, the designers, and the owner's project manager. Managing the time constraints of a casino project is unique because of the compounding nature of gaming revenue. A large-volume purchasing company has the staff resources and expediting training to work at a fast pace with accuracy and efficiency.

At PMI, there's a team of people solely dedicated to project expediting. Project expeditors enable designers to be efficient, expose risks to project schedules and empower owners to make informed decisions about project milestones.

Owners with large and small casino projects recognize that project purchasing has unique requirements, and their project execution excellence can be amplified when they partner with a qualified large-volume FF&E and OS&E purchasing company that specializes in the gaming industry.

Carl Long is senior vice president of Purchasing Management International, the gaming industry's leading FF&E and OS&E procurement company. He is also president of the International Society of Hospitality Purchasers and regularly speaks on topics related to global sourcing and procurement.

Engaging a qualified purchasing company early in the conceptual development of a project will provide guidance on where to allocate resources and how to truly value-engineer FF&E.



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ENTERTAINMENT

From Old School to New Kids—Everybody's Playing Casinos

There was a time it was considered uncool for entertainers to play the casino circuit. No more. In Las Vegas, AC and at every stop along the way, contemporary and iconic performers are bringing in fans of every era.

By Marjorie Preston

In November, Wayne Newton announced that his residency at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas would continue through 2020—the legendary crooner's 61st year in the business of show.

These days, old-school entertainers like “Mr. Las Vegas” are sharing the stage with rock ‘n’ rollers, country bands, hip-hop artists and even rappers. Stroll the Strip these days and you’ll see marquee promoting vintage metal bands (Aerosmith), ’80s phenoms (Backstreet Boys), and contemporary performers (Drake, Lady Gaga, Bruno Mars) along with the likes of Barry Manilow and—of course, eternally—Cher.

The sheer breadth of entertainment gets everyone in the door and on the floor, even those who don’t typically gravitate toward casinos.

“The casino demographic is still age 60-plus and down to the early 40s or so, people who are still gambling, but younger ones want things to do as well,” says veteran entertainment buyer and talent manager Bill Talarico.

“The only reason you don’t see more residencies in Atlantic City is that it’s not as much as a resort destination as Las Vegas. But when Vegas residencies take a break—for example, Elton John—the AC casinos can pick up those shows.”

Down Memory Lane

Talarico’s resume includes stints at the Trump Taj Mahal, Trump Plaza and Bally’s in Atlantic City, back when Nevada and AC were the only games in town. He’s been entertainment director at Atlantic City’s newest property, the Hard Rock Hotel Casino; served as tour director for Harry Connick Jr., Patti Austin and the Gipsy Kings; and engineered stage productions for the Temptations, Liza Minelli and the Everly Brothers.

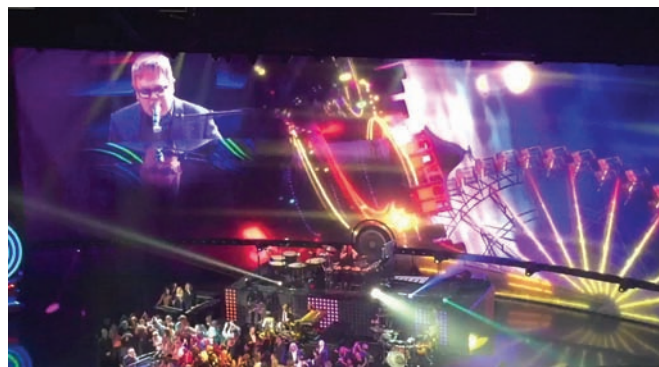
He’s seen it all, and says nostalgia acts will always go over “because of the memories. That’s what draws people and makes those shows viable in the market. If it didn’t touch their heartstrings, they wouldn’t come out.”

As writer Shaun Assael somewhat cynically put it, to mount a boffo Vegas show, “All you had to do was brush off the old act and play to people who didn’t see you the first time around because they were busy raising kids and putting food on the table.”

But that’s the nature of nostalgia, and comedy acts are potent draws too. Comedians of a certain age and era have the same sort of sentimental appeal—witness the successful pairing of Steve Martin and Martin Short, whose current



Lady Gaga in Las Vegas



Elton John in his Million-Dollar Piano show at Caesars



Bruno Mars has made Vegas his home away from home

global tour includes stops at Atlantic City’s Borgata and Hard Rock Live in Hollywood, Florida.

Martin himself has said he and Short initially wanted to do all fresh material. But their audiences demanded at least a taste of the comic routines they loved back in the day.

Martha Reeves: From Motown Songbird to Casino Legend

The first time Martha Reeves and the Vandellas performed in Las Vegas, they shared the bill with none other than the King himself: Elvis Presley. That was 1970. Today, after more than 50 years, Reeves continues to tour, backed up by her sisters Lois and Delphine, singing hits like “Come & Get These Memories,” “Heat Wave,” “Nowhere to Run,” “I’m Ready for Love,” “Jimmy Mack” and her signature tune, “Danc-



ing in The Street,” which was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

Casino Style spoke to Reeves from her Detroit home, shortly after she received the CEA’s Casino Entertainment Legend Award. The honor recognizes lifetime achievement in the casino entertainment industry—recognition that Reeves richly deserves.

Casino Style: Can you share a few memories of your first time in Las Vegas?

Martha Reeves: I thought we’d really made it in show business when we were asked to open for Redd Foxx in the lounge of the International Hilton. Elvis was there with the Sweet Inspirations. Ann-Margret was also on that bill, and Pearl Bailey, too, with the road show of (Broadway musical) *Hello, Dolly!*

Around that time, we did a three-month tour of one-nighters all across the United States. Smokey Robinson was the star of the show, singing all the hit records he and the Miracles made. It was 12 acts in the show with a 12-piece band on a broken-down bus, but it opened the way for all of our music to chart. It also opened the hearts of America to our sound, the sound of the Motown family.

Since then, we’ve played nearly every casino in Las Vegas: the Sands, Circus Circus, New York New York, and the Four Queens Downtown. It’s always been a thrill.



Your hits are timeless and so tuneful. It seems like it would be inevitable that your audiences would sing along, and maybe get up and dance too.

There’s no “maybe” there, honey! We look forward to it. People know all the songs, and I insist that they sing along—it’s a wonderful choir when everyone starts in with, say, “Nowhere to Run.” Then it’s a nice place to be, a place of harmony and unity.

That’s how we started, and you know, music helped to settle a lot of the civil rights problems in the early years, when there were still segregated audiences. Back then, people were inhibited; they didn’t think it was right to get up and sing and dance. Then Smokey spoke up at one of our events and said, “Listen, let’s have fun. Our music is family music, so let’s all enjoy it as a family, together.”

I don’t think there’s a person in the world who wouldn’t join in and start singing if I were to break into Mary Wells’ “My Guy.”

Do you tend to see multiple generations out front at your concerts?

Oh yes, I think three generations come to see our show—grandparents, parents and grandchildren, all enjoying the music together.

You’ve been called the Queen Mother of Soul, and you’ve had a long and illustrious career. Do you plan to continue touring and performing?

Someone asked me recently when I’m going to retire. I told them, “I am a bird. Birds don’t send in retirement papers. They just keep on chirping until they fall off the limb.”

When you’ve been onstage as long as I have—well, this is where my happiness is. I’ll sing until I can sing no more.

“So we put them back in,” the comedian said in a 2019 interview, “and now the show is about 70 percent new material and then 30 percent on demand.”

Acts like Cheech and Chong, ’60s stoners who once epitomized the pot-smoking counter-culture, have gone from “underground to mainstream” and are now staples of the casino stage; their 2020 tour includes multiple dates at tribal properties, from coast to coast and also in the heartland (look out, Iowa).

Big Business

The diversity of entertainment now served up in casinos was reflected at the 2019 Casino Entertainment Awards, a highlight of the G2E trade show held each October.

In 2019, the CEA Entertainer of the Year award went to Peter Noone, “Herman” of the ’60s-era pop group Herman’s Hermits, in a race that also included Manilow and country hitmaker Dwight Yoakam. This year, the still-youthful Noone will perform at a number of casinos including Mohegan Sun in Connecticut and his Las Vegas stomping grounds, the South Point.

Casinos and entertainers mine extra revenue from these shows with enhanced levels of patron access, says Talarico. “That’s become big business. Now you can get a VIP pass to go backstage and meet performers like Keith Urban, Kenny Chesney and people on that level.”

For example, Live Nation subsidiary VIP Nation offers an “Ultimate Experience Package” where, for a price, an avid Ozzy Osbourne fan can slip the velvet rope at Osbourne’s No More Tours tour, visit the Prince of Darkness in his dressing room, attend a pre-show sound check, get goodie bags, posters and other memorabilia, and, oh yes, snap a selfie with the former Black Sabbath frontman.

“People love that part—Instagram and social media have spawned a lot of the VIP experience,” says Talarico.

High rollers may get the same treatment on a complimentary basis—though of course, they pay while they play.

The Leading Edge

CUNINGHAM GROUP

Cunningham Group, an international design firm founded in 1968, and Full Circle Indigenous Planning, a Native American-owned design firm, understand the gaming industry's shifting demographic. In response, they create award-winning gaming resorts and entertainment venues to meet clients' needs.

Cunningham Group helps clients evolve their facilities to feature dynamic gaming and entertainment experiences that attract guests of all ages. Together, Cunningham Group and Full Circle use an integrated approach and cutting-edge technology to design energized spaces and amenities that stand out in competitive markets.

Potawatomi Hotel & Casino

Following the design of the original LEED-Gold-certified Potawatomi Hotel & Casino in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Cunningham Group designed a 119-room hotel tower expansion that features a spa and additional meeting space.

The 19-story hotel tower expansion brings the total room count to 500, making it the second largest hotel in Milwaukee. The existing hotel contains a casual dining restaurant, a lobby bar/lounge and meeting space.

To reflect its setting, the hotel's façade is a combination of green-tinted transparent and opaque glass to resemble Lake Michigan's shimmering waves on a sunny day.

Angel of the Winds Casino Resort

The 300,000-square-foot expansion and renovation of Angel of the Winds Casino Resort in Arlington, Washington elevates the property to a destination resort.

The expansion adds 275 slot machines and 12 new table games, a 200-seat buffet and 60-seat upscale steakhouse, and an entertainment block with a multi-purpose 750-seat entertainment facility, 12-lane HyperBowling facility, and virtual sports simulators.

The design takes its cues from the natural, organic forms in the Washington landscape with sweeping pathways and strong ceiling elements.

Rival House

Rival House at Grand Casino Hinckley in Hinckley, Minnesota combines gaming and music for a dynamic experience.

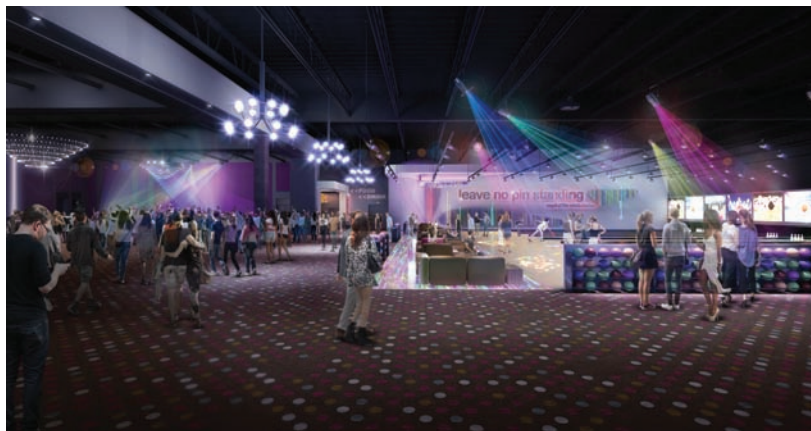
Rival House's front half contains high-top seating, stage and dance floor, and the back half offers arcade-style games. It also contains one of two HyperBowling facilities in Minnesota.

The stylish, smart and whimsical design of the space utilizes unique materials such as reclaimed wood, theatrical lights, decorative tile, triangular ceiling elements with integrated lighting and inconspicuously designed acoustic wall panels.

For more information, please visit cunningham.com.



Potawatomi Hotel & Casino



Angel of the Winds Casino Resort



Rival House

Comfortable Chairs Handcrafted By Artisans

GARY PLATT MANUFACTURING

Gary Platt Manufacturing offers a dream come true for designers approaching projects of all types and scale. That's because Gary Platt doesn't have employees—it offers a team of artisans who design, create and construct every chair by hand.

This dedication to craft results in unsurpassed attention to detail, meaning every designer's vision is perfectly and meticulously brought to life by artists who treat every chair as a work of art. Plus, each chair is customizable to the exact specifications of the designer.

Choosing Gary Platt is a decision every designer can be comfortable with. The company has more than 20 years of experience, handcrafting chairs using only the best materials, right down to the proprietary blend of foam that goes into each chair so it perfectly pairs fashion with unsurpassed comfort.

While Gary Platt perhaps is best known for bringing incomparable comfort to the casino floor, the company has a deep portfolio of seating solutions for the entire enterprise: gaming and hospitality. Traditional chair companies seem to have forgotten that comfort still matters in bars, restaurants, guest rooms, convention halls and other hospitality areas. However, Gary Platt brings its ergonomics and comfort solutions to every chair, everywhere.

Two examples of Gary Platt's innovative design are its Tesla and Savannah models. The Tesla model recently received the company's third patent, preceded by patents for Gary Platt's best-selling Monaco chair and Epic Frame, known globally for versatility and durability. Sleek and

Classic design and comfort are typified in Gary Platt's luxurious Savannah series



modern, the Tesla wraps players in comfort with a wing-style back and legs that cascade down from the seat.

Classic design meets elegance and class in Gary Platt's Savannah, with a custom-upholstered back, hand-stitched channel front and versatile bases that allow it to fit into any area of the casino.

For more information, please visit garyplatt.com.

Intuitive, Thoughtful Solutions

FRIEDMUTTER GROUP

Friedmutter Group is an award-winning, internationally recognized master planning, architecture and interior design firm specializing 100 percent in multi-use hospitality resort projects of all sizes.

Brad Friedmutter founded the firm in 1992 for the unique purpose of exclusively providing professional architectural and interior design services to the gaming industry. Friedmutter Group's expertise includes hotels, casinos, entertainment venues, restaurants, bars and lounges, convention and meeting facilities, pools and spas, retail facilities and hotels.

In the past year, Friedmutter Group was proud to have been included as the architect and designer for several new build projects, such as Hard Rock Casino and Hotel-Sacramento at Fire Mountain, the Soboba Casino Resort and MGM Springfield. In addition, Friedmutter Group created unique interior designs for the rebranding and renovations at iconic Las Vegas Properties including the Palms Casino Resort, the Strat (formerly Stratosphere) and Palace Station. Current indications are that 2020 also is shaping up to be an exciting year for the Friedmutter Group.

Friedmutter Group provides critical and comprehensive understanding of the many required elements of the gaming industry, from site selection and development to operating fundamentals, while successfully creating unique architectural and interior designs in existing and new markets.

The firm provides intuitive, thoughtful solutions that manage access and easy circulation of large numbers of people into and through venues,



MGM Springfield in Massachusetts

while providing highest-quality design, best efficiencies and adjacencies of space and maximum profitability opportunities during all phases of development, construction and operations.

Offices are located in Las Vegas, Nevada and Newport Beach, California. More information may be found at fglv.com.

American-Crafted Comfort

GASSER CHAIR COMPANY

Most chairs are designed to fill a space. Gasser chairs are designed to elevate it.

Gasser Chair Company is a premier American designer and manufacturer of seating products for worldwide gaming, hospitality and casino venues. For more than 70 years, Gasser has been designing, building and perfecting the art of commercial seating.

Rooms come in all different shapes, colors and sizes, and so does Gasser seating. Gasser is not one to provide cookie-cutter solutions to complex challenges. As a true commercial seating manufacturer with in-house design, engineering and R&D, Gasser is ready for anything. From custom upholstery methods to completely original designs, Gasser encourages customers to let their imaginations soar and then custom-designs solutions specifically to their needs.

Each Gasser chair is handcrafted and manufactured in the U.S., using only the finest components that provide the comfort and structural integrity Gasser is known for. Gasser furniture is modularly constructed to allow unique customization and parts to be easily replaced if incidents occur, such as a tear in the fabric or damage to a seat or back. This modular construction is an important feature as Gasser values each purchase as an investment for the customer and stands prepared to assist customers through many years of service.

For more information, please visit gasserchair.com.

Comfort and elegance:
Gasser's Conley series



Designing Experience

HBG DESIGN

For 40 years, HBG Design has been pioneering the creation of imaginative and memorable guest experiences.

As a Top 5 hospitality and entertainment design firm in the U.S., its team of 120 architects, interior designers and building professionals in Memphis, Tennessee and San Diego, California share a passion for making stories come to life by shaping physical space and connecting people to place.

Guests crave distinctive, transformative experiences, and that's what HBG Design delivers—through esteemed projects spanning the country for diverse clients, including more than 40 Indian gaming enterprises, as well as commercial hospitality and entertainment giants such as Caesars Entertainment, Elvis Presley Enterprises, Hyatt Hotels and Hilton Hotels.

In the last two decades alone, the firm has designed more than 21,000 resort and hotel rooms and more than 22 million square feet of hotel, gaming/entertainment, food and beverage, conference/meeting, events and retail space.

Understanding that architecture and interior design are intrinsically connected to the guest experience, HBG Design's in-house teams of architects and interior designers work side-by-side to approach hospitality and entertainment design as a collaborative, intentional process.

HBG Design's philosophy of experience-driven design is well represented in several recent project openings, including the acclaimed \$226 million, 500,000-square-foot expansion of Sycuan Casino Resort in El Cajon, California. The 300-room hotel tower, casino and food and beverage expansion has created an array of revenue-generating opportunities for Sycuan and helped fulfill a need

The \$226 million, 500,000-square-foot expansion of
Sycuan Casino Resort in El Cajon, California



for more distinct cross-generational and upscale guest experiences in the competitive market.

Offering guests a sensory nourishing wellness experience, the new Spa at Cache Creek Casino Resort in Brooks, California was luxuriously reimagined by HBG Design ahead of the resort's eagerly anticipated opening of the 459-room hotel expansion in early 2020.

The firm also looks forward to the opening of the Desert Diamond West Valley Casino Resort in Glendale, Arizona and two urban hotel experiences for Canopy by Hilton and Hyatt Centric in the coming year.

Collaborators. Storytellers. Market surveyors. Experience curators. HBG Design is absolutely passionate about entertainment and hospitality design. Learn more at hbg.design.com.

Synergy At Its Best

KLAI JUBA WALD

Las Vegas-based Klai Juba Wald architecture + interiors provides comprehensive design services creating award-winning projects that enhance communities nationwide. The company's talented team creates design excellence for integrated gaming resorts, retail, dining, entertainment, sports and convention venues.

Klai Juba Wald takes pride in its loyal employees and teams hand-picked with owners, each committed to listening, sharing expertise and ensuring operational acumen—"whatever it takes"—to shape successful and acclaimed projects.

Collectively, the firm's principals have 200 years participating in the evolution and reinvention of Las Vegas and the hospitality industry. Klai Juba Wald has led major remodel and expansion projects at MGM Grand, Luxor, Planet Hollywood, Palms Casino Resort, Silverton and numerous Boyd Gaming Group properties. Recent projects include Las Vegas Convention Center Phase 3; Hard Rock Las Vegas' conversion into Virgin's flagship resort; remodels and expansions at San Manuel, Chinook Winds and Rivers Des Plaines, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia; and Maryland Live!

The company also served as architect of record for Mandalay Bay, the Four Seasons and the Hotel Delano, its signature beach and conference/event center; and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Thomas & Mack modernization and Fertitta Football Complex.



The Seminole Hard Rock Guitar Hotel Expansion for the Seminole Tribe of Florida

Klai Juba Wald takes pride in nurturing enduring client relationships while providing vision, leadership and support to architectural education. The firm believes in giving back to the community it calls home. Employees are champions for education, children and the homeless—and are proud of its namesake lecture series, founded at UNLV's School of Architecture in 1997. UNLV Foundation's 2019 Palladium Society inductee, Klai Juba Wald remains "proud of every endeavor—the firm's work—its reputation—and the company it keeps."

For more information, visit klaijubawald.com.

The Industry's Premier Purchaser

PURCHASING MANAGEMENT INTERNATIONAL

Connect with Purchasing Management International, the gaming industry's premier purchaser of furniture, fixtures and equipment and operating supplies and equipment.

With extensive experience in the gaming industry, PMI works with designers, architects and owners to offer the accuracy, integrity and buying power needed for demanding gaming resort projects. PMI saves clients time and money.

The company has purchased and installed more than \$3 billion in furnishings, operating equipment and systems throughout the gaming industry at properties such as Maryland Live!, Rivers Casinos, Churchill Downs, Isle of Capri, Caesars Palace, MGM Grand, Harrah's, Treasure Island, Mirage, Wind Creek, Choctaw, Bellagio, Tropicana, Hard Rock, Station Casinos' Red Rock Resort and the Four Winds Casino Resort in New Buffalo, Michigan, owned by the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians.

PMI's well-trained staff, vendor knowledge and unique system of checks and balances offer clients better project results, more project savings and higher design execution.

PMI understands that in the gaming world, every minute matters on a project. FF&E and OS&E sourcing and procurement are no different. PMI choreographs thousands of moving parts from international sources to deliver



Four Winds Casino Resort, New Buffalo, Michigan

some of the most well-designed and complex projects in the gaming industry, on time and under budget.

For the best in gaming FF&E and OS&E procurement services, connect with the best—connect with Purchasing Management International.

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Discover. Collaborate. Deliver.

WORTHGROUP ARCHITECTS & DESIGNERS

Worthgroup Architects & Designers specializes in design and planning for diverse project types, and are authorities in commercial projects including hospitality, gaming, retail and mixed-use, community and well building and industrial design.

Since opening its doors in 1990, Worthgroup has delivered hundreds of innovative designs both nationally and internationally. Renovating an existing facility or designing a completely new, from-the-ground-up property, Worthgroup has the creative team of designers, architects, interior designers, planners and animators to deliver a successful project.

With a design led by discovery approach, the Worthgroup team is committed to providing creative and distinctive project solutions through a close partnership with clients. Staying true to architectural intent while considering factors such as functionality, cost and performance, the firm is committed to always respecting the bottom line, focusing on the guest experience and delivering a project both memorable in narrative and true to the clients' unique story.

Discover. Collaborate. Deliver.

For more information, please contact Christina Stanfill at 303-649-1095, email cstanfill@worthgroup.com or visit worthgroup.com.



Mystic Lake Casino Hotel in Prior Lake, Minnesota, the largest gaming resort in the North Star State

The Rewards Of Quality Design

SOSH ARCHITECTS

SOSH Architects was founded in 1979 on the core conviction that quality design continually rewards the community, the client and the design team.

The firm has steadily grown from a company of four partners to its current size of 45 design professionals and support staff, all engaged in the execution of master planning, architecture and interior design commissions worldwide.

SOSH's philosophy drives a design process that values exploration, visualization and the contributions of multiple voices. Together, they deliver the best design solutions, the result of thoughtful collaboration and creative analysis.

With offices in Atlantic City and Philadelphia, SOSH has handled every aspect of hotel and casino design—from small, intimate VIP lounges and retail spaces to expansive casino floor renovations and new tower and resort construction. Each project has its own unique set of design opportunities and technical requirements, which SOSH addresses to meet client needs and stay ahead of market trends.

SOSH has played a pivotal role in many successful launches of sports betting venues over the last two years as gaming legislation evolves in various states across the country. Other current hospitality and gaming projects include work with high-profile clients including Eldorado Resorts, Hard Rock International and Mohegan Sun.

While hospitality-based work is a substantial aspect of its business, SOSH also is engaged in a variety of project types around the globe.

To learn more, please visit sosharch.com.





All Hospitality, All the Time

TBE ARCHITECTS

Over the past 48 years, Thalden Boyd Architects LLC, dba TBE Architects, has become one of the best-known hospitality and gaming architectural firms in North America.

The firm has designed more than 400 unique hotel projects and 300 casino projects, so “All Hospitality, All the Time” is much more than a tag line—it’s the very foundation of TBE’s client base and an integral part of defining its team culture.

TBE Architects provides full architectural services including master planning, architectural design, theming development and interior design. Its highly experienced design teams work tirelessly to deliver bold, high-quality and fully integrated projects on time and on budget.

Much of the firm’s “adaptive theming style” is a direct reflection of the team’s ability to meet the unique demands of diverse clients, and it is proud to say that no two TBE casinos or hotels are alike. With roots firmly planted in gaming and hospitality, the team has an exceptional understanding of sophisticated entertainment for adults.

TBE has dedicated a significant portion of time to the growth and development of several national and internationally recognized brands such as Caesars, Churchill Downs, Delaware North, Harrah’s, Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott and Jacob’s Entertainment. It also has designed directly for 116 Native American tribes and First Nations.

Throughout the firm, each employee shares a common goal: to fuse the talents of the team with the needs of the client; designing architectural destinations that are fresh, exciting, appropriately themed and fully functional.

TBE Architects is an active associate member of the American Institute of Architects and an associate member of the National Indian Gaming Association.

For more information, visit tbearchitects.com or contact Vice President of Client Development Linda Roe at 602-321-6207.



The North Lobby of Harrah’s Ak-Chin features a striking “raindrop” chandelier and a horizontal band with a water motif.

Back to the Future

Hotel Nacional de Cuba was the hub of the Cuban gaming industry before the takeover by Fidel Castro

By Patrick Roberts

When the communist revolution of Fidel Castro toppled the regime of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, it also toppled Cuba's healthy and thriving gaming industry. Of course, the industry was thriving for its organized crime owners and for Batista, who got a cut of their end, but it also employed lots of Cubans.

Starting in the 1920s, thousands of Americans and Latin Americans traveled to Cuba each year to enjoy the legal alcohol, wide-open gambling, bordellos and Havana nightlife.

After World War II, the casino industry developed robustly. Many casino resorts opened, and like Las Vegas a decade or two later, each one was more elaborate than the last.

But one hotel was the center of the casino industry: the Hotel Nacional de Cuba in Havana. Opened in 1930, the hotel was on the Hill of Tuganana, with panoramic views of the city and the ocean. The hotel has a unique *parti pris* design that gave a majority of the rooms a view of the ocean across the road. Each of the eight floors held 74 rooms, except for the top, which has 64 rooms. The hotel was developed by the U.S. engineering firm of Purdy and Henderson, and designed by the New York architecture firm of McKim, Mead and White. It's clad in coral stone and is a mix of architectural styles.

The Hotel Nacional was owned and operated by a group of investors who also owned New York's swanky Plaza Hotel. Its early history was somewhat tragic, as the revolution that brought Batista to power in 1933 ravaged the hotel. The hierarchy of the Cuban military defended the hotel against the military rank and file, culminating in the Battle of the Hotel Nacional, which decided the conflict but caused substantial damage to the hotel, including many shell and bullet holes, some of which remain today.

In 1943, it was purchased by the Kirkeby Hotels company and operated by the firm for more than a decade.

In 1946, the infamous "Havana Conference" of mob bosses was held at the Hotel Nacional. The meeting was called by Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky. Attendees included Santo Trafficante Jr., Frank Costello, Albert Anastasia, Vito Genovese and many others. You may remember a depiction of the conference



Above: The *parti pris* design of the Hotel Nacional. Left: A 1958 photo of the Casino Internacional located inside the hotel owned by mobster Meyer Lansky.

in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part II*.

Lansky was the power, and in 1955 persuaded Batista to allow him to take over a wing of the hotel and create high-roller suites for gamblers at his casino downstairs, Casino Internacional. Run by Wilber Clark, who later was the owner of the Desert Inn in Las Vegas, the casino boasted revenue that routinely bettered any Las Vegas gaming hall. Lansky sold the casino to Michael McLaney and Baltimore Colts owner Carroll Rosenbloom in 1958.

When Castro took over a year later, he immediately closed all Cuban casinos, but relented a few days later after massive demonstrations by casino workers—and warnings from his advisers that the closure would destroy the economy. But the damage had already been done. U.S. tourists avoided the island. The casino industry, along with the Cuban economy, collapsed anyway. Castro later reinstated his ban on casinos in Cuba.

Today, the Hotel Nacional de Cuba still stands and welcomes guests, albeit with a vacant casino area awaiting a revival. With relaxed relations with the U.S. and the easing of travel restrictions, it could still happen.

TRIBAL Government Gaming

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