

april 2010 hospitalitydesign.com

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16 stunning projects
the magicians of citycenter
platinum circle 2010

City Center



Bill Smith still remembers back in 2004 when MGM Mirage CEO Jim Murren asked him to come to his office to talk about building something other than just another casino. "The concept was to create a place in Las Vegas that is really a center—something world class," says Smith, president of design and construction for CityCenter.

From a bubble diagram concept for 67 acres to the finished product 60 months and \$8.5 billion later, the project utilized 275 architect, engineer, and consulting firms, some 50,000 design and construction drawings, numerous top chefs and F&B operators, and a team dedicated solely to planning roughly 75 weekly meetings. With six LEED Gold certifications in its pocket, CityCenter opened in December.

In terms of hospitality, there's non-gaming hotel Vdara with 1,495 suites, a restaurant, lobby lounge, pool and lounge, and spa. Across the way is Aria Resort & Casino, with 4,004 rooms, 16 restaurants, 10 bars and lounges, a spa, and three pools with 50 cabanas and Liquid, an adult-only pool lounge. Hugging the Strip is the 47-story non-gaming Mandarin Oriental, with 392 guestrooms, 225 residences, a spa, pool and sundeck, six restaurants and bars, and a 23rd floor sky lobby, and Crystals, 500,000 square feet of restaurants, dining, entertainment, and retail.

"It's more than just another development. It's beyond what everyone believed we could accomplish at the level we did," says Smith, pointing to its extensive fine arts program and the fact that they were the largest employer in the country in 2009. "To me, it's a symbol of what people can do

when they collaborate together in the U.S. I equated it to the Empire State building, which opened during the Great Depression, and here we are in the Great Recession."

"The incredibly large scale of the property and the overall monumental achievement of the whole project enticed us from the beginning. Then, with notable world class architects involved and MGM Mirage's vision behind the project, it was too incredible to not be involved," adds Andy Masi, managing partner of the Light Group, who has five venues in Aria.

The architects have all been well publicized—Daniel Libeskind, Rafael Vinoly, Kohn Pedersen Fox, Pelli Clarke, Gensler, Foster + Partners—but we decided to take a look inside, at 19 of the 46 design firms that collaborated on CityCenter, and their spaces, where the city within a city truly comes to life. It's an infusion of talent, a mix of veterans and up-and-comers, from large firms to small, many making their Vegas debut. Each space has its own distinct feel, with many elements not seen before, but together, they form one cohesive look that is CityCenter.

"Hiring all of these different designers and architects to work on a single project was born out of the idea of how do we represent an experience and product so uniquely different from what we have done before, something that's unique for society," says Sven Van Assche, vice president of design for CityCenter, adding that his biggest challenge was guiding everyone along a common big-picture path. "There was an excitement from doing something so unique that it afforded a whole different range of concepts."

Robert D. Henry Architects

"We were enticed by the opportunity of creating the most intimate spa within this grand complex. We wanted to connect on a more humanistic scale: softening the guest, as they journeyed through a series of water spaces to the treatment areas. Behind the front desk, a series of two-story water ribbons entice guests to the changing area on the second level. Here, 'aqua-lounges' become the focal point, spilling water from a misty blue ocular source," says Robert Henry of the design for Vdara Health & Beauty. "Beyond, a four-foot-high garden at eye level connects the changing areas with the 'care suites' via a curved 77-foot corridor. The episodic journey culminates in a tranquility room with sculpted ergonomic sapele chaise lounges with an integral memory foam layer providing pure comfort. Guests enjoy the hushed sounds of water falling over undulating platinum tile gathering in a clear glass catch-basin located behind a ledge lined with an effervescent glow from a series of prayer candles."



From top: The whirlpool area at Vdara Health & Beauty; the meditation treatment lobby. (Photos by Scott Frances)

