

HOTEL DESIGN

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Seductive SLS Las Vegas

Wilson A

Dan Kwan

Yin and Yang Fair

at Jumeirah Beach | SLS Las Vegas | Raffles Istanbul Zorlu Center

ad Koh Samui | Loews Regency Hotel New York

PRODUCTS Outdoor Furniture | Occasional Seating



THE FIVE WS

WHAT: SLS Las Vegas
WHO: Philippe Starck and Gensler
WHERE: Las Vegas
WHEN: August 2014
WAY: Conversion from the former Sahara Hotel & Casino

OUT OF SAHARA'S ASHES RISES THE SLS LAS VEGAS

By Jena Tesse Fox

THE FORMER Sahara Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas got new life last summer when its doors reopened as the SLS Las Vegas after a \$415-million renovation. The 62-year-old property had been dark since May 2011, but under the guidance of global design firm Gensler, interior design icon Philippe Starck and sbe head Sam Nazarian, it has returned with a decidedly 21st century style.

But that is not to say that the hotel forgot its roots. Beth Campbell, principal and managing director for Gensler, in its Las Vegas office, says that the team wanted to pay tribute to the original property with “experiential” design. “Many of the building materials were recycled during the transformation process,” she says, and the original structure of the building was preserved.

“The space was a collaborative team planning effort with Starck, sbe, Penta and Gensler,” Campbell continues. “The Starck team communicated their creative ideas. Sam Nazarian and his executive team clearly shared their vision for the property.”

SOMETHING OLD

Joe Faust, president of sbe’s Dakota Development, says that the resort was programmed around existing structures and infrastructure of the old Sahara. “We felt it was necessary to incorporate elements of the Rat Pack era, the Beatles’ visit and other momentous times in Vegas’ history.

These can be found in the carpet and artwork throughout the property.”

The team made “extensive efforts” to streamline paths of travel, increase accessibility and efficiencies while integrating some of the features expected in a modern casino resort. “Nightlife and evening-only venues were consolidated and all-day venues were focused towards the guestrooms towers and retail outlets,” Faust says.

Of course, working within an existing footprint presents unique challenges to designers—but challenges can also spark innovation. “Early on in the project, several engineering hurdles prevented Ku Noodle’s kitchen from being placed in the back of the restaurant,” Faust says. Rather than spending several million dollars to force the kitchen into a space where it didn’t fit, the team turned the ▶

Above:
The Foxtail Pool Club.



PHOTOGRAPHY: SLS Las Vegas

Clockwise:
The Center Bar;
Bazaar Meat by José Andrés;
Lux rooms are bright and opulent.

kitchen into the restaurant's showpiece with a window onto the casino so that passersby could watch the chefs at work.

About halfway through the project, the team had the chance to "push the digital media installations in the space to the next level," Faust says. Adding new installations required re-engineering and reconceiving spaces and elements that had been considered complete, from the layout of bars to how the lighting was handled. "The collective team assisted in the redesign to limit cost exposure," he notes.

SOMETHING NEW

"Through the leadership and creative financial thinking, we were able to add several programmatic elements throughout the process," Campbell says. This included adding "pools, restaurants and additional gaming features."

Starck likes to use lighting to "add drama" to his spaces, Faust says, and for this project tried to be more theatrical and treat the whole casino "as a big movie set," only placing lighting where it was needed and letting the slot machines generate all other ambient light.

The design team used tapestries throughout the building to soften and set the tone of spaces. "In Bazaar Meat, the tapestry depicts an English pastoral hunting setting, and the warm colors work well with the wood finishes and upholstered furniture. At the exterior of Foxtail on the main casino, a pseudo-cosmic scene creates a dramatic backdrop for all of the slot machines," Faust says. But in spite of the brand's clout and cache, the team had to be careful what materials were chosen and where they were placed due to the size of the project and the limited budget. "Where there was limited guest exposure to materials, alternates were used such as Chemetal and wood wall coverings. Where guest used and had a tactile interaction with surfaces and objects, we selected marbles and metals that reinforced the quality of the experience. Unlike other venues in Vegas, we didn't feel the need to cover every last square inch of surfaces with silk, marble or panelling," he says.

In some spots, materials served dual purposes. For the Foxtail nightclub, the team used Tectum acoustic panels, painted in dark grey, and then had a French calligrapher write all over the walls—reducing noise while creating a playful ambience. "The effect was pretty spectacular and proved to be a dramatic and cost-effective solution," Faust says. **HD**



PARTICIPANTS

Architecture Design Firm: Gensler
Structural Engineer: John A Martin and Associates
Interior Design Consultant: Philippe Starck
General Contractor: PENTA Building Group, Inc.
Landscape Architecture: Attanasio
Interior fit-out contractor: GM Raymond, Las Vegas
Lighting Consultant: Lighting Design Alliance, Long Beach
Audio Visual Consultant: NAV
Mechanical/Electrical Consultant: Southland Industries, Bombard Electrical
Kitchen Consultant: Abrams & Tanaka Associates
Signage Consultant: Vision Sign Co.
Art Consultant: Iconic Images
Paint: Benjamin Moore
Wallcovering: Koroseal, Aztek
Wood veneer: Koroseal Arbor Series
Faux: GM Raymond
Millwork/Casegoods: Berman Falk, NunoErin