LOVE AT FIRST SITE
LOCAL MOVERS AND SHAKERS REFLECT ON THEIR FAVORITE SPACES IN SOUTHERN NEVADA

THINK GLOBALLY
HOW VEGAS IS EXPORTING ITS ARCHITECTURAL TALENT AROUND THE WORLD

MOD MESSIAH
THE HIGH PRIEST OF MID-MOD WHO QUIETLY Styled LAS VEGAS
OPTIMISTIC
BY DESIGN

IT’S BEEN A WONDERFUL YEAR
celebrating the 60th anniversary of our AIA Chapter — made all the more wonderful by the rave reviews of the April issue that marked the welcome revival of Architecture Las Vegas. Adding to the energy are the AIA panels, lectures and meetings that have both celebrated our chapter’s history and fired up our enthusiasm for the future. Indeed, with our October issue, we hope to continue the vital conversation about architecture, design, community and livability.

Serving the AIA membership and design community continues to be our major focus; however, brand identity and public awareness are two other areas that deserve our attention. Architecture Las Vegas has been the perfect tool in our efforts to move these initiatives forward. We appreciate your continued support of the publication, especially as we move toward 2019, when we host the AIA National Convention.

One of my personal goals with Architecture Las Vegas was not just to publish a magazine about architecture for professionals and laypeople alike. I also wanted to create a magnet that would pull our industry together and engage the professional community — but, at the same time, create a megaphone to speak to the wider community, informing and educating them about the many benefits beyond design that architecture delivers to the community. Architecture is a competitive profession, to be sure, but I remain convinced that we are stronger when we work together, when — as in a finely crafted building that pleases us — the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

This year, I’ve been reflecting on my career, and it dawned on me just how unique our city is, and how there are opportunities offered by Las Vegas that don’t exist anywhere else. I moved here in 1982, and both the population and the footprint of the valley have more than tripled in size over those 30-plus years. Along with my colleagues, I’m very fortunate to have been a part of this extraordinary design experience — one in which bold ideas were seemingly dreamed up overnight and complex projects were programmed, designed and constructed with incredible drive and remarkable discipline. Where else could an architect be a part of a project such as the Bellagio, which spans over 5 million square feet, employs over 10,000 people, and operates like a small city? A project that, by the way, was conceived, designed and built in less than five years.

What does the future look like for us? In my humble opinion, we’ll not only retain our hard-earned title of Entertainment Capital of the World, we’ll expand the very definition of it. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority has been taking major steps to keep our foothold as a world leader in convention tourism. The LVCVA’s planned growth and expansion will protect and grow the billions of dollars that have been invested in our community and keep us at the top of the list as the world’s destination for leisure, adventure and escape. (The fact that the new Jason Bourne movie takes place in Las Vegas and revolves around a technology conference speaks volumes about the reputation of Las Vegas and its very bright future.) As our industry continues to develop, invent and grow, we’re well-positioned to take advantage of this post-recession moment that’s ripe with promise and opportunity.

Please enjoy the features, profiles, discussions and perspectives in this, our second rebirth issue of Architecture Las Vegas. Thank you for your support as we continue our 60th anniversary celebration — and as we look forward to the years ahead.

Brett K. Ewing, AIA
President, AIA Las Vegas Chapter
Principal, Cuningham Group Architecture, Inc.
Save it for later: Whether they’re striving behind the scenes or making headlines, these historic preservation groups work hard to preserve our past.

Everybody wants some: Exporting our vibrant architectural vision requires smarts, sensitivity — and a touch of that Vegas verve. Tony Illia

Personal space: High-profile Las Vegans consider the buildings and spaces that inspire, engage, and intrigue them.
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Remembrance: Joel D. Bergman, AIA had a profound influence not just on the Strip, but on entertainment architecture as a whole. Tony Illia

Community: The Urban Sketchers take pencil to paper to capture the soul of the city — and keep the art in architecture. Misti Yang

Design: From deft refreshes to total reinventions, these five bar and restaurant makeovers offer lessons in efficiency, sustainability and pure imagination. Jason Scavone

History: Architect Hugh E. Taylor delivered Mid-century design to the Las Vegas masses. And yet we're still uncovering the extent of his impact. Tony Illia

Profile: Legendary Strip architect and developer Tony Marnell, AIA talks about his career, his views on contemporary design and the future of Las Vegas. T.R. Witcher

News + Notes: Reflecting on the impact AIA architects have had on Las Vegas, and notes on upcoming events for those in the profession. Randy Lavigne, Hon. AIA

Perspective: Reflecting on the power of sketching — for fun, fulfillment and problem-solving — in a digital world. Eric Roberts, AIA
At BWA, designs for tomorrow are built on past successes. Our 20+ year legacy of hospitality projects is the foundation that inspires the next generation.

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To appreciate the impact of architect Joel D. Bergman on Las Vegas, you need look no further than the Strip — Bergman’s laboratory and playground. He produced numerous landmark projects, including The Mirage, Treasure Island, and Paris Las Vegas during a rich and varied 45-year design career.

“There will never be another architect who has had such a profound influence on entertainment architecture as Joel,” says architect Paul Steelman, who worked for Bergman for nine years. “Disney was created by Walt Disney. Las Vegas was created by Joel.”

To be sure, the pioneering architect irrevocably changed the Las Vegas landscape, but Bergman’s impact on resort design in general is no less significant. Bergman’s prodigious talent and design skills resulted in work across the country, with commissions in Missouri, New Jersey, California, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Washington, Mississippi and elsewhere.

“He was an exceptional architect, and a master at managing large, complicated projects,” says American Institute of Architects Las Vegas Chapter Executive Director Randy Lavigne. “He was a completely kind, loveable guy who always spoke his mind honestly.”

Bergman died August 24 from complications related to chronic lymphocytic leukemia. He was 80. Bergman had been diagnosed with the disease 15 years ago, and quietly underwent several successful treatments, often returning to work the next day — a telling reflection of his enthusiastic commitment to the profession.

An L.A. native, Bergman moved to Las Vegas shortly after graduating with
XIX ANNUAL
KLAI JUBA WALD
FALL LECTURE SERIES

REGIONAL THOUGHTS
UNLV SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

8.22-9.23 PROJECTHOME
EXHIBITION SPONSORED BY MELISSA PETERSEN
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY

09.02 LARRY SCARPA
BROOKS+SCARPA
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
DOWNTOWN DESIGN CENTER 5:30PM

09.12 ELIZABETH SMITH
DIRECTOR, HELEN FRANKENTHALER FOUNDATION, AUTHOR
SPONSORED BY JD STAIRS
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 8:30PM

09.15 WENDELL BURNETTE
WENDELL BURNETTE ARCHITECTS
BULTHAUP KITCHENS (LA)
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 5:30PM

9.16 PROJECTHOME SYMPOSIUM
SPONSORED BY FLEETWOOD WINDOW

JOSE GALARZA
DIRECTOR DESIGN BUILD BLUFF
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
SPONSORED BY BLUE KEEN
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 10:00PM

REED KROLLOFF
JONES KROLLOF
SPONSORED BY MERRILL CONSTRUCTION
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 2:30PM

ALAN HESS
AUTHOR
SPONSORED BY SCOVOLIN
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 4:00PM

9.17 PROJECTHOME
MATERIAL WORKSHOPS
SPONSORED BY SUMMER LIN

RAMMED EARTH
DCI AND BLASER CONSTRUCTION
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE 9:00AM

BLACKENED STEEL
JD STAIRS
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE 10:00AM

INSULATED CMU
OMNI BLOCK
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE 11:00AM

WINDOWS
FLEETWOOD & SAWBUCK
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE 12:00PM

09.26 MARWAN AL-SAYED
MASASTUDIO
WEST HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 5:30PM

10.08-10.09 HADRION PREDOCK
WORKSHOP
DIRECTOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM AT USC
SPONSORED BY NEVADA ART COUNCIL
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

10.10 HADRION PREDOCK
DIRECTOR OF UNDERGRADUATE ARCHITECTURE AT USC
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 5:30PM

10.24 ERIC LOGAN
CARNEY LOGAN BURKE ARCHITECTS
JACKSON, WYOMING
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 5:30PM

11.14 JERRY VAN EYCK
IMELK
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY 5:30PM
Joel Bergman’s early work on projects such as the Golden Nugget presaged the megaresort era to come.

honors from the University of Southern California, earning an architecture degree. He joined renowned architect Martin Stern Jr. in 1968, receiving $5 per hour — which was big pay at the time. Bergman cut his teeth on the $60-million, 1,519-room International Hotel for developer Kirk Kerkorian. It was the largest, most lavish resort of its day. The 30-floor complex had white marble floors, chandeliers and a 2,000-seat showroom with opening acts such as Barbra Streisand and Peggy Lee. Opened in 1969, the tri-wing International became the progenitor of the modern, all-in-one megaresort and eventual building template for the Las Vegas Strip.

“The International was a landmark at the time. It was the largest hotel resort built, and it was Stern’s first major project,” says Peter Michel, special collections curator.
at UNLV Libraries, which houses Stern’s archives. “It was also off the Strip, which allowed for a different design scheme. It gave Stern the opportunity to build from scratch, integrating a big casino with restaurants, venues, and theaters.”

Working for Stern proved an invaluable life-shaping experience for Bergman, giving him the skills, experience and confidence to eventually head up Steve Wynn’s in-house architecture firm, Atlandia, from 1978 until 1994. He remodeled Las Vegas’ Golden Nugget in 1977, and later oversaw construction of the North Tower addition. Berman also designed the $140-million, 506-room Golden Nugget in Atlantic City, which debuted in 1980. It was Atlantic City’s sixth casino following gambling legalization in 1976.

THE BUILDING AND THE BOOM

The Wynn-Bergman partnership proved mutually enriching. (Wynn reportedly had a chair next to Bergman’s drafting table). The duo’s most fruitful collaboration was The Mirage — a game-changer — which set off a two-decade-long building boom along the Las Vegas Strip. The $630-million 3,044-room megaresort opened in 1989 and set a new standard in using design and décor to not just evoke a theme, but conjure it with the potency of a dream: The Polynesian-themed resort has palm trees, water features and rainforest flora inside a day-lit atrium. A 53-foot-long aquarium behind the registration desk houses nearly 1,000 specimens of tropical fish. The balmy island ambiance extends outdoors with a lagoon, lush landscaping and, of course, its famous fire-blowing volcano. The gleaming white Y-shaped resort even featured windows tinted with gold dust. It was the most expensive hotel casino in history, requiring $1 million a day in order to cover operating costs. The high-stakes gamble paid off. More than 25 years later, The Mirage is considered an icon.

“Every major resort project since has referenced The Mirage, so that alone is a legacy,” says David Schwartz, director of UNLV’s Center for Gaming Research. “Bergman worked at a time when the casino industry was expanding, and his design contributions helped to build the language still used today.”

Indeed, Bergman used those lessons learned to craft the $450-million, 2,884-room Treasure Island hotel and casino, which originally began as expansion to The Mirage before developing into its own standalone resort. (It still connects to The Mirage by tram). Opened in 1993, Treasure Island originally had a Caribbean-themed design with a skull-and-crossbones marquee and staged pirate battles nightly in Buccaneer Bay along the Strip. It embraced a family-friendly theme that competitors soon copied.

“A successful resort is a place where people feel comfortable and their needs are satisfied,” Bergman said in a 2008 interview. “When Walt Disney created theme parks, the attractions that fantasized about the past were more successful than those based on some future world. No matter how bad the past was, it’s something they can touch and feel.”

RUNAWAY SUCCESS

The runaway success of The Mirage and Treasure Island as fully integrated, themed megaresorts cemented Bergman’s professional reputation. It paved the way for the launch of Bergman Walls & Associates in 1994, with fellow Wynn designer, Scott Walls. The Las Vegas-based firm specializes in architectural, master planning and design for resorts, casinos, and condos as well as retail, dining and entertainment projects.

The practice hit the ground running with an avalanche of work at the venerable Caesars Palace, designing the 29-level Palace Tower (1997), 26-level Augustus Tower (2005), and 23-level Octavius Tower (2012). Additionally, the firm completed a
$376-million convention center addition (2010) and a revamp of the famous Bacchanal Buffet (2012) inside Caesars, too. “He cared about every aspect of architecture and design,” says son and Bergman Walls & Associates Executive Vice President George Bergman. “It was about what was best for the client and his project.”

Bergman Walls & Associates tackled such noteworthy ground-up resorts designs as the $760-million Paris Las Vegas, opened in 1999, a project in which Bergman’s renowned attention to detail came into play: The French Chateau-inspired hotel, on 24 acres, has three wings with Versailles-style detailing. A two-thirds size Arc de Triomphe greets visitors via a circular entryway off the Strip, as does a replica of La Fontaine des Mers and a sign in the shape of the Montgolfier balloon. And, of course, there’s the one-half scale Eiffel Tower — based upon the original blueprints from Gustave Eiffel — with the back legs of the tower extending through the ceiling into the gaming area.

Bergman additionally designed the $600-million, 64-story Trump Las Vegas hotel-condominium tower, across from Wynn Las Vegas and Fashion Show Mall. The 645-foot-tall building was the city’s tallest residential tower when it debuted in 2008. Once again, the luxurious details are important: the high-rise is clad with 24-karat gold-tinted glass with a stepped-back façade, and has a seventh-floor outdoor deck consisting of a 110-foot pool and private, air-conditioned cabanas with wet bars and plasma TVs.

**FUNCTION AND FLOW**

In fact, under Bergman’s leadership, Bergman Walls & Associates completed more than 5,000 projects during the last two
decades, employing up to 130 people across four offices in Las Vegas, Seattle, Minneapolis and Vietnam. Although company principal Scott Walls retired in 2010, Bergman was active until the end, reflecting not just his work ethic, but his commitment to the practice of architecture and his personal enthusiasm for great design.

“Joel was the greatest of all of the casino architects,” says son Leonard Bergman, Bergman Walls & Associates president and chief executive officer. “His ability to see a plan and the inter-relationships of function, flow, and what guests didn’t even know they want will remain unsurpassed.” Bergman’s many accolades include the Global Gaming Expo’s Sarno Lifetime Achievement Award for Casino Design (2006) and induction into the Nevada Entertainer/Artist Hall of Fame at UNLV (2013).

A swimmer, ballroom dancer and one-time aspiring singer, Bergman also appreciated the energy of the Strip entertainment scene, and knew Frank Sinatra, Michael Jackson, and Marty Allen, as well as Siegfried and Roy. His memoir, Whatever You Hear About Me Is True, self-published last year, recounts lively anecdotes from both his professional career and personal life. Whether through the iconic buildings he designed or lives he touched, Bergman’s imprint upon Las Vegas is indelible.

“Joel was an incredible architect and his memory will last forever through the buildings he designed,” says Steelman. “The Strip in Las Vegas, as well as Atlantic City, served as his canvas to design and build the integrated casino resort that we all know today.”

—TONY ILLIA
“I THINK EVERY GOOD architect sketches,” says Eric Roberts, AIA, vice president at SH Architecture. That might sound obvious, but the more you think about it, the more provocative the statement is. In an age when architectural software enables designers to create fully interactive 3-D models, and smartphones snap high-resolution pictures, is it safe to assume that every architect can still put pencil to paper to communicate an idea? And in such a digital age, what is the point of pencil and paper? Perhaps the soul of architecture itself. That’s what inspired Roberts to launch a local chapter of a drawing brigade, The Urban Sketchers, that aims to keep the art in architecture.

OUR TOWN, SKETCHED

Roberts’ mom introduced him to drawing as a small boy to keep him out of mischief, but as he grew older, he lost his passion for it. That is, until he arrived at the University of Idaho as an architecture graduate student in 2001. A professor and mentor, Matthew Brehm, extolled the importance of urban sketching, the simple practice of going out and recreating the world that you see, by hand. After graduating in 2004, Roberts moved to Las Vegas. He remained active sketching when traveling out of town, but realized he put down his trusty Stillman & Birn sketchbook when he came home.

One day at lunch, he asked a group of fellow architects: Why don’t we sketch our hometown? This marked the beginning of Urban Sketchers Las Vegas, a group that goes out and draws the places and people of Southern Nevada on location. Their first destination was Fremont East in April 2013. Today, the group includes architects and designers, but also people who simply want to see the valley and draw together. If you can keep yourself occupied with a pad of paper for two hours, consider yourself invited. They meet one Saturday a month to trace the outlines of whatever they encounter, whether it’s Hoover Dam’s sentinels or CityCenter reflections.

“Going out and doing urban sketching feeds and creates an encyclopedia in your brain,” Roberts says. An architect tasked with creating the next grand entrance to a Las Vegas casino, he reasons, may be more likely to produce a masterpiece if she’s drawn 23 different porte cochères on location. The act of drawing contributes to an understanding of what makes a particular aspect of a building work on a practical level, but Roberts also believes it connects you to...
“When (you) stop sketching, you start to become a placer of blocks, detached from the true nature of who you are as an artist, and you lose the connection of your humanness — your ability to be organic and feel your architecture,” he says. “I think it becomes more mechanical.”

Roberts isn’t alone in subscribing to this theory. Architecture programs often include a curriculum on sketching. Urban Sketchers member and landscape architect Anna Peltier, RLA spent a semester abroad doing nothing but sketching. Traveling to several different countries, she and her classmates would go out with their professor, evaluate a new location, and create three sketches a day, every day, for the duration of the program. “It taught me that pretty much anyone can draw. You just have to do it,” Peltier says.

Today, Peltier thinks that sketching is a skill in peril of being lost as architects increasingly depend upon AutoCad, Revit, Photoshop and other rendering programs for creating and presenting ideas. Before starting her own landscape architecture firm, Aria, Peltier didn’t use sketching very often in her day-to-day work at big firms. Today, though, she finds that being able to demonstrate an idea to a client with whatever tools she has handy — say, a pen and a napkin — invaluable. Sketching is fast and cheap compared to computer modeling and, as she notes, a picture — even if it’s scribbled on a piece of scrap paper — can make abstract ideas accessible for everyone sitting around a table.

She started attending Urban Sketchers to keep her skill level up. “If you don’t use it, you lose it,” she jokes. Even for Peltier, though, the practice is more than just an exercise in professional development. Going out and really looking at things, not simply skimming an environment or snapping a selfie with a Gehry in the background, is meditative.

“The main thing that I really like about it is being able to dial into the nuances of your environment,” she says. 

WIDE WORLD OF SKETCHING

She and Roberts are in good company. Urban Sketchers Las Vegas is a chapter of an international nonprofit organization by the same name. Urban Sketchers was founded by Seattle journalist Gabriel Campanario in 2008 and, according to current president Elizabeth Alley, 59 chapters have been added in 2016, bringing the total to 140 worldwide. Visit their website and you’ll find chapters from Bhutan to Birmingham, Alabama. In July, close to 500 sketchbook-wielding enthusiasts attended the international Urban Sketchers’ symposium held in Manchester, England.

Brehm, the University of Idaho professor who inspired Roberts to sketch again, helped form Urban Sketchers. At the time, Urban Sketchers was simply a blog featuring notable artists invited by Campanario to submit their sketches, and Campanario asked Brehm to submit. Starting with the blog, the idea of sketching on location — a practice as old as graphite — experienced a renaissance. The phrase “urban sketching” became a part of the art lexicon; Urban Sketchers chapters started forming across the world, and the group of bloggers decided to create a nonprofit to support the formation of additional chapters. Brehm served on the first board as secretary.

Given his dedication to the practice of drawing, Brehm’s role in creating and sustaining Urban Sketchers is not surprising. After one conversation with him, you feel as if you may have lost a bit of the sweetness of life if you haven’t captured it with hand-drawn mementos of beach umbrellas and buildings long forgotten. Brehm received his architecture education in the mid-to-late ’80s, graduating before computers were part of the design process, and during his first two years working for firms, he designed, drafted, and presented by hand. As computers became more accessible, drawing became less of an everyday practice at the firm, so he started going out during his lunch break to draw the vibrant city life and spaces of Washington, D.C.
Today, Brehm is still a professor at University of Idaho, where he taught Roberts. In journal articles, he often notes that in the ‘90s, the idea that computers would completely replace the drafting board and other analog techniques was commonplace. However, his own commitment to the value of analog never wavered. From his first days teaching, he was convinced that sketching was integral to successful architecture — and demonstrating why has become his life mission. In the spring semester, for instance, he prohibited the use of design software in one of his courses. Students were required to do everything by hand, and he says that unexpected things started to happen. What started as a group of students who had underperformed the previous year transformed into a more competent and confident set of designers.

“Those students were jazzed about what they were doing, proud of it, enjoying it, understanding much better the time it takes and how valuable it is to turn the devices off and really get lost in a drawing for a while,” Brehm says.

Even before his classroom experiment, Brehm had a hunch that something more than callus-inducing dedication was created through drawing. He often references the work of Steve Graham on the impact of teaching cursive to elementary students. Graham, a professor of education at Arizona State University, has found evidence that students who are taught cursive handwriting demonstrate higher levels of critical thinking than students who use only block letters or computer keyboards. While there are many theories as to why this might be, they all boil down to the simple idea that connecting the movement of your hand directly to a mental process is powerful and cannot be replaced with digital prosthetics.

If cursive creates brighter first-graders, it seems safe to infer that sketching creates better architects. Brehm’s conviction has led him to propose an addition to the three types of drawing outlined by William Kirby Lockard in his seminal text Three Kinds of Drawing. Alongside drawing as art, drawing as drafting and design drawing, Brehm presents a case for “drawing as learning.”

**DOING IT BY HAND**

When it comes to architecture, Brehm is not a technophobe, but when he recounts the outcome of his “by hand only” studio, there is a distinct pride.

“It was so unique. Every other studio just looked like every other studio. It was all these digital drawings, photorealistic renderings, the kind of sloopy, blobby design work that is en vogue because of the software tools that are available.”

He does not dismiss it all, but in the academic studio, he sees room for more risk and personality. He knows that digital tools are here to stay, but, for the most part, he thinks their impact on the end products of design is somewhat overstated. For strong designers, he thinks that such cutting-edge technology can be invaluable, but he says, “If you are not already a competent designer, the computer will (expletive) you up.”

So why not just take a photograph? Brehm and Roberts have similar answers. You could visit Niagara Falls, for example, and take hundreds of photographs, but when you return to those photographs, you will not remember what you were trying to capture in the 38th shot of the plummeting cascades. But if you sketch, your picture will remind you of the feel of the breeze, the sound of the children, and the smell of burnt pretzels.

If you peruse Roberts’ sketches on Flickr, you’ll see sketch after sketch of temples and churches, all captured with the F-type nib of his Lamy ST fountain pen, some brightened with watercolors. He says he’s attracted to 19th-century religious architecture of the West because of the hardships endured in building it and the communities it sustained.

“Even those that are just hanging by a couple of clapboards are worthy of sketches. They’ve got stories to tell,” he says.

AutoCad could certainly render straight the weathered details of century-old frames and make a pristine recreation, but, you would probably agree, it would lack a little soul.

— Misti Yang
DESIGN on the MENU

From deft refreshes to total reinventions, these five bar and restaurant makeovers offer lessons in efficiency, sustainability and pure imagination.
Bars and restaurants do much more than ply us with food and drink. They’re gathering places that foster community and affirm a city’s sense of place. And in a restless, ever-changing city such as Las Vegas, maintaining those values requires much more than a new sign and a fresh coat of paint. The architects behind these five bar and restaurant makeovers — among them, a historic watering hole, a new restaurant concept and a global nightclub brand — share a deep understanding of that. Each project presents a distinct case study in imagination, sustainability, and tasteful restraint.

A study in artful transitions from subdued fine dining to a “super high-energy” nightclub

Hakkasan
MGM Grand
YWS

Fine dining and nightclubs had been combined to great success already — Tao and Lavo inside the Venetian and Palazzo proved that was a winning formula. But when Hakkasan was planned for MGM Grand, it was on a scale that hadn’t been attempted for an established brand that was looking to make its mark in Las Vegas.

Hakkasan was already established in London as a premier dining venue. The idea was to replicate the restaurant in Las Vegas as part of an 80,000-square-foot complex, completely overhauling the entrance to the casino in a way that wouldn’t just dominate the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and Tropicana Avenue, but would project the Hakkasan Group as the dominant player in the city’s booming nightlife industry.

The challenge for the restaurant side, though, came in creating a space for a clientele that was largely more subdued than the frenetic clubgoers up on the dance floor.

“The restaurant was completely based on London,” architect Mike Stewart says. “The nightclub was then a reinterpretation of what the restaurant was. We used the screening and the geometric patterns of the restaurant throughout the rest of the nightclub. It was kind of an inspiration itself on the nightclub. As you go up the
building, the energy level increases. That’s how we interpreted the transition strictly from the restaurant to the large-box nightclub. We had those transition spaces in the middle that we think was a good way of translating the energy from super high-energy to a little more subdued.”

As a way to keep diners literally above the fray, Stewart incorporated private dining rooms that overlook the main floor, affording a bit of serenity from the chaos at the top of the building — which is, of course, an important element for a club that routinely attracts celebrity clientele. But an even more important nod to the fine dining clientele is the ability to access the restaurant in a way where they could engage with the club chaos on their own terms, or skip it entirely. That was the linchpin of the restaurant’s design.

“There are two separate entries for that reason,” Stewart says. “It’s completely separate but there are interconnections that would allow a customer from the restaurant if they wanted to move their way up into the club space. We were really going after two different demographics. There are discrete entry and exit points. If you’re in the restaurant having a nice dinner, you don’t necessarily want 30 clubbers coming down stumbling into your table. I think having those separate circulation points was a big key to that.”

Design for MTO was heavily influenced by the original location, but the firm’s specialty in sustainable architecture played a big role in this project. Because they already had to pour a concrete slab, Turbin stained the slab instead of bringing in an exotic wood or tile as a floor covering. The wood used along the front wall and counter was all reclaimed lumber. Even the kitchen equipment, in a tremendously cost-saving move, was reclaimed. The project underscored an important, but oft-overlooked, element to sustainable architecture.

“The wood used along the front wall and counter was all reclaimed lumber. Even the kitchen equipment, in a tremendously cost-saving move, was reclaimed. The project underscored an important, but oft-overlooked, element to sustainable architecture.”

FOR THEIR FIRST FORAY INTO restaurant architecture, the Coda Group had to work within some fairly narrow confines. Co-owner Kevin Turchin had to plan out the second location of Downtown staple MTO Café, match the original’s style, and fit it into the under-construction Downtown Summerlin on a tight budget and a looming deadline in November 2014. (And that’s before a neighboring restaurant took two of MTO’s planned rooftop locations for mechanical equipment.)

“We had to come up with a solution very quickly and figure out the cost later,” Turchin says. “That construction site was so crazy, there were so many projects going on. There are contractors for the whole mall coordinating schedules and utility hookups. It’s a huge coordination project.”

Design for MTO was heavily influenced by the original location, but the firm’s specialty in sustainable architecture played a big role in this project. Because they already had to pour a concrete slab, Turbin stained the slab instead of bringing in an exotic wood or tile as a floor covering.

The wood used along the front wall and counter was all reclaimed lumber. Even the kitchen equipment, in a tremendously cost-saving move, was reclaimed. The project underscored an important, but oft-overlooked, element to sustainable architecture.

“For a project like that, which was on a tight budget, it’s really about efficiency,” he says. “Our engineers are very good and we always use the most efficient mechanical and electrical systems we can. Sometimes the most cost-effective thing is also the most sustainable. Some people overthink it a little too much.”

The key to the space was realizing that while the original Downtown location was purely a sit-down experience, the Downtown Summerlin operation would be a walk-up counter with a grab-and-go component. Turchin designed an L-shaped flow around the dining area with that in mind. Get them in, get them out — and give them something substantial while they’re there.

Embracing the art of knowing when to leave well enough alone

Atomic Kitchen
Downtown Las Vegas
NOVUS Architecture

THE ATOMIC LIQUORS REVIVAL, opened in 2013 to a wave of preservationist joy and dipsomaniacal enthusiasm, was an instant hit, landing on Anthony Bourdain’s No Reservations and in the hearts of anyone who had a soft spot for the mid-century original. Part of the plan was always to convert the adjacent garage into a small restaurant, but it took owners Lance and Kent Johns a couple years to get there. Enter Dwayne Eshenbaugh, AIA at NOVUS, who was presented with … a crumbling husk — and a mandate to design a spot that could honor the history there and serve existing clientele while bringing in an upscale element to compete with the sustainability is more than the flavor of the month

MTO Café
Downtown Summerlin
Coda Group

**FOR THEIR FIRST FORAY INTO**

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higher-end venues that are expected to move into that part of Fremont Street.

“One of the things we wanted to sort of maintain was some of the integrity,” Eshenbaugh says. “The building, frankly, was in pretty bad shape. We had to enhance some of the structural systems. We took the entire roof off. One thing we did do was we kept all of the wood, the roof joists. We kept all that material and we are reusing quite a bit of that in the interior. I think the bar façade is going to be clad with those old two-by-fours that have been standing there, supporting that roof since 1946. We wanted to keep in that sort of mid-century vibe and feel and not bring something too swanky and clean and sparkly.”

Eshenbaugh embraced brick and wood to complement the light cream color scheme, and touched it all up with mid-century-style fixtures. But he also wanted to leave intact what he could. There are concrete columns he left alone, even though if someone goes at them with a mind to, they can wrest free chunks of the original material from the columns. Remembering the building’s original life matters. “I think it still reads as the garage,” he says. “The original architecture is still there.”

Blending daytime and nighttime use in a focal point for the Downtown community

Sprague, AIA had to find a way to make the project function day and night, as both a store, a dining venue and a watering hole.

“How does this place transition from a market to a more nighttime activity in the restaurant and bar area?” Sprague asked. “There are some subtle little walls there, some things we did architecturally that create different environments, so you can be hanging out with friends and not feel like you’re sitting next to some cereal boxes.”

With a limited menu, Sprague didn’t have to dedicate too much space to the kitchen, which meant leaving plenty of room to create a comfortable, open feel in the building even as it transitions from space to space.

The biggest move was in opening up the ceiling, allowing skylights to be placed and bring in as much natural light as possible. After that, it was a matter of bringing a little bit of period glory to an old building.

“The big thing was opening up those bowstring trusses so you got all the building envelope exposed to the customers,” he says. “It added some height. It allowed us to do some things like put the sprinklers and the lighting up a little higher than if we had a ceiling in there. The other thing was opening up the façade. We did a lot of precedent study on the old buildings Downtown. We looked at the more permanent storefronts, and used that as our pattern language.” The result is a new Downtown business that blends seamlessly into the existing neighborhood.
Balancing respect for tradition with a nod to a new generation

Siegel’s 1941
El Cortez Hotel & Casino
Bergman Walls & Associates

THE FLAME MAY NOT HAVE BEEN venerated, but it was certainly beloved, particularly by El Cortez’s fiercely loyal clientele. So when the order comes to give the old girl a makeover, as well as a rebranding — oh, by the way, keep the old-timers happy while still appealing to the Millennials roaming Fremont East — it’s a bit of a tightrope.

George Bergman, AIA, executive vice president of Bergman Walls & Associates, had to check all those boxes when he got the Siegel’s 1941 job in 2014. With a core clientele in their 50s and 60s, the property wanted to make sure the loyal customers were taken care of, but that it offered something to customers in the thriving bar scene just outside the front door.

“How do you cross that line between something that’s traditional but something that’s appealing to a Millennial?” Bergman says. “There were some New York restaurants that were very inspirational. What I loved about those restaurants was that they were older. They weren’t necessarily over the top in terms of polish like a lot of Las Vegas places are.”

The first step was to raise the ceilings as high as the existing space would allow. Bergman also increased exposure to the casino floor from the restaurant through wrought-iron covered windows, allowing in a bit of noise. Natural materials were a big part of the design, also, to blend the contemporary and the classic. Then there’s the glass piece with an etched portrait of Bugsy Siegel front and center, as both motif and touchstone.

“I think the general openness plays to the younger crowd,” he says. “I think the way we did the front, with all the tile and having the signature in the floor. The kitschy-type entry, the yellow banquette in the front, the chandelier that creates that little space there, all those things are purposefully designed to be visible from the casino. The entry was really about that younger person experience, but when you go into the restaurant itself, you have the metal ceiling. We used a lot of wood in the ceiling. Really nice soft light fixtures. It had to be comfortable for their existing clientele.”

—JASON SCAVONE
Architect Hugh E. Taylor brought Mid-century Modernism to Las Vegas with a rich and varied portfolio of commercial and residential work that showcased design dexterity, creative innovation and ambitious output. He was responsible for the Desert Inn, Sunrise Hospital, and Country Club Towers, as well as portions of Paradise Palms, McNeil Estates, and the Scotch 80s, among other communities.

Taylor designed nearly 1,000 projects from 1946 to 1989. He rubbed elbows with the city’s power elite, from Moe Dalitz and Wilbur Clark to Betty Grable and Louie Prima. And yet, Taylor may be Las Vegas’s most famous unknown architect, despite being posthumously inducted into the UNLV Nevada Entertainer/Artist Hall of Fame.

“I don’t think his work is very well-known, at least, not among the younger generation,” says UNLV associate architecture professor Eric Strain, AIA. “It’s a shame that we don’t respect our architectural history more, even among our current designers and new firms.”

That may soon change. The Nevada Preservation Foundation acquired a 5,000-piece archive from Taylor shortly before his death last year at age 91 — nothing less than an architectural treasure trove. It consists of architectural drawings and photographs of residential and commercial buildings, additions and renovations, dating back to 1946. The foundation received a $107,000 grant from the Las Vegas Centennial Commission to catalog, preserve and digitize Taylor’s work, which is a major step in reassessing and firmly establishing his architectural legacy. The Hugh E. Taylor Archives will be housed in the Nevada State Museum.

“I think we don’t fully yet know his impact upon Las Vegas,” said Heidi Swank, executive director of the Nevada Preservation Foundation.

**PRODIGIOUS TALENT ON THE FLY**

Taylor burst onto the Las Vegas scene during its infancy, when developer Wilbur Clark tapped the then-25-year-old, L.A.-based architect to replace Wayne McAllister in order to finish the Desert Inn. (Clark and McAllister had disagreed on the project’s design). Although the Desert Inn’s foundation had been poured, not much else was done. You couldn’t ask for a better metaphor for the rising architect’s prospects: The young, ambitious Taylor leapt at the chance to design a $6.5-million, 300-room hotel-casino situated on 200 acres along South Las Vegas Boulevard between Desert Inn Road and Sands Avenue. It would be just the fifth...
resort to open along the Strip.

And it was a canvas upon which Taylor’s prodigious, intuitive talent became quickly evident. There were no construction drawings for the Desert Inn; everything was done on the fly. (Not that there was much official use for drawing, anyway: Las Vegas didn’t have a building department, at the time).

“He would draw construction plans on site on a two by four, handing it off to construction workmen as needed,” says Priscilla Taylor, the architect’s widow and wife of 43 years. “There were no computers. He would do everything by hand, old-school.”

**OPTIMISM IN ACTION**

Taylor’s steady hand produced a Southwestern spa feel that was half nightclub, half Modernist ranch house. The Desert Inn boasted clean, geometric lines and airy spacing built from cinder blocks trimmed with sandstone, with other natural touches such as flagstone flooring and redwood trim interiors. The Desert Inn was the first Vegas hotel to feature a fountain at the entrance with a water show of musically choreographed fountain jets. The property was anchored by a three-story, glass-sided tower at the front of the hotel known as the Sky Room, overlooking the surrounding desert landscape; it was the Strip’s largest structure when it debuted in 1950.

The horseshoe-arranged resort had individually climate-controlled guest rooms with recessed balconies that opened onto a lushly landscaped courtyard and a figure eight-shaped pool. The Desert Inn featured a 450-seat performance venue with hand-painted Charles Cobelle murals, plus a 2,400-square-foot casino, salon, and restaurants, among other things.

The 18-hole golf course didn’t open until two years later in 1952, and Taylor wasn’t done. He would eventually design most of the homes surrounding the course, a community known as the Desert Inn Estates, including a two-bedroom residence for Eddie Fisher with an atrium and fountain, and a living room with a central fireplace. Desert Inn was a triumph that attracted visitors like the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, and Harry S. Truman during the 1950s. The project boldly announced Taylor’s arrival in Las Vegas as a major architectural force.

“The project boldly announced Taylor’s arrival in Las Vegas as a major architectural force. Hugh was one of a handful of architects in town after World War II, just as the city began to grow,” says architectural critic and author Alan Hess. “He was perfectly
positioned to take on a variety of projects, and he was a Modern architect, which suited the time period and its optimism about the future in a growing city.”

There were a lot of reasons for optimism. Las Vegas saw a 192 percent population growth from 1940 to 1950. It was followed by another 162 percent growth between 1950 and 1960. And Taylor was in the middle of the action, designing projects furiously fast, employing two draftsmen, as the city swelled from 8,422 residents to a staggering 260,561.

**THE GENTLE GIANT**

Born in Utah, Taylor moved to Los Angeles as a young boy and quickly developed a passion for architecture; he designed homes while still in high school. He studied architecture at the University of South-
ern California, and soon began work as a draftsman. Taylor was trained as a World War II pilot, flying P-51 Mustangs, although armistice came before deployment. He later served in the Korean War, as a captain, designing air bases, and flying missions. Taylor returned to Las Vegas after the war, picking up where he left off.

“He was a gentle giant, unassuming, not boastful, and completely self-made,” says daughter Christine Gunier. “He never advertised. Everything was all word of mouth and reputation.”

Taylor, however, did network through the Masons, Shriners and First Presbyterian Church while hosting dinner parties and outings. It paid off. Developer Irwin Molasky tapped him to design Sunrise Hospital in 1958; it was the city’s first private hospital.

Taylor later designed the 12-story Country Club Towers in 1973. The Y-shaped concrete-and-glass building rests on a little over two acres at 850 E. Desert Inn Road. It has 135 apartments originally designed as condominiums that were later converted amid sluggish sales. Two gently arching wings, connected by a central spine, provide unobstructed views of the Las Vegas Country Club from recessed balconies. The towers have a stripped-down, clean aesthetic where form follows function.

Taylor’s other commercial work includes a renovation of the Moulin Rouge Hotel and the Showboat Bowling Alley. But, his greatest impact can be appreciated from the custom and tract houses he designed.

“He wanted to make good design available to the masses. It was important to him that comfortable homes were available to everyone,” says Swank, who is also a state assemblywoman. “There were very few neighborhoods where Hugh hadn’t designed some or all of the homes.”

Indeed, Taylor designed residences inside the Rancho Circle Estates, Southridge, and Beverly Green, among other places. (In fact, Swank is in the process of garnering a historic designation from the city for Beverly Green, where she lives.) His homes had uncluttered floorplans and a strong visual connection between interior and exterior spaces. There was exposed natural material that provided texture and pattern. These are standard design elements in many modern homes; at the time, it was revolutionary.

“Homes of that era had been segmented into small rooms with narrow hallways,” Priscilla Taylor says. “Instead, Hugh’s homes have open and flowing spaces with a unique style.”

HUGH’S HANDIWORK

Taylor’s houses would feature angled butterfly roofs, textured concrete, and broad expanses of glass, wood and stone. Perhaps the best remaining example of his handiwork is the 3,300-square-foot Morelli
House, built in 1959 for Sands bandleader Antonio Morelli. It escaped the wrecking ball in 2001, moving from the Desert Inn Estates to Bridger and Ninth streets in downtown Las Vegas, where it now serves as headquarters for the Junior League of Las Vegas. The residence underwent a painstaking six-year, $700,000 restoration effort.

Morelli was a classically trained musician and Modernist acolyte influenced by R. H. Schindler and Philip Johnson. As such, he tapped Taylor to help design a simple yet exuberant two-bedroom home whose stretched rectangular shape melts into the landscape. The long, asymmetrical, sloped roof is covered with crushed white rock to reflect sunlight while creating cantilevered shaded eaves. The wood and glass home has decorative concrete block screens with carved recesses that catch the brilliant sunlight throughout the day, casting playful shadows across the building’s surfaces, lending a textural variety to the carefully arranged and defined house.

The main living space is a stretched central pavilion with exposed redwood roof beams and clerestory windows. It frames the home, rising above two flanking wings, while the interior combines glass walls and painted stucco with unstained wood paneling. It features a dramatic pleated copper fireplace set against a white stone wall. The downturned, fan-shaped hood acts as more of a sculptural expression than an actual hearth.

Interior spaces are smartly appointed with Vladimir Kagan furnishings, including kidney-shaped couches and boomerang-leg chairs and tables. The organic forms, bright colors and luxurious fabrics lend warmth. The Morelli house, like much of Taylor’s best work, reflects inventiveness, freedom, experimentation, expression, and a post-war love of space-age technology.

Taylor was successful enough to retire at age 59, spending his later years traveling the country by motor coach and spending time with his grandchildren. He would also see the world by cruise line, visiting the Panama Canal, Bahamas, New Zealand, Australia, Haiti, Bora Bora, and Hawaii. He was known for his fun-loving demeanor, dry humor and personal style, often sporting a bolo tie and white loafers. Although the full measure of Hugh Taylor’s legacy is still being weighed, his impact upon Las Vegas is unmistakable.

“Hugh gave Las Vegas its Modern character — in big buildings and small ones — that really identified the city from the 1940s well into the 1960s,” says Hess. “This is the period when Las Vegas was creating its unique identity as a city of tourism and recreation for visitors, coupled with a city of everyday life for its citizens. Taylor helped to define that in his buildings.”

—TONY ILLIA
Tony Marnell's office is a big, swank, modernist temple of leather chairs and large desks. There's no door leading into this space, so it feels more like a whole wing of a building than a conventional corner office. It radiates easy power, as does the man himself. Marnell wears a crisp white shirt, unbuttoned at the top, and it gives him a look of relaxed formality.

But he's ready to pounce on the unsuspecting — like me, who begins by asking him a long question about his experiences as a developer.

"You keep using the word developer," he says.

"That's not correct? I ask. He is after all, the CEO of Marnell Companies, one of the city's premier developers and contractors for more than 30 years. The man built most of today's Las Vegas Strip, in one way or another.

"I don't know," he replies, with the pointed skepticism of a demanding teacher. "You see me as a developer."

"A builder? I try.

"A builder," he repeats. "I see me as an architect who happens to also build his own buildings. I see me as an architect and a builder who happens to also do his own developments. It's the opposite of how, for most of my career, the whole world sees me. Which is a misinterpretation."

Fair enough. Indeed, during a freewheeling and far-ranging
interview that covers his career, his impact and his prognosis of the future of Las Vegas, Marnell the person reveals himself to be much like his signature projects — confident, forceful and direct, yes, but always thoughtful.

UNUSUAL COMBINATION

Back to that developer-over-architect misinterpretation. That misinterpretation is the result of the fact that Marnell is both designer and builder — an unusual combination — and in many cases, an owner. Marnell grew up in a contracting family (his father operated a masonry company and helped build a generation of Las Vegas casinos, schools and homes) so he understood how buildings were built. He received his architecture degree at USC and studied there with legendary Chicago landscape architect Alfred Caldwell. He worked at architecture firms and construction companies, and quickly realized he didn’t need someone to build his buildings.

“I know how to build them myself. Let me look at the advantages of offering not only the architecture but also the construction to my clients.” Doing so could eliminate what he calls the “traditional architecture-contractor-owner triangle,” where it’s easy to pass the buck and blame someone else when things go wrong. In a design-build arrangement, he says, “I have all the responsibility.” The benefit of being the designer and builder is that he could deliver products 25 to 30 percent faster, which means it costs less money to build them and the buildings can open and start generating revenue more quickly.

Why aren’t there more architects bridging that gap? “There are not many in the country, because, it’s one thing to say it. When you look out there at those buildings, those are billion-dollar risks. Do you have the team, do you have the wherewithal, and do you have the monetary backing to back your bet? We didn’t just jump out and build the Mirage.”

MAKING HIS NAME

It took years of smaller projects to show what he could do. Marnell made his name as the designer, builder and initial owner of the Rio Hotel, which opened in 1988. From there, his company has been the architect of record or general contractor at Wynn, TI, New York-New York, The Mirage, the Forum Shops and Town Square. It has also built the Bellagio, the M Resort, the new MGM Park pedestrian mall, and a slew of custom Cirque du Soleil theaters. The company is also the driving force behind the XpressWest proposal to bring high-speed rail from Victorville to Las Vegas.

It’s an impressive résumé, but the flip side is
that people think of you as a builder — as the person who executes someone else’s vision. The price of such ubiquity is, ironically, a kind of anonymity. Until CityCenter came along, no one thought of the men and women who designed the hotel-casinos of the Las Vegas. The casino moguls — the Jay Sarnos, Bob Stupaks, Steve Wynns — were the de facto architects of Las Vegas.

“When somebody says who built Bellagio, a lot of people built Bellagio. And there was an architect,” he says with a laugh. “Tony Marnell was the architect. I had 34 consultants. It was the implementation of Steve Wynn’s vision or business idea or business strategy, but because I was the general contractor you can see my name all over the world for 20 years as having built Bellagio — but you’ll hardly ever see my name anywhere as also being the architect.”

That lack of name recognition among lay people doesn’t necessarily bother Marnell. “What it means is the profession has not done a good job at educating the public about what they do.”

**THE ARCHITECT EMERGES**

The one project where Marnell the architect most clearly emerged was the M Resort. Developed by his son, Anthony Marnell III, Marnell’s design brief was straightforward, though hardly simple: “How do you design a contemporary hotel casino and it not come off like a building in Manhattan, a steel and glass metal box? How do you do that?”

The solution, he says, was to use “colors, materials, textures that were we felt were harmonious unto themselves and to the environment we find ourselves in, in Las Vegas.” The result, a sleek blue-glassed hotel with a gracefully arcing façade, opened in 2009 and helped usher in a more contemporary aesthetic in Vegas design, seen also in The Cosmopolitan and the rehabilitation of the Sahara into the SLS.

“We always make a large effort in any of our buildings, themed or not themed, that what you see on the outside you get more of on the inside — harmony and honesty.”

If architects of large casino hotels tend to be invisible figures, what of our more conventional view of the architect as auteur? I ask about a building like Disney Hall, which we associate with the architect (in this case, Frank Gehry), and not the client or owner? That kind of architecture we don’t see much of here. Marnell doesn’t sound impressed.

“We have a society right now that doesn’t have a consolidated view of our society,” he says. “The easiest default is to be different. Different will get me recognition. So when you see these buildings like the (Disney)
concert hall, they’re being done over two issues: Number one, money. There’s a client there that has enough money asking for a building that’s different. Two, there’s a computer now that allows you to draft and engineer these buildings with no real central purpose except it can do it.

“Personally,” he adds, “my definition of different usually coincides with the definition of ugly. If you think about it, all these twisted, upside-down things that are being built is very interesting because we’re supposed to be building using the least amount of energy, when you can cover a space up with 50 percent less materials, 50 percent less energy, 50 percent less maintenance, there’s this oxymoron which just adds to my belief of how confused we are.”

But, he notes, architecture’s periods of soul-searching only mirror periods when the larger society is wrestling with its identity. It certainly seems like we’re in a moment of national soul searching, so I ask him whether this sense of societal confusion is on display in Las Vegas, which in recent years has been dipping its foot into a more urbanistic approach to city building.

Marnell’s view is resolutely practical. “The buildings in Las Vegas are not intended to be a reflection of our society,” he says. “The buildings in Las Vegas are intended to chase a specific market, i.e., chasing money.” Consequently, he sees the future of building in the city along a generational divide, with a younger generation of Americans possessing very different temperaments and expectations than baby boomers, and a casino industry trying to figure out how to monetize them.

“Us baby boomers, I started with $200 in my pocket. In order to get anywhere, we had to take some gambles, we had to take...
some risks. We had to take some chances,” he says. By contrast, he says, younger Americans have been “raised and lived their lives with having to take very little risk. There are plenty of safety nets. The idea of gambling is simply not in their mentality.”

‘WHAT ABOUT THE MONEY PART?’

It’s an important question for the next generation of casino properties on the Strip, which will have to appeal to this new group of customers. The gaming entertainment world is trying to figure out what entertaining risks this generation will be willing to take. “You see them playing these games (on their phones), trying to beat the game. So you say we’re halfway there. What about the money part? That DNA is in us, how do you get it to the surface?”

I mention that Millennials seem to favor urban, authentic and shareable experiences. “So let’s give ’em these so called urban venues, meet and gather, let’s see if we can sell them a hot dog or a health drink or a kale sandwich. There has to be some way to get some money out of them,” Marnell says. But whether that can play out on the Strip remains to be seen. “It’s going to be a while before somebody goes out and puts up a new $2-$3 billion new hotel casino chasing kale sandwiches.”

As we talk, his uneasiness about the impact of computers on his profession became clearer. “For the longest times up until most recent times buildings were a reflection of the morals, principles and beliefs of the society. Then we were forced as architects into the computer.”

Against architects’ collective will?

“I think it’s probably 50/50,” he says. In 2013, Marnell donated $1 million to his alma mater, USC, to create a new design studio called the M Studio. “The idea behind the M Studio was very simple,” he says. “It was a class that was structured around solving a problem without the use of a computer. The idea being you had to think your way through to the solution.”

He also worries that art history, which helped students learn “where the world has been and why it was there,” is waning in the architectural curriculum. Most students today, he rues, think the world started around 1990. The challenge is to extend that kind of education to the public at large.

“That’s when there’s a demand for our architecture to be reflective of where we want to go, what we want the world to see us as.” And hopefully the world sees them as the artful shapers of the public experience of the built environment — otherwise known as architects.

—T.R. WITCHER
SAVE IT FOR LATER
Whether they’re hustling behind the scenes or making headlines, these historic preservation groups work hard to preserve our past.
In an ever-changing town obsessed with the new, our historic buildings may not get the recognition and protection they always deserve — but that seems to be changing. Meet some of the groups that are fighting to preserve Southern Nevada’s past, whether it’s by focusing their efforts on a specific building or raising a broader awareness about the importance of historic preservation.

NEON MUSEUM

The Neon Museum may be the most “only in Vegas” thing in Vegas. Since 1996, it’s been dedicated to preserving that beautiful Sin City icon, the glass tube lined with colored fluorescent coating and filled with electrified neon/argon. (Precursor efforts go further back; the now-defunct Allied Arts Council helped rescue the Fifth Street Liquors sign back in the mid-1980s.) The museum is headquartered at the old YESCO Boneyard on North Las Vegas Boulevard, where it tends a collection of some 200 signs that were once commercial kitsch and now are Vegas art — a number of them classics saved from the scrap heap. (Pro tip: Peer down on the museum with Google Earth to see the old Treasure Island skull grinning up at you.) The museum hosts tours, talks and weddings, and frequently serves as a backdrop for high-profile fashion and celebrity shoots. Some of its rehabbed signs have been installed along Las Vegas Boulevard between Sahara and Washington avenues.

Thank them for: Protecting the beloved, architecturally significant lobby of the La Concha motel. Rescued from tear-down in 2006, the retro-space-age Googie structure officially reopened in 2012 as the museum’s lobby. The ghost of its acclaimed architect, Paul Revere Williams, AIA, is surely thankful, too.

Blast from the past: Museum workers have been slowly inventorying years’ worth of archival material amid their many other duties. “On one shelf there was a beat-up cardboard box that didn’t look very promising,” recalls Collections Manager Maggie Zakri. “However, inside was a treasure trove beyond our imagination — stacks of VHS tapes containing interviews with most of the major sign designers who worked in Las Vegas.” This is huge. Recall that most creators didn’t consider their signs art, just commercial work, so there were few efforts to document the process. “Sometimes we have so little to go on when trying to restore or interpret a sign,” Zakri says. “Recorded interviews with the men and women who dreamed up the pieces are like gold to us.” And to us.

(neonmuseum.org) Scott Dickensheets
THE JUNIOR LEAGUE OF LAS VEGAS

Take on the tough part of getting a project started — raising funds for a school garden, say, or developing an expansion for a homeless youth center — then hand it off to the community group that needs it. That’s the MO of the Junior League of Las Vegas, called the Service League when it was founded in 1946. Being picky about details like environmental stewardship and historic preservation, the Junior League discovered its job wasn’t any easier when it came to satisfying its own need for a headquarters. It took a decade of work, help from the likes of Jackie Gaughan and the Molasky Development Group, and a trip back to the drawing board after the first building they found burned down, but in April 2007, the group finally opened the doors of its new office and event space. And what a space it is.

Thank them for: The painstakingly restored mid-mod masterpiece custom-designed by Hugh Taylor as a home for Sands Hotel music director Antonio Morelli in 1958.

Blast from the past: “This was really special,” Carole Terry, a Junior League sustaining member and docent of the Morelli House, says, sweeping an arm in the direction of the stylish chairs and tables that bedeck the open-plan living area. Whereas the Morellis had filled the place with Italianate furnishings, the league wanted something more period-appropriate. In an unbelievably fortunate coincidence, the grandfather of modern furniture design, Vladimir Kagan, happened to be in Las Vegas and visited the site during its restoration in the mid-2000s. Smitten with the exemplar of an era he helped to define, Kagan offered to design furniture for the home and even donated pieces from his personal collection. Hence, the cubist dining room set, grey Nautilus sofa and tri-symmetric foot stool that every visitor to the place secretly wants to steal. (morellihouse.org) Heidi Kyser

MESQUITE CLUB

Here was the state of Las Vegas in 1911, the year some 20 local women formed the Mesquite Club (named after the hardy desert bush): For its first project, the women’s nonprofit service club planted cottonwood trees to provide shade for the sweltering city — and, according to club history, had to continue making sure “the livestock did not damage the bark.” Things have changed a bit since then, livestock giving way to tourists, and the Mesquite Club has sometimes been in the forefront of civic progress, establishing the valley’s first library, advocating for women’s suffrage and creating what evolved into the Metro Crime Stoppers program. In part because they occupy a historic building, club members are keenly aware of the past. “Throughout the building,” says club President Cherie Williams, “you will find photos of our founders as well as past presidents.”

Thank them for: Getting their clubhouse — designed by the local firm Walter Zick & Howard Sharp and built
in 1960 — declared a historic building by the city in 2010. Located at 702. E. St. Louis Ave., it’s been a focal point of civic and charitable activities since then. “The ladies of the Mesquite Club are very proud of their building, and at every opportunity will host an event to showcase the building,” Williams says.

**Blast from the past:** The club’s history is not just a point of pride for Mesquite members. It’s a responsibility they take seriously: After vandals damaged their air-conditioning units, the women of the Mesquite Club had new wrought-iron gates installed on both driveways ... very carefully. “During the construction of the gates,” Williams recalls, “we could not let them touch the walls since they are historic.”

*(mesquiteclub.com)* SD

**NEVADA PRESERVATION FOUNDATION**

In her quest to get her downtown community of Beverly Green designated as a historic neighborhood, Heidi Swank kept coming up against the same obstacle: Life. “A couple years ago, we tried to get it named as a historic district,” she says. But between day jobs and busy schedules, it was an on-again, off-again process. “We all worked full-time, so we’d come home at night and work on it, but inevitably, we’d drop the ball, and the effort would peter out. If only we had someone to break the process into doable chunks, herd the cats and do the tasks.”

Swank started Nevada Preservation Foundation in late 2013 as a nonprofit to do just that — professionalize the sometimes complicated process of garnering official recognition and protection of historic Las Vegas.

**Thank them for:** Numerous historic preservation projects both completed and in process. The foundation worked with Super Pawn to preserve a 1962 Zick and Sharp building Downtown that the Super Pawn bought in 2013. The organization is also working to get the headquarters of The Travel Channel’s “Ghost Adventures” show, a Tudor revival house on Charleston Boulevard, on the city historic register. They’re also working to get portions of the Beverly Green and Paradise Palms neighborhood on the city and county historic registers, respectively. Getting neighborhoods official historic recognition doesn’t just preserve architecture and design, says Swank, but in many cases it protects property values in older areas of town.

**Blast from the past:** The foundation won a grant in 2014 to compile an oral history of iconic Las Vegas architect Hugh Taylor (see story on p. 26). “We spent two days interviewing Hugh and his wife Priscilla, and got to be good friends,” says Swank. The Foundation also received a trove of Taylor’s archival documents and drawings — offering a rare glimpse into one of the architectural minds that literally shaped a young Las Vegas.

*(nevadapreservation.org)*

**THE HUNTRIDGE FOUNDATION**

They say you can’t be everything to everyone, but the Huntridge Theater...
might defy that adage. In its 70-year-history, the theater has done turns as a movie theater, concert hall, art gallery, teen hangout and preservation cause célèbre. But its latest incarnation is troubling: a dilapidated shrine to dashed hopes. Since its purchase by the Mizrahi family in 2002, the theater has spent most of its recent life as an empty shell, with numerous plans to revive it as a performing arts venue fizzling out. A would-be sale to Huntridge Revival LLC fell through, and the state sued the Mizrachis for failing to maintain the theater as required by state historic building covenants. In a settlement hammered out in late August, the covenants protecting the building from demolition were extended from 2017 to the end of 2028, giving the Mizrachis time to repair the building or, perhaps as many hope, sell it. For The Huntridge Foundation, it’s about keeping the theater and its history in the public eye.

“As an advocacy group, we feel we’ve played a role in a lot of what’s happened, whether at the forefront of behind the scenes,” says Huntridge Foundation President Daniel Roberts. “What’s always wowed me is how deep the Huntridge’s roots go in the community. There are so many personal stories that intersect with the theater.”

Thank them for: Launched in 2012, the Huntridge Foundation has focused much of its work on its Memory Project, a collection of oral histories, artifacts and ephemera from the Huntridge’s many incarnations, culminating in an exhibit, “Huntridge Through the Decades,” at the Nevada State Museum that ran through August.

Blast from the past: In his ongoing research on The Huntridge, Roberts discovered that the historic theater had an identical twin in Long Beach. Also designed by architect S. Charles Lee, the Lakewood Theatre featured a central tower in the Moderne style, along with the prominent marquee doing double duty as an inviting portico. This sibling story takes a sad turn from there: The Lakewood was demolished in 1991 after a 46-year run (including a controversial stint as an adult theater). (the huntridgefoundation.org) AK

CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

What do Mrs. Nevada 1994 and the Centennial Commission have in common? Louise Helton. In 2001, the pageant titleholder was spitballing ideas for celebrating Las Vegas’ 100th birthday, which was then four years away, with fellow participants in the Chamber of Commerce’s leadership institute. Helton had the idea of designing a commemorative license plate and using the proceeds from it to fund events and projects that honor the city’s history. The Centennial Commission, which vets applicants for the funding, was born and is still fueled by the special license plate fees. It’s doled out $22 million in 11 years.

Thank them for: Too many projects to count. As executive director of the Centennial Commission, Esther Reincke has processed checks to pay for some big lifts: moving the architecturally sacred La Concha Motel lobby to the Neon Museum boneyard, where it serves as a visitors center, for instance; or restoring the Historic West Side School, the commission’s biggest grant recipient at $2.5 million in grants (and counting). The project that Reincke is most passionate about, possibly because she produces it herself, is the 21st-Century revival of the traditional Las Vegas parade and rodeo known as Helldorado Days.

Blast from the past: But she acknowledges that the smaller works sometimes have a greater impact: “We funded a book about Sarann Knight-Preddy (the first and only woman of color to receive a gaming license) called 72 Years in Las Vegas. It told her story of growing up here during segregation. It was an incredible project, and she passed away about a month before the book was published. … When you hear about people like her, who have been here since the early days, it really makes you appreciate this funding. Without it, those stories might die.” (las vegas nevada.gov) HK
WE’RE PROUD

YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

We value our loyal clients, the friendships & relationships – our reputation, our dedicated employees & their families and we are forever grateful for the many opportunities.

KLAI JUBA WALD
architects
EVERYBODY WANTS SOME

Exporting our vibrant architectural vision requires smarts, sensitivity — and a touch of that Vegas verve
It's no secret that Las Vegas is unique among cities, powered by the promise of excitement, fantasy fulfillment and indulgence, made possible in large part by its vibrantly imagined architecture and cleverly designed spaces. Last year, the city's entertainment, recreation and leisure experiences attracted 21,306 conventions and 42.3 million visitors. Naturally, those eye-popping numbers inspire the envy of other cities seeking similar success.

Which is why owners, developers and municipalities are increasingly tapping homegrown Las Vegas talent to design projects worldwide, especially — you guessed it — resort casinos. U.S. gambling is a $240 billion annual industry, now legal in 48 states, according to the American Gaming Association. Its popularity has grown globally, too, with over 180 countries offering some form of legalized gambling. Macau, China, for instance, generated $28.3 billion, or 80 percent of its tax revenue, from gambling in 2015. As the figures grow larger, so do the stakes, making Las Vegas architects heavily sought after for their hotel-casino expertise.

"We are living in the world's largest laboratory for hospitality," says Ed Vance, AIA, founder and design principal of EV&A Architects. "We have developed a global reputation for understanding hospitality design, planning, and operations. When owners want horsepower for their projects, they turn to Las Vegas."

But you may be surprised to learn that exporting our architectural chops entails some skills and traits you might not associate with the brashness and boldness of Vegas — such as sensitivity, a knack for nuance and talent for storytelling. But it does reflect our well-earned appreciation of the value of knowing your audience.

Consider how EV&A lent its skills to Mississippi and Iowa, among other places (it's licensed to work in 16 states nationwide). The firm designed the $25 million, 40,000-square-foot Magnolia Bluffs Casino in Natchez, Mississippi, opened in late 2015. The rustic style building mimics a cedar mill, in keeping with the area's historic culture. The high-rise sections are tinted in gold, silver and copper, symbolizing wealth and good fortune, while the horizontal lines and wide windows that meld with the landscape, reflecting the region's architectural heritage.

"We looked at the community with fresh open eyes," Vance said. "We used a local vernacular to integrate the Wild Rose within the local community as though the building was continuing a conversation with time."

THE GOLD RUSH

EV&A is hardly alone in exporting Las Vegas design know-how. Klai Juba Wald Architects designed the Hard Rock Hotel Casinos in Hollywood and Tampa, Florida, as well as the $445 million Rivers Casino in Des Plaines, Illinois, and the $550 million Maryland Live! Casino in Hanover, Maryland. Steelman Partners, meanwhile, has completed 4,000 casino and resorts worldwide, including the Solaire Resort Casino in Manila and Caesars Gauteng Hotel Casino in Johannesburg. Friedmutter Group completed the Harrah's Resort in Atlantic City, including the 458-room Bayview Tower expansion and a 45-story, 954-room Waterfront Tower addition. Adding to a global résumé that includes projects in China, Korea and other international markets, Cuningham Group Architecture, Inc. is currently working on two Native American gaming resort projects in the Pacific Northwest. YWS Architects, likewise, stays busy outside of Nevada, designing the Crown Sri Lanka, the Crown Towers in Perth, Australia, and the MGM Grand in Macau, China.

"It was really interesting working in China, where the emphasis is upon story," says YWS co-founder Jon Sparer, AIA. "They wanted an architectural design that incorporated the Portuguese and Asian influences. We consequently researched the area's cultural history, which is very spiritual, steeped in nature and mythology."

The $1.25 billion complex, opened in 2007, features a soaring 35-story, 600-room glass tower composed of three undulating forms that reference the neighboring South China Sea; three is also a lucky number in Asian culture. The high-rise sections are tinted in gold, silver and copper, symbolizing wealth and good fortune, while the horizontal waves mirror the rolling swell of the ocean surf.

"We looked to a story from the ancient Daoist third century philosopher, Zhuang Zhou, discussing the dream of being a butterfly," Sparer says. "We subsequently incorporated a butterfly leitmotif of transformation and rebirth throughout the property, which was a fun design approach that we don't always experience in the states."
Sensitivity to context, history, tradition, community and environment can be key components for successful project designs in foreign places. It takes skill, adaptability, and creativity, as well as intellectual and sociological inquisitiveness in order to produce an influential, timeless design.

“In China, they are looking for interesting ideas that tell a story. The architectural design must have a metaphorical component. Everything relates to something else,” says Windom Kimsey, AIA, president and chief executive of Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects.

“You have to develop a narrative. It’s a culture that likes to name their buildings.”

The practice currently is building a pair of 820-foot-tall glass office, retail and hotel towers inside the Shenzhen Bay Technology Park in southeast China. The 3.7-million-square-foot complex consists of two slightly offset, high-rise buildings that convey a sense of rhythm and movement. They are connected by a large podium base with a rooftop park, linking the project’s horizontal and vertical elements for a sense of seamless continuity.

The clean contemporary aesthetic and advanced building methods convey a sense of forward momentum and civic progress important in Chinese culture.

HOSPITALITY — AND HEALTHY COMPETITION

“Hospitality has become the calling card for Las Vegas architecture. They have essentially done our marketing for us, enabling forays into other non-resort related markets,” says Kimsey. “Las Vegas previously had a little chip on its shoulder, but perceptions have changed over time with high-quality designs.”

Last year, Tate Snyder Kimsey completed the $65 million, 67,433-square-foot Butte County Courthouse in Chico, California. The two-story, concrete-and-glass building references the picturesque buttes found in the surrounding foothills. The entry has a soaring curtain wall, acknowledging the area’s vertical rock formations, which pierces through the flat wide roofline resembling a hat brim to form a cupola. The west front has six buff-colored brick pillars with recessed glass walled sections for naturally lit interiors sumptuously appointed with vertical wood slats; the resulting effect connects visitors to the neighboring landscape, thereby blurring the boundaries between indoors and out.

The firm secured the commission through an open design competition in which architects can win work based on creativity, skill, quality and ingenuity, free from prejudice and geographical bias. It’s an increasingly popular procurement method for finding inventive designs with resonant power. “Competitions help us keep our pencils sharp,” Kimsey says. “It’s a great way to exercise our creative juices, unfettered, while measuring ourselves against the competition.”

SH Architecture similarly sees benefits from design competitions. It recently beat out 100 international firms in an architectural design contest for the 120-acre, 2.7 million-square-foot mixed-use Zahid Business Park in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The park calls for office towers, industrial warehouses, community recreational centers, cultural museums, research laboratories, housing, and a vocational training center, among other things. Located off the grid, the complex must be self-sustaining, producing its own power from solar arrays, wind turbines and diesel generators, plus provide, treat
and recycle water through filtration wells, desalination facilities, and sewage plants.

“We were selected because we are outside the market. The owners wanted a Western-style, sustainable business park and corporate headquarters that would fit into a desert environment,” says SH Architecture Design Director Curt Carlson, AIA. “They felt our experience with a similar climate coupled with our product type familiarity were project strengths.”

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of owner-architect relationships can’t be overstated. Developers often bring architects into other markets based upon experience, trust and comfort, resulting in lucrative repeat work. Carpenter Sellers Del Gatto Architects, for instance, has taken on 374 projects across 41 states for the University of Phoenix. Reliable service, sustained quality and similar design philosophies cinched the partnership, which has produced 6 million square feet of built projects since 2000.

“They were looking for someone to do a building for them in Las Vegas. We subsequently wound up doing a few projects for them,” says Rick Sellers, AIA, founding principal and president of Carpenter Sellers Del Gatto Architects. “In our office, we treat everything like it’s the first project. We don’t live on our laurels.”

The firm built the university’s flagship Riverpoint Center in Phoenix. The 37-acre, 660,000-square-foot complex consists of a 10-story and dual six-story office buildings that together act as the school’s desert-inspired corporate campus. Phoenix has a similar eco-climate as Las Vegas, making the transition easy with similar design approaches and features. Buildings, for example, are oriented along an east-west axis in order to maximize natural daylight and reduce energy costs. The architecture incorporates indigenous materials such as stone, concrete and copper with gabion walls filled with onsite river rocks that act as sculptural components and partitions, guiding pedestrian traffic.

“It was important that we created something that connected to the landscape,” Sellers says. “Relationships really drive everything we do.”

Relationships with other architects are equally important for securing work. Nearly every firm tackling a project in a new and unfamiliar market partners with a local practice; it’s essential for navigating the Byzantine permitting and building codes as well as integrating into the market with a better understanding of local dynamic forces. Conversely, bold name out-of-town architects working in Las Vegas similarly tap local expertise in order to ensure a smooth trouble-free project. Collaborations often prove fruitful and mutually beneficial with a cross-pollination of ideas that leads to something new and unexpected. It can further expand and deepen respective design skills.

“Longevity, diversity and talent comes over time. Las Vegas is still a relatively young market compared with larger, more mature eastern architectural firms,” Sellers says. “We gain knowledge by embracing those relationships that help us grow and develop new skills, gaining experience from projects we may have not done before.” In other words, what comes around, goes around, and what happens in Vegas architecture most definitely doesn’t stay in Vegas — a win-win all around.

—TONY ILLIA
Personal Space

HIGH-PROFILE LAS VEGANS CONSIDER THE BUILDINGS AND SPACES THAT INSPIRE, ENGAGE, AND INTRIGUE THEM
I find it difficult for me to name one single “favorite” piece of architecture in Las Vegas. Since many of the newest structures are entries in our annual AIA Design Awards program, I have an excellent opportunity to get to know them all in detail. So every year I add to my favorites. Las Vegas can claim hundreds of exciting models of quality architecture created by architects and design professionals who live right here in Nevada. The Historic Fifth Street School where the AIA office is located is a historic treasure. The Springs Preserve, the West Sahara Library, the Centennial Hills Library and the Lied Library on the UNLV Campus are all exciting models of quality architecture. For a pure adventure in perspective and the magic of creating space, the James Turrell “Akhob” art installation in the Louis Vuitton at Crystals is an exceptional experience. When I think about the buildings I like and those that simply meet their purpose and function properly, one in particular stands out to me.

The Bonneville Transit Center is an excellent building that admirably fulfills its purpose as the heart of the Regional Transportation Commission’s public transportation offerings. The 22,000 square-foot building is filled with natural light and is a safe, reliable and comfortable complex for transit-riders to access the Downtown area or to connect to routes serving the rest of Southern Nevada. It is the central hub for the exceptional transit services that include the Strip and Downtown Express, the Deuce and Route 206 (Charleston), plus 15 other routes. The facility is designed to provide complete transit services and assistance, and features 16 on-site vehicle bays, including bus transfer facilities, parking for hybrid vehicles and connections to our walkable Downtown business districts. Its purpose is to welcome people and to assist in getting them to their destinations, and that it does admirably. And sustainably: The BTC has photovoltaic solar panels that generate 58 percent of the electricity used by the facility, and has received LEED Platinum certification. It also includes a bicycle storage facility and repair shop, and even provides showers, lockers and changing areas for bike commuters. The 15,000 square feet of fabric and metal canopies provide shade and protect passenger boarding areas.

The BTC stands proudly on the 2.75-acre Downtown site and simply looks and functions appropriately. The undulating porticos and roof lines give it a positive, uplifting energy when viewed from all elevations. At night, the light from the building and the hint of what could be neon give it a special identity as a part of our city.

In the end, the best thing about any piece of architecture is the way it makes you feel. Buildings and our built environment influence our thoughts and make us feel things about our city. Hopefully, they are good things. I like this building, and it makes me feel good every time I see it.

Randy Lavigne, Hon. AIA
Executive Director, AIA Las Vegas
IF THE TURN of events I had anticipated as a young man had occurred, I would have been an architect by vocation. Instead, I am one in spirit, as a passionate advocate for how spaces should be designed to accommodate human needs — with that imperative balanced by the needs of a sustainable natural environment. While I’ve had the opportunity to experience large-scale design, I am lured to how smaller spaces can be easily as elegant — as well as instructive examples for large-scale counterparts. The DesertSol house is a shining instance of that.

Designed by students in the UNLV Solar Decathlon Team in 2013, DesertSol is an internationally recognized, best-in-class example of an ultra-efficient home design that incorporates creative, innovative and responsible design into a one-bedroom, 754-square foot abode ideal for desert living.

I draw lessons from — and am inspired by — the thoughtfulness of the envelope design that integrates sustainable energy generation and design via solar panels, a low-flow water system integrated with fire sprinklers and an outdoor water feature that captures rain, and air- and shade-management features (a steel structure over the deck that mimics a mesquite tree, for instance) that facilitate cross-ventilation in the summer and heat capture in the winter. Moreover, DesertSol further promotes sustainable design from the beginning through the use of indigenous materials.

Capping all of this is the fact that DesertSol was conceived, designed and orchestrated here and by UNLV students who achieved top awards nationally and second place (to Austria’s Vienna University of Technology) globally.

DesertSol is proof that good things come in small packages — with valuable lessons that are easily replicable and scalable in a dynamic environment.

Jim Murren
Chairman and CEO,
MGM Resorts International
LAS VEGAS HAS one of the most recognizable skylines in the world, with miles of impressive mega-resorts and unmistakable attractions such as the world’s largest observation wheel. While those buildings evoke great memories for many, there is one building that really takes me back to my childhood and inspires a warm feeling of community in me — St. Joan of Arc church in Downtown Las Vegas.

This iconic structure was the site of my grade-school graduation from St. Joseph’s School. The building’s history is of great significance, not only in my personal history, but also for the spiritual community in Las Vegas. In the early 1900s, in order to meet the needs of the Catholic community, a priest would travel to Las Vegas from Salt Lake City by train and deliver mass. By 1908, the Catholic people requested that a parish be established in Las Vegas, and St. Joan of Arc came to fruition.

In 1910, St. Joan of Arc church started out as a small chapel that could seat only about 40 parishioners. As the city of Las Vegas grew, so did the Catholic community and the need for a larger church. By 1938, Southern Nevada’s Catholic population reached 800. To meet the needs of the growing public, the church initiated a fundraising project to expand St. Joan of Arc to the large, beautiful church it is today.

Today, St. Joan of Arc remains a popular icon for those of faith. Many people visit the church to enjoy the art installation, “Our Lady of Lourdes,” designed by famed Las Vegas resident David G. Lorenzi. The church says the shrine serves as a favorite stop for prayerful visits and photos.

For me, the St. Joan of Arc represents more than a place of worship, though. It represents a place where I began to come of age and set my sights on my future. Walking up the steps to the main entrance, the iconic statues and the beautiful mural provide a sense of pride and wonder every time I see it. It is a refreshing anomaly among the Downtown architecture that stands out from the casinos and government buildings surrounding it. The next time you visit Downtown Las Vegas, take some time to enjoy St. Joan of Arc and its history that’s grown along with our wonderful city.

Rossi Ralenkotter
President and CEO,
Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

ST. JOAN OF ARC CHURCH
OUR FIRST CATHOLIC CHURCH EVOSES NOT JUST SPIRITUAL VALUES, BUT WARM PERSONAL MEMORIES

JUST INSIDE THE city limits of Las Vegas, the Sahara West Library sits among the neighborhoods of Peccole Ranch. The building, hailed as the pinnacle of the 1991 library expansion and development bond program, was designed by Minneapolis architecture firm MSR (Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, Ltd.). The $19.5 million, 122,000 square-foot building was the first of its type to integrate an art museum and library for joint use, and its juxtaposition of bold exterior forms and intricate detailing hint at its hybrid role. The two spaces are joined by shared meeting and congregational areas, such as the atrium and courtyard — areas that take advantage of the views to the east toward Downtown and west to the mountains. The design came equipped with a barrel-shaped roof, beautiful natural lighting and a “celestial wall” with tiny glass rods piercing the building’s shell.

After making your way through the inviting sunken garden that unfolds in a spiral in front of the building, it almost feels like you’re entering a canyon, with hidden gems of art and books nestled in the creative spaces of the building. The design was trendsetting not just for blending two uses into one, but also because it incorporated many of the principles and sustainability features that subsequently formed the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED guidelines two years later.

While the original joint-use concept has evolved over the years, the community building remains widely regarded as an open and inviting public space. The library is the largest in the state, and last year served more than 625,000 adults and kids, while circulating nearly 1 million items — stats and style worthy of “favorite building” status. A beautiful work of art in its own right, Sahara West Library further impresses with art shows and book signings — and occasionally a City Council workshop.

Betsy Fretwell / City Manager, Las Vegas
WHEN I THINK about spaces I love, I keep coming back to the Hoover Dam. The dam is an amazing piece of architecture and a structural marvel as well. (It was the world’s largest concrete structure at the time it was built.) To think that this piece of architecture brings great pleasure as a design and also provides flood control and electricity is a marvel to me. (And let’s not forget the benefit we get from Lake Mead recreational area.)

Gordon B. Kaufmann designed the Art Deco exteriors and Allen Tupper True designed the interiors, which were inspired by Native American art. I love the designs of the terrazzo floors in the public areas and bathrooms. Oskar J. W. Hansen designed the two Winged Figures of the Republic sculptures, as well as other pieces of art, including the bas-relief on the elevator tower. Architectural context inspired the Art Deco design on the dam, which seems to fit beautifully with the rocks of the canyon. (I’ve seen images of the original designs that looked a little like a highly adorned government building in Washington D.C., and I believe that Kaufman nailed the simpler design, from the curved arch to the turrets.)

The ripples from Hoover Dam extend to this day. We have Boulder City thanks to the dam, and the entire region owes a great debt of thanks to the Hoover Dam for being a catalyst for development and growth. In studying the architectural context for The Smith Center, architect David Schwarz had little to go on with the Symphony Park site (then just 61 acres of dirt), so he studied the region and quickly realized that Las Vegas really became a city as a result of the construction of the dam. Like the dam, The Smith Center was built during turbulent economic times and was originally imagined as a more classical edifice. Schwarz’s study took inspiration from the dam, removed adornments and celebrated the Art Deco form. (Terazzo floors inside of The Smith Center’s Reynolds Hall and in the Boman Pavilion were also based on this inspiration.) Needless to say, our sculpture “Genius in Flight” by Ben Victor is a tribute to the dam, as are the metal reliefs on the front of the building depicting the water from the dam feeding flowers in our valley. I think these are fitting tributes to this amazing structure.

Hoover Dam opened in 1936, and has been inspiring people ever since. Tourists visit the site every day, artists and photographers [including Ansel Adams] have marveled at its glory — and no wonder, because it’s one of the most significant and lasting pieces of architecture in our state.

**Myron Martin**
President and CEO, The Smith Center

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**IN THE GREATER** Downtown area bounded by Wyoming Avenue, Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, Bonanza Road, and Maryland Parkway, you’ll see several dozen buildings with barrel-top roofs, sometimes called bow-truss roofs. I’ve lived in or worked in three of these buildings — most of which were built in the ’40s and ’50s — and they were the scenes of some of my most happy and productive years as a painter.

I lived at the Arts Factory from 2002–2008 in a 2,300-square-foot bow-truss space on the second floor, with 16-foot high, arched ceilings. The Arts Factory space was a real hub of excitement and optimism in the then-burgeoning Arts District. My paintings showed well there, the lighting was good, and there was always something happening. Just north of the Arts Factory is Art Square, which contains two bow-truss buildings where the ceilings reach 20 feet. Artifice is a nicely designed space, but the area where the barrel-top roof trusses are exposed is all painted black and little attention is directed up.

The third bow-truss building is at 418 W. Mesquite Ave., and holds an extra-special place in my heart. I had a live/work space there from 2009–2013. The white-painted, 22-foot-high ceilings with 48-foot-long bow trusses made for a magical space.

There I was for four glorious years, alone with my stuff, several dozen completed paintings with plenty of wall space to show them, tons of paint in gallon and quart containers, rolls of canvas and more brushes than I needed. I loved working in that space, with the pristine white canopy ceiling like a wide-open sky arching above me. It had a beautiful concrete floor, too, that had sealed-in remnants from the building’s 60-year-plus history, a floor on which I could make as big a mess as I wanted. It was the best playground I’ve ever occupied, and I feel like I did some of my best work in that beautiful, idyllic space. If I were king of Las Vegas, I’d make it illegal for these spaces to be rented to anyone other than working artists — and, to better share the magic I experienced, the price would be a very artist-friendly 25 cents a square foot.

**Michael Wardle / Artist**
BACK IN THE 1990s, one of the things that ‘they’ say made Las Vegas unique is that you didn’t have to go far to be someplace different — walking effortlessly from the Eiffel Tower to the Brooklyn Bridge to King Arthur’s Court to a pyramid. But it wasn’t really going someplace different. The fact that they didn’t speak French in Paris Las Vegas or Brythonic at Excalibur or Middle Egyptian at Luxor probably tipped you off to that. But with a little imagination, you were a world traveler without leaving Las Vegas Boulevard.

Las Vegas, though, has no monopoly on imagination; just ask any kid who makes an interstellar cruiser out of an oversized cardboard box. Any great space engages the imagination as much as it provides shelter and beauty. From that perspective, my favorite space in Las Vegas is the Discovery Children’s Museum. Over the past few years, I’ve spent dozens of hours there with my kids.

Wait — what about all that great architecture on the Strip? Don’t get me wrong — it’s perfectly fine, but it’s not really anything I can love. If I had spent years working there or hit Megabucks, we could talk, but there’s just not enough personal emotional resonance for me. The museum, though — I’m watching my kids learn and explore there, and seeing that everyone there has one thing in common: They are being inspired to imagine.

We’ve all heard how audacious Steve Wynn’s Mirage was — a Pacific retreat in the middle of the desert, imagine that! But the “Desert Pearl,” a kid-sized pirate ship replica, is just as bold a journey. Even better, it’s across from a medieval-style castle that’s just as substantial as anything on the Strip and, seeing the faces of the kids running around it, much more joyful. In the middle is a stage where kids present impromptu skits and soliloquies. When you see pirates battling knights battling superheroes with the benefit of a few props and costumes, you know you’re seeing imagination run wild.

And that’s just part of the first floor. The multi-level summit gives brave kids (the grated floor can be intimidating for those who haven’t conquered their acrophobia) three stories of activities. On the second floor, Eco City lets kids pretend to work as veterinarians, air-traffic controllers, cashiers, and engineers. The third floor has spaces that let young ones solve mysteries, build things, and create art.

The best thing about the Discovery Children’s Museum might be that its design forces you to be an active parent. Take your eyes off your charges, and they might run off to something else, leaving you to explain that you lost your kids (again). You can’t just plop your children down and fire up your phone — you need to keep watching. So even if you’re not helping them draw or build, you’re keeping a close eye on them. Maybe Las Vegas isn’t the easiest place to raise your children. The Discovery Children’s Museum makes it that much easier.

David Schwartz
Director, UNLV Center for Gaming Research
THE NEWEST BUILDING on the Las Vegas Strip, one perfectly suited to the Entertainment Capital of the World, is also my favorite — and not just because it will host the community’s first major league sports team from the National Hockey League. The T-Mobile Arena is placed in an open, inviting locale, at the end of The Park, an outdoor dining and entertainment district that straddles New York-New York and the Monte Carlo resort. The Park, with its numerous restaurants and generous open-air seating, has itself become an attractive venue to catch a meal and chat with friends before or after enjoying a concert or show at the arena. The 40-foot-tall "Bliss Dance" sculpture, which displays ever-changing colors at night and dazzles under the daytime sun, is very cool, and attracts those in search of must-have images for their social media channels.

But it’s the 20,000-seat T-Mobile Arena itself that is the most awe-inspiring jewel of this new crown on the Strip. It is here, particularly with our new NHL hockey team, that I see our community coming together as one, whether to celebrate our victories or to commiserate over losses. The T-Mobile Arena blends in perfectly with its environment. The side facing The Park and the Strip exudes high energy, particularly with its huge mesh video wall (210 feet by 45 feet), glass façade and sweeping balconies. The southern and western sides of the building are wrapped in a sleek, captivating copper, reflecting the Spring Mountains and the desert to the west. Inside is a similar palette, along with blue, purple and orange in the upper levels, representative of our glorious Las Vegas sunsets. There’s a dizzying array of amenities found in modern-day event venues of this nature: event-level suites, luxury suites, opera boxes, bunker suites, loge boxes, and more, along with various clubs and lounges. Certainly impressive are the 820 LCD video displays, a fantastic sound system, scoreboards viewable from all angles and free public Wi-Fi. Who wouldn’t want to perform or attend an event in such a venue that creates excitement, vitality and energy around this end of the Strip?

It would be convenient to say T-Mobile Arena is simply a high-tech Las Vegas performance space. The truth is that it was designed and built to be much more. It is communal, it is inviting, and it is designed for the creation of memorable experiences — a perfect fit for a city that serves as the world’s gathering place.

Steve Sisolak
Chair, Clark County Commission
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ARCHITECTS DID THAT

THIS YEAR, THE AIA LAS VEGAS
Chapter is celebrating our 60th anniversary, but long before the AIA Las Vegas Chapter was established in 1956, the architects who were practicing in Nevada were hard at work imagining, designing and building our city.

In the early part of the 1940s, it was the architects who recognized the growing need for a regulatory body for architecture in Nevada. They joined together and worked to establish a State Board of Architecture with the sole stated purpose to “establish laws to protect the profession and to raise the standard of architecture in Nevada.” Finally, in 1949, thanks to the persistent labors of the architects and the full-time lobbying efforts of architect Graham Erskine, “The Act to Regulate the Practice of Architecture in Nevada” (AB70) was passed by the state legislature and the Nevada State Board of Architecture was established. Architects did that.

Governor Pittman appointed the first state board members, all of whom were architects, and included Leman A. Ferris, Russell Mills, Edward Parsons, Aloyisus McDonald, and Walter Zick. They held their first meeting on July 31, 1949, where they elected officers, determined the criteria for licensure and set about issuing licenses to architects.

License #1 was issued to L.A. Ferris and today — over 60 years and some 8,000 licenses later — the Nevada State Board of Architecture, Interior Design and Residential Design exists to protect the profession and the health, safety and welfare of the public, thanks to those dedicated and determined architects and those who have followed in their footsteps. Architects did that.

During the 1970s, the leadership of the Chapter recognized the importance of establishing a School of Architecture at the new University of Nevada Las Vegas campus. AIA members organized to lobby for the funding to establish an architecture studies program. Led by architect Julio Lucchesi, AIA, their efforts to secure funding and to establish the school were successful. Once the school was established, it was Julio’s son, Ray Lucchesi, AIA, and other dedicated members of AIA who helped to design the curriculum and volunteered to teach the classes. The program began slowly, but has grown and expanded to a fully accredited, six-year School of Architecture. Architects did that.

If you’re a resident of Las Vegas, you live in a world-class city. There are many reasons our city deserves this designation, but one of the most essential is the architecture. Las Vegas architects have created some of the most innovative and exciting buildings, homes, public facilities and structures to be found anywhere in the world. The hotels, megaresorts and entertainment venues of...
the fabulous Las Vegas Strip have generated a tourism industry that is the powerful engine of our economy. A large part of engendering that successful economy is the phenomenal design of these structures and the experiences they provide. At the same time, exceptional homes and livable communities stretch across the valley, from the mid-century modern homes in Paradise Palms and the Scotch 80s to Anthem, Henderson, North Las Vegas, Boulder City and Summerlin. We have wonderful schools, great hospitals and medical facilities, beautiful libraries, churches, cultural centers, office towers and civic services. It is the design and architecture of these facilities that helps our city to function and has made Las Vegas a welcoming and comfortable place to live and to do business. Architects did that.

In celebration of our 60 years, AIA Las Vegas is compiling an informal history of our Chapter, which to a large extent is the history of our city. Beginning in 1956, when architects Walter Zick, Harris Sharp, Jack Miller, Hugh Taylor, Aloysius McDonald, Dick Stadelman, Elmo Burner and other early licensed architects established the AIA Las Vegas Chapter, to the present day, AIA members are still creating exceptional spaces, protecting the health, safety and welfare of the public, and expanding the future of young architects and designers. This “informal history” will be told through the personalities, recollections, projects, events and contributions of individual architects and design professionals who have spent their lives creating Las Vegas.

Look around you. The city that we enjoy today and the city that Las Vegas will be in the future depends upon the continued creativity, innovation and problem-solving talents of architects. And yes, that’s what architects do!

60 Years: An Informal History of the AIA Las Vegas Chapter will be published in December, and provided as a gift to all AIA members. It will also be available for purchase through our website at aialasvegas.org.

—RANDY LAVIGNE, HON. AIA
UPCOMING EVENTS
The special celebrations of our 60th anniversary will continue through the remainder of the year. AIA Las Vegas invites you to join us by attending the meetings, lectures and events that we have planned. You must RSVP online for each event at aialasvegas.org.

■ OCTOBER 19
“LEARN ABOUT/TURN ABOUT” PRODUCT SHOW
This annual one-day product show is open to the public and all are invited. It begins with continuing education classes on a variety of subjects offered from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Product Show opens at 4 p.m. Forty-one exhibitors showcase the latest technologies, products and services with complimentary snacks and beverages, $3,000 in cash prizes and a variety of door prizes. Exhibitors can also take advantage of the opportunity to meet face to face with firm principals and key decision-makers during a special networking lunch, a great chance to introduce your company or service.

■ OCTOBER 26
60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION MEETING
Jim Murren, Chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International will speak on “Modern Gaming and Design Trends.” One of the most successful CEOs in hospitality history, Murren will share his views on the era of modern gaming and the influence of design in the hospitality industry. The event will be held at an MGM property to be announced. It will begin with a reception at 5:30 p.m., and the program will start at 6:30 p.m. RSVP required at aialasvegas.org.

■ NOVEMBER 16
“VISIONS OF THE FUTURE”
This program will provide a fresh perspective on the AIA and the Strip with a look at where we are and where we are going. What does the future hold for Las Vegas and for architects and design professionals who practice here? How can they leverage the unique characteristics of Las Vegas to better prepare for that future, and what are the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead? The event will be held in the auditorium of the Historic Fifth Street School, beginning with a reception at 5:30 p.m. RSVP required at aialasvegas.org.

■ DECEMBER 14
AIA HOLIDAY CELEBRATION AND AWARDS GALA
This end-of-the-year gala will be the final celebration for our 60th anniversary year, featuring a review of the important highlights of our history and the recognition of the award recipients of the AIA Nevada Excellence in Design and Distinguished Service Awards, which celebrate the best of the architectural profession from across the state. 5:30 p.m., Four Seasons Hotel. Ticketed guests only. Tickets can be purchased online at aialasvegas.org.
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IT WAS AN ARCHITECTURAL PUZZLE, A VEXING construction detail I just couldn’t seem to resolve. I was working on a building design that had a barrel vault that terminated into another sloped plane, and I needed to find a way to gracefully (and, of course, beautifully) resolve the terminations of three or four distinct building materials where the vault met the plane. Because architectural construction docs are generally drawn in two dimensions — and because old habits die hard — I’d been limiting myself to that approach. Over a week of work, and I had nothing to show for it but a hopeless pile of computer printouts.

My drawing pad saved me. Ruminating upon the situation late one night at my desk with carne asada fries and a Diet Coke, I absent-mindedly began sketching. I started drawing this tricky portion of the building in three dimensions and, slowly, almost magically, voila!, the solution began to reveal itself. In just a few short moments, sketching and drawing were able to solve a complex building problem I wouldn’t have been able to crack otherwise.

Sketching has enriched my professional and personal life immeasurably. It’s made me a more discerning and creative architect, increased my appreciation of special moments with family and friends, and deepened my experience of the Las Vegas cityscape.

But when people ask me why I sketch, I don’t say any of that. Rather, my answer is another question: “Why doesn’t everyone sketch?” Sketching is an excellent way to actually “see” a place with all your senses. I know that sounds counterintuitive but, trust me, more than your eyes and hands are engaged in sketching. Don’t take my word for it. For instance, Dr. Karin James, a professor of psychological and brain sciences at Indiana University, studied how handwriting affects patterns of brain activation in children; she found that learning to print letters by hand actually helps kids not only learn to read, but also to develop other brain functions. In other words, our brain moves our hands, but moving our hands also shapes our brain.

Sketching takes the next step; it’s the continued evolution of our creative minds. As an architect, I use sketching as a problem-solving and communication tool with clients and co-workers. Sketching is often a substitute for words in many of my daily conversations: When I don’t have time to write the 1,000 words, I just draw the picture. Sketching and drawing have also honed my ability to think in three dimensions. Because I so often create sketches to explain a thought or idea, I’m habitually requiring my brain to work out solutions in 3-D so I can understand spatial relationships that affect scale, proportion and aesthetic. Without sketching, that late night at the office spent pondering the problem of the barrel vault would have ended with little more than indigestion.

As part of the design process, drawing by hand has important advantages over computer-developed designs. Certainly, the computer is an indispensable part of our design process; we should integrate new technology as much as possible. But until the way we interact with the computer allows the realism of human imperfection and welcomes the unpredictability and happy chaos that we bring to our endeavors, any design developed solely on a computer will have missed an opportunity.

And I don’t limit my practice to the office. Sketching is a lifestyle. When I travel with my family, I like to sketch what I see. Years later, I can return to a drawing that took me 30 minutes to create, and remember the warmth of the sun on my back that day, the smell of jasmine, the salty cool of the ocean air. A smartphone snap, no matter how many megapixels, can’t do that for me.

Urban sketching is not about problem-solving — at least not on the surface. When our Las Vegas Urban Sketchers group goes out to different corners of the community each month, it’s an opportunity to take a deep, fresh breath of our city — to truly see this place where we live. It’s a fantastic chance to spend time in parts of our community we might not normally visit. It’s even more fun to visit a place that’s familiar and to see it for the first time through your sketchbook — a process that reveals as much about you as about your subject.

What do you include in the drawing? The people, the trees? What do you leave out? The shadows, the power lines? There’s always a story about what’s there — and what isn’t there. That’s the kind of fascinating, enriching dynamic that takes place between observer and observed, sketcher and subject, self and world, that keeps me coming back to the sketchbook. Why doesn’t everybody sketch? Why don’t you?

— Eric M. Roberts, AIA

Eric Roberts is vice president of SH Architecture and founder of Urban Sketchers Las Vegas.
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