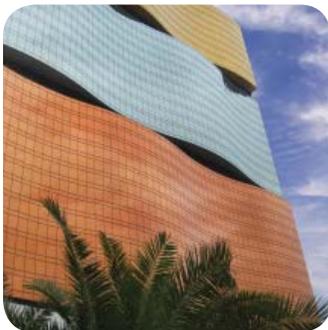


Designing the Ultimate Leisure Brand Experience

5 design guidelines for transforming your brand's essence into a uniquely compelling experience



A white paper by

yws



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The most important phase of any project is the earliest planning stages, for that is where the success or failure of the project is truly determined. To leave out any marketing or brand considerations at these stages would be unthinkable. However, when embarking on a new leisure project, design firms characteristically focus on producing a compelling piece of architecture. That is, after all, what they do. When it comes to the consideration of how the design must embody the brand to produce a uniquely compelling experience, they will rely solely on the development team to provide this input. In this white paper, we will share five design guidelines that will enable you, as a member of the development team, to properly deliver it to them.

Where so many leisure projects fall short

Of the scores of leisure developments that have debuted in the last five years, many are impressive, yet only a select few offer what can be considered as groundbreaking leisure brand experiences. What prevents the majority from achieving greatness? In our observation, the primary reasons can be categorized as follows:

1. The project reflects an aspiration to be all things to all leisure visitors

There is always an irresistible urge among project developers to appeal to as many categories of guest as possible, in an effort to prevent losing out on any potential revenues. In the beginning, perhaps they seek to appeal to well-heeled young executives. Then they consider the vast numbers of affluent baby-boomers they could be capitalizing on, so they look for ways to make the project appeal to that audience. Then someone on the team insists the project be family-friendly. Ultimately, the project achieves the goal of appealing to these diverse categories, but in doing so, it fails to create a compelling experience for any individual category.

2. The project achieves impressiveness – but in a commoditized way

Imagine this scenario: Once the project has been completed, the media and first wave of visitors concur that everything looks spectacular, except... everything feels familiar. That's because it is an amalgamation of all the other impressive projects in its category that preceded it. There is nothing original about the

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experience, and therefore nothing that is proprietary to its brand.

3. The sum of the project's individual experiences lacks coherency

When there is anything less than absolute definition of a brand's thematic essence and the specific category of visitor it will appeal to, then it is nearly impossible to create a coherent, compelling brand experience. Conversely, visual and experiential coherency is elemental to a strong brand. As a comparison, coherency in a brand's visual communications is achieved through the use of a brand standards manual. This document ensures coherency in the depiction of the logo, the look and feel of every ad, direct mail piece and web page, and the voice of the written communications, regardless of which vendor is creating them. This disciplined approach must be applied to the way your project is designed as well.

How the brand relates to the experience

A brand is more than a logo, an advertisement or a catalog. Those are two-dimensional ways a brand delivers an experience. Instead, one must graduate to multi-dimensional brand thinking – which is the all-encompassing way of considering the cumulative brand experience.

The brand experience occurs on multiple levels – hence, it is “multi-dimensional.” The overall project must be in alignment with your brand. There are individual experiences that constitute the overall project, and these, too, must be in alignment with your brand.

As an example, consider how Starbucks created a branded environment that in turn creates the brand experience. The décor is part of that experience. The music is part of that experience. The perky, engaging personalities of the baristas are part of that experience. Even the aroma of coffee is part of that experience. And so, too, is the coffee itself. Apple Computer, whose brand personality is much different than Starbucks', translated it into an equally compelling brand environment in the form of its Apple Store retail chain where every element is a reflection of the brand.

Why today's leisure visitors are so much harder to impress

Amid today's experience economy, leisure consumers have an overabundance of amazing, diverse experiences to choose from. Today's consumers are more informed, connected and savvy than ever, thanks to the infinite on-demand informational resources online. Especially when it comes to leisure, consumers are no longer satisfied with anything they consider "adequate." Rather, they insist on the highest standard of experience their budgets will allow.

Consumers relish the challenge of sifting through the profusion of resources online to uncover the ultimate experience. To them, it's comparable to searching through a confection store for the ultimate bonbon. When they do come across a leisure option that's particularly savory, they delight in telling the world. "Word Of Mouth," amplified by blogs, forums and other social networking channels, is more of a factor than ever before.

What is the result of today's consumers being so well informed? When they're exposed to the best of everything, their standards elevate sky-high. They come to you with sky-high expectations. If you fail to meet those expectations, they'll become indifferent to you. They'll tune you out.

Developing a compelling brand experience – by today's leisure visitors' standards

What today's leisure visitor demands is a fresh and compelling overall *experience*. The experience your brand delivers must fill a void in the marketplace. It must be a meaningful void; it should correlate to an unfulfilled desire among your target markets.

To illustrate how the experiential expectations of today's leisure visitor have escalated, consider the influence of boutique hotels. When they sprang onto the scene a couple of decades ago, they succeeded in delivering remarkable brand

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experiences. At the time, most people regarded them as a fad; they figured the boutiques appealed only to a minority of design-savvy, affluent guests. Today, the standard pioneered by boutiques has altered the expectations of all leisure guests, and has emerged to govern hospitality brands and projects of every size.

YWS' recommended methods for achieving a compelling brand experience

1. Open a dialogue between your design people and your brand people early on

When you hold your earliest discussions with your architectural design team, it may not be typical for you to bring in your senior brand managers to participate in the design dialog. It is imperative that you impart to your designers a solid understanding of what makes your brand distinctive. During this discussion, there are fundamental questions which should be included in the discussion. For example:

- Who is our target guest?
- What appeals to them? What turns them off?
- What experiences set the standard for them in terms of hotels, restaurants, retail stores and travel?
- What is the essence of our brand?
- In what ways can this brand essence translate into a spatial experience?
- What kinds of spatial experience would contradict our brand essence?

As part of your design firm's programming process, you should request that they translate the concurrences regarding the brand and project design into a design brand platform. Essentially, this is a set of guidelines to govern how the brand will translate to the project design.

2. Be involved in consumer research of your target guests

At every stage of overseeing the design process, you want a sound basis for making your decisions. The most important insight for guiding your decisions is to know what makes your target guest tick. Of course, you can always derive this by watching the focus group videos or reviewing the accompanying summary report. However, these are no substitute for directly interfacing with your target guests, and directly experiencing how they express their perceptions. Such interface is the optimal way to gain an intimate, gut-level connection to them.

One leisure brand that has mastered the art of knowing its audience intimately is Carnival Cruise Lines. Their target is budget-minded consumers who prefer shorter (thus more affordable) cruises with a casual ambiance – a market referred to within the industry as the “contemporary” segment of cruise ship vacationers. As the industry leader, Carnival has the means to appeal to a broad range within this segment, including families, singles, honeymooners and seniors.

By maintaining a firm finger on the pulse of its customer base, Carnival has been successful at adapting its product to match the evolving tastes and preferences of its audience. In recent years, Carnival has introduced cigar bars, sushi bars, the Presidential Wine Club, complementary twenty-four-hour cabin service and a dramatically improved Camp Carnival children’s program. They have also continuously refined the staples of the Carnival experience such as entertainment, casino gaming, dining choices, bars and nightclubs.

This evolution is reflected in the layout and design of Carnival’s ship interiors as well. Twenty years ago, Carnival’s spaces were visually energetic, featuring bright colors and liberal application of neon lighting. At the time, cruise line traditionalists may have found it shocking, but Carnival’s guests felt right at home. Since then, the garishness has been tamed by refining interiors to be more tasteful, while still feeling fun and fanciful.

3. Be involved in benchmarking leisure experiences – in a variety of categories

Obviously, it is important to know where the bar has been set within your own category. But if you only benchmark competing leisure experiences, the very best you can hope to achieve is to match them. In doing so, you’ll give your rivals the opportunity to raise the bar.

True innovation comes from looking outside your industry, and incorporating the ideas and insights you discover there. For this reason, you need to experience the ultimate leisure standard-setters in every category. You need to personally travel to the places, and experience everything as if you were one of your target guests.

One venue well worth visiting is Niketown, for the way it has utterly

rethought and redefined the retail shopping experience. In the same way Nike’s television commercials deliver entertainment that transcends the utilitarian salesmanship of conventional TV spots, Niketown’s environments deliver entertainment that rises above retail. Every surface and element visually engages the shopper with the spatial equivalent of a quick-cut commercial. There are vibrant colors, a mélange of visual and tactile textures, and pulsing monitors everywhere, all beckoning the shopper’s attention simultaneously.

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Niketown engages other senses as well. Ethereal, energizing music fills each space, and actually increases in volume whenever a shopper lifts an item of merchandise off the shelf. The music is accented by ambient sounds that reinforce each themed space. There are sounds of surf and seagulls in the Aqua Gear shop, squeaking

sneakers and bouncing balls in the Force Basketball boutique, and the rhythm of feet pounding pavement in the International Running Pavilion. All these sensuous elements contribute to a shopping experience that is stimulating, novel, and unlike any other.

4. Seek opportunities to transcend the boundaries of the visitor experience

An obvious place to begin is by mapping out where the current threshold of experience is for every individual space and function within the property.

One boundary worth considering is the utilitarian spaces, such as lobbies, hallways, restrooms or parking garages. For example, when you say, “hotel lobby,” what’s the image that emerges in most people’s minds? What can your designers do to defy expectation – by creating a hotel lobby experience unlike any other, in a way that gives dimension to your brand? What are other utilitarian spaces that you can evolve into memorable experiences?

Another boundary is integration of technology. What are new ways that environment and technology can merge? How can Bluetooth and similar technologies be incorporated to connect guests with their environments, or with service personnel, or with other guests? Where can you put screens in places they’ve never been put before? What can you put on those screens to enhance or create distinctive experiences?

Yet another boundary is personalization of spaces. According to a Harvard Business Review article entitled, “The Four Faces of Mass Customization” by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, the concept of adaptive customization refers to a product that users can alter to suit their own preferences. How might you develop readily changeable spaces so the visitor can change its appearance or functionality the way he or she likes it? What other boundaries can you think of? What other boundaries can your design team think of?

If there is any business leader who possesses a knack for barging into new industries by creating built-from-scratch companies that overturn every sacredly held convention, it is Sir Richard Branson. In 1984, Sir Richard’s disgruntling experience as an airline passenger inspired him to launch of Virgin Atlantic. Today, Virgin Atlantic is the UK’s second-largest long-haul airline with the youngest aircraft fleet – and the hippest reputation.

The environments aboard Virgin Atlantic’s Boeing 747s and Airbus A340s (and soon Boeing 787 Dreamliners and Airbus A380s) feel more like airborne lounges than passenger aircraft interiors. In fact, the “Upper Class” (Virgin’s version of first class) cabin features an actual bar. It is billed as the largest bar in the skies, and it is as hip and happening as anything on terra firma.

However, Virgin Atlantic’s real innovation is where passengers sit in Upper Class. They’re not even referred to as “seats,” but as “Upper Class Suites,” and were designed to be the most comfortable chair and the most comfortable bed in the air. Unlike most first class seats which simply extend into beds, Virgin’s Upper Class Suites consist of luxury leather armchairs that each flip at the push of a button into a separate bed with mattress. Spanning 79.5 inches each, the beds are the longest in the industry.

5. Evaluate the design specifications against the design brand platform

As important as it is to include the consideration of the brand as part of the design team’s programming process, it is just as vital to ensure this is reflected in the team’s design specifications. Does the design as a whole embody the brand essence? Does each individual component of the design reflect the brand as well? Is there brand coherency across all the individual experiences throughout the project? Is the overall project sufficiently unique in a way that can be connected to the brand?

One of the most coherent and distinctive brands in all of mass retail is Target, with a consistency that is rigorously upheld across magazine pages, TV screens, computer screens and physical environments. Trendy and hip, carrying house-brand designer goods at low cost, Target has successfully differentiated itself from its chief rival, Wal-Mart, who merely focuses on offering low-priced goods. The shorthand way of referencing Target’s positioning is “cheap chic.” As a result of this strategy, Target attracts shoppers who are younger (median age: 41), more affluent (median household income: \$63,000) and more educated (48% have college degrees) than discount shoppers overall.

One way Target reinforces its brand is to deliver goods that Wal-Mart and other retailers cannot. To accomplish this, Target has forged exclusive deals with famous apparel designers. Target also partners with famous brands including Converse, Nintendo and Sony to create exclusive collections for its stores. Another brand differentiator is, of course, Target’s distinctive advertising. Developed by a team of a half dozen agencies, Target’s communications are remarkable for their clean, bubbly style and content.

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Fundamentally aligned with Target’s positioning, brand personality and advertising are its store environments. Designed to make shopping intuitive, Target’s related departments are placed next to each other. Aisles are wider than at other discount retailers, drop ceilings make overhead spaces more appealing, and careful attention is given to its vivid environmental graphics. Because Target considers itself a “discount department store,” it does not play the Muzak associated with other mass retailers, and does not promote services through its public address system. Overall, Target’s environments deliver on its advertising, while differentiating it from Wal-Mart, Kmart and all other discount retailers.

Case Study: Diamond Jo Dubuque

Delivering a Las Vegas experience to value-minded Midwesterners

To illustrate the process of designing a powerful leisure brand experience, we shall describe our own involvement with reinventing Diamond Jo Casino in Dubuque, Iowa. In late 2006, the casino's operator, Peninsula Gaming, LLC, approached us with the challenge of relocating its 19,600 square foot Mississippi riverboat into a land-based, 188,000 square foot casino complex. In achieving this, we needed to develop a leisure experience that met three branding and design requirements: (1) to resonate with socially conservative, value-minded guests; (2) to differ from competing leisure experiences nearby; and (3) to blend with the historic industrial setting of downtown Dubuque.



Diamond Jo Dubuque's exterior complements its classic industrial surroundings, as well as the experience inside.



Warm colors and textures in the Arts and Crafts design style feel accessible and friendly to value-minded Dubuquers.

Project description

Owned and operated by Dubuque-based Peninsula Gaming, LLC, the Diamond Jo Casino is a two-story, 188,000 square-foot structure in the Port of Dubuque, nestled near the historic downtown area of Dubuque, Iowa. The casino features approximately 900 slot and video machines, 17 table games, a separate high-stakes gaming area, and a 5-table poker room. Also on the first floor are The Woodfire Grille, The Kitchen Buffet and Jo's Delicatessen; two bars; and a concert venue known as The Mississippi Moon Bar. The second floor features "Cherry Lanes," a 36-lane bowling center with private VIP lanes, as well as a sports lounge and meeting space, administrative offices, and additional support space.

History of the Diamond Jo brand

Diamond Jo began life in 1994 as a riverboat casino that initially cruised the Mississippi, then was moored permanently at Dubuque's Ice Harbor. The brand's moniker was born of a local naming contest, and honors local business legend Joseph "Diamond Jo" Reynolds, who owned a Dubuque shipping company. The 305-foot riverboat's 19,600 square feet were devoted exclusively to gaming, which included slots, video poker and table games. The riverboat's adjacent land-based facility housed three restaurants: the Diamond Deli, HighSteaks Restaurant, and Jo's Café. In 2006, Peninsula Gaming opened a second Diamond Jo Casino in Northwood, Iowa, about 200 miles from Dubuque. In September of that year, following a change in local ordinances, Peninsula Gaming announced the transition of Diamond Jo into an \$84 million land-based casino.



Numerous venues were benchmarked in Dubuque and in other markets, toward attaining a distinctive bowling experience.

Understanding Diamond Jo's target guest

Diamond Jo's Manager, a long-term resident of the area who had worked in the gaming industry locally for many years, possessed an intimate understanding of his target guests' attitudes, preferences and biases. The insights he shared with us, corroborated by consumer research, provided us with a consummate familiarity of the property's target market.

Diamond Jo's target market is derived almost entirely from the local community. Dubuque's residents can be characterized as having strong family values, and a sense of tradition. They have a deep connection to the community in which their parents and grandparents grew up and worked. As a consequence, they maintain socially conservative lifestyles.

Many of Dubuque's citizens have made the pilgrimage to Las Vegas. Therefore, when it comes to gaming and entertainment, the Las Vegas experience is their standard of reference; it is the style and caliber of experience they expect – and demand. The caveat is that they have no fascination with the city's flashier aspects, such as \$1,200 bottle service at the nightclubs, or luxury retail boutiques. Rather, their primary criterion is value – as manifest in Las Vegas' quality gaming environments, entertainment and meals, collectively available at a reasonable price. Indeed, our target audience's insistence on value was determined to be a key insight in developing this project.



Recognizing how important steakhouses are to Dubuquers, we knew that Diamond Jo's had to raise the bar.



This is the one environment that overtly acknowledges Diamond Jo's Mississippi riverboat heritage.

Benchmarking relevant leisure experiences

In conducting a thorough benchmarking analysis, we accompanied Diamond Jo's Manager on a tour of Las Vegas properties catering to the local market. We also traveled to other local markets in the southern part of the U.S. as well as the heartland. In recognizing the significance of the steakhouse institution in Dubuque culture, we visited restaurants of that genre throughout the region. In benchmarking entertainment options, we toured Dubuque's bowling alleys and movie theaters; we also visited nightlife venues in the Dubuque area, and at properties in Las Vegas and the southern and mid U.S. Our benchmarking also included research of the local building materials and construction methods that would contribute to the experience, such as limestone and locally-produced brick.

Developing a distinctive leisure experience consistent with Diamond Jo's brand

Following our target guest research and property benchmarking, we established Diamond Jo's design brand platform which factored into the project's design specifications. We conducted in-depth discussions not only with Diamond Jo's project team headed by their Manager, but also with the casino's branding firm.

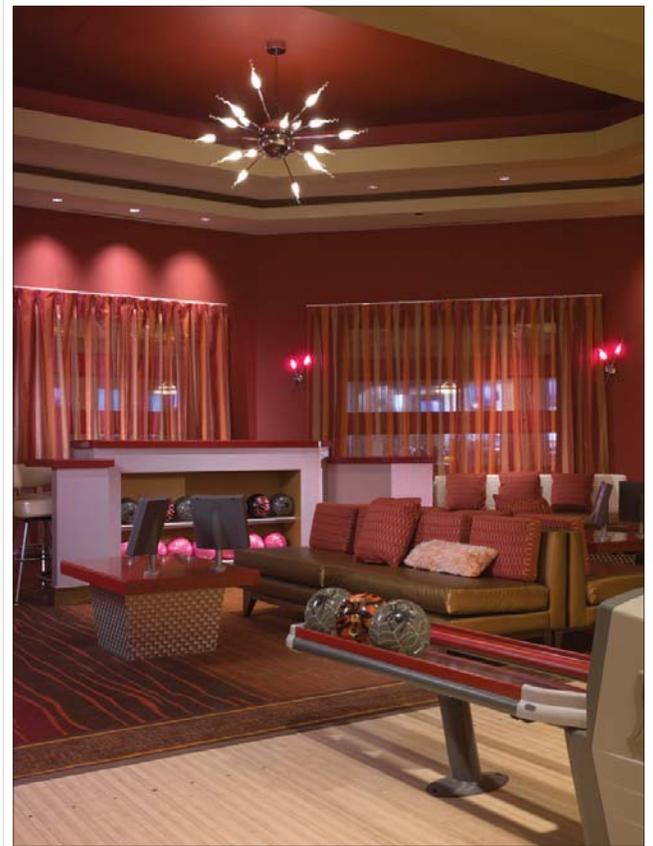
The essence of Diamond Jo's brand can be described as "providing a fun experience to a value-oriented guest." Despite Diamond Jo's previous life as a riverboat casino, the project team decided that a fresh departure from this heritage was called for. The exception is Diamond Jo's entertainment venue, the Mississippi Moon Bar, which uses the riverboat as the basis for its design motif.

In lieu of an overt theme, we selected the Prairie School of architecture, popular in the Midwest in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was agreed this style was most consistent with Diamond Jo's brand while complementing the classic industrial styles that define downtown Dubuque. Another important design choice was to create Diamond Jo as a single unified structure, as opposed to a collection of adjacent, smaller structures exemplified by New York New York in Las Vegas. Not only was a single structure more appropriate for Dubuque, it more accurately reflected the experience within. In making this choice, we successfully pushed for an approach that would result in a facility that appealed to the target market.

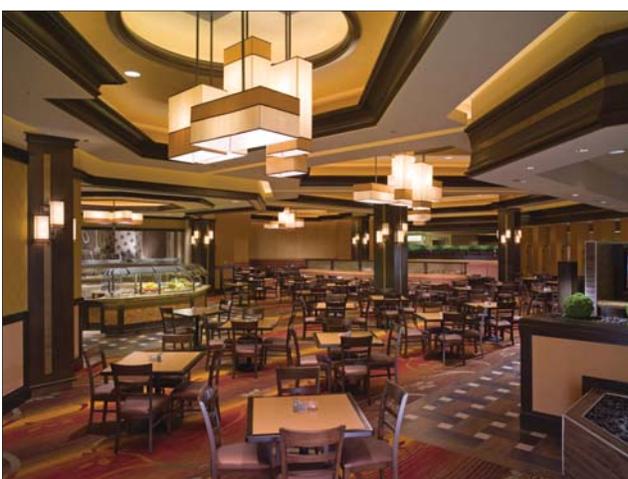
We elaborated on this design foundation by choosing a combination of warm colors and textures in the Arts and Crafts design style to exude comfort, familiarity and – above all else – good value. We gave each restaurant and entertainment venue its own brand experience, in a way that supports and enhances the Diamond Jo brand. Overall, Diamond Jo offers a Las Vegas experience made warmer, friendlier and more accessible, and devoid of pretension. In achieving this, Diamond Jo delivers a leisure brand experience that is unique unto itself.

Diamond Jo's success

Diamond Jo Dubuque's brand experience has proven to be quite popular among its target guests. According to Dubuque's Telegraph Herald, Diamond Jo's revenues for January of 2009 were twice those of January 2008. Diamond Jo has also established itself as a cultural success. Together with its neighbor, the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, the property has contributed to Dubuque's large and expanding tourism market. Finally, Diamond Jo Dubuque has been recognized as a design achievement.



How can you redefine the bowling experience for VIPs? In this case, we developed a fun, fashionable cherry wood environment.



Diamond Jo's brand delivers "a fun experience to a value-oriented guest." The buffet's tasteful, inviting interior embodies this.



The Tree Bar is just one example of how Diamond Jo softens the Las Vegas experience for a local clientele.

Case Study: MGM Grand Macau

Translating an established Las Vegas brand experience to Asia's gaming enclave

Our experience as Concept Design Architect for the MGM Grand Macau offers an ideal case study to illustrate the process of designing a powerful leisure brand experience. The project's Architect of Record was the acclaimed Wong & Tung International, Limited, headquartered in Hong Kong. When it was decided that the project should translate the quintessential Las Vegas resort-casino experience to Macau, YWS was hired as Concept Design Architect. This selection was based on our career design experience working with nearly every major gaming operator, from Boyd Gaming Corporation to Harrah's Entertainment to MGM Mirage.

In our capacity as Concept Design Architect, we developed the overall concept for the 'podium' of the property – including the casino, VIP rooms, restaurants, lounges, bars, hotel lobby, registration area, the Portuguese-style atrium, and other common areas. In creating a distinctive leisure brand experience for MGM Grand Macau, we faced several challenges: how to appeal to the tastes and expectations of China's new elite socioeconomic class; how to interpret the MGM Grand brand into an experience that Asian guests would embrace; and how to incorporate a signature element that would instantly differentiate the property from any other in the market.



When does the MGM Grand Macau brand experience commence?
When a guest first sights the structure from afar.



The lobby's low ceiling and warm, friendly elegance give it an unexpected intimacy.
Chihuly sculptures complete the effect.

Project description

Perched on the waterfront in Macau's bustling Nam Van gaming district, MGM Grand Macau dominates the skyline with its unforgettable tower. Rising 35 stories, the tower features three shimmering glass tiers colored gold, silver and bronze, undulating to represent the South China Sea it overlooks.

MGM Grand Macau features 600 rooms, suites and villas. Its grand casino includes approximately 375 table games, 900 slot machines and 16 private gaming salons for preferred clientele. There are twelve restaurants, ranging from 'casual' to 'celebratory' to 'extravagant,' and the lavish Six Senses Spa. There is also a convertible convention space, which includes the Grand Ballroom that can be configured for business meetings, social events and weddings.

MGM Grand Macau is a 50-50 joint venture between Las Vegas-based MGM Mirage and Ms. Pansy Ho Chiu-king, Managing Director of Shun Tak Holdings Limited (which is not a participant). Construction of the integrated resort commenced in June of 2005, and finished in December of 2007. An expansion has been scheduled which will add 47,000 square feet to the casino's second floor. Overall cost of the project (excluding the planned expansion) was US\$1.25 billion.

Essence of the MGM Grand brand

In preparation to develop a distinctive leisure brand experience that complemented and was consistent with that of MGM Grand, we gained a thorough understanding of the brand's heritage and distinguishing features. We supplemented property benchmarking visits and other research by discussing the MGM Grand brand experience with key executives of the Las Vegas property.

One of our observations was the discontinuity of several thematic revisions throughout the flagship property's history. When the original MGM Grand opened in 1973 where Bally's Las Vegas now stands, its movie theme reflected Kirk Kerkorian's ownership of the MGM studio in Hollywood. Upon reopening in 1993 at its current location at Tropicana Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard South, the MGM Grand was given a Wizard of Oz theme, complete with a green exterior to emulate Emerald City. A 2000 renovation replaced most of the property's Oz-themed decorative elements with an Art Deco style that referenced its classic Hollywood heritage, according to the tagline, 'The City of Entertainment.' This re-theming resulted from a desire to appeal to a more "grownup" target market.

Given this discontinuity, our approach was to ascertain the underlying, intangible traits of the MGM Grand brand – its essence – and use this as the basis for developing the leisure brand experience for Macau. Unique brand attributes of the MGM Grand include its cinematic heritage; its sensation of awe; and a feeling of comfort (such as one would experience watching a favorite classic movie). We determined as a primary criterion that the typical first-time guest of the Macau property should experience continual delight and surprise, while recognizing an inexpressible similarity to other MGM Grand properties. Additional continuity was achieved through the creative displays of Leo, the MGM lion mascot which greets visitors of the MGM Grand Las Vegas.

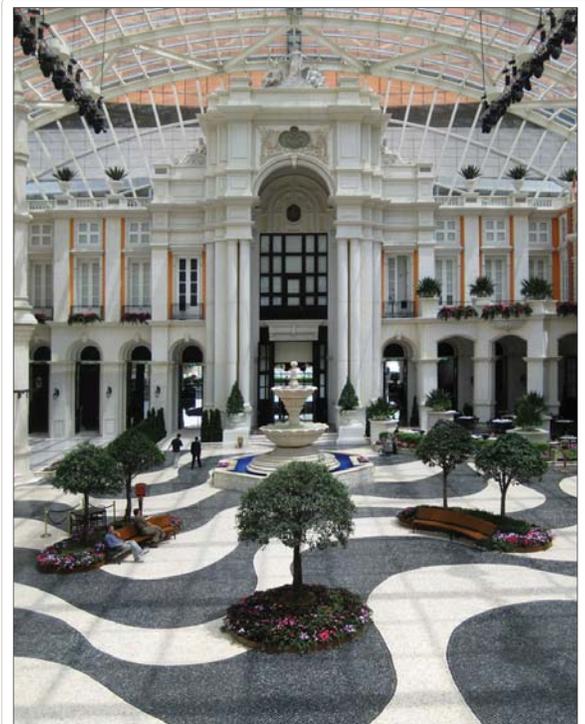
Understanding MGM Grand Macau's target guest

In recent years, China has undergone an explosion of both its middle and affluent classes. Practically nonexistent fifteen years ago, China's middle class surged to around 87 million in 2005, and is expected to surpass the current U.S. population by 2015. More recently, the affluent class has emerged from nothing. Defined as earning the U.S. equivalent of \$100,000 to \$150,000 per year on the low end, this burgeoning wealthy class currently includes around 3 million individuals, concentrated in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. By 2015, China's affluent class will nearly triple, with combined discretionary spending of US\$55 billion.

In understanding the motivations, tastes and stylistic preferences of MGM Grand Macau's target markets, we could not have asked for a finer resource than Ms. Pansy Ho. Affluent, educated and well-traveled, Ms. Ho epitomizes her target guest. She has also participated throughout



For any passer-by requiring a final enticement to step inside, this Dali sculpture hints at the mystery and contrast within.



Deliberately contrasting with the lobby's coziness, the Grand Plaza's open grandeur inspires surprise, delight, and instant freedom.



Central to the MGM Grand's brand is its mascot, Leo. Here, the iconic feline is interpreted for Asian audiences.

her career in the family gaming enterprise, and experienced firsthand China's socioeconomic class revolution from both a personal and business perspective.

From our cumulative research, we identified several key insights. For example, nearly half of those considered affluent have spent significant time abroad, by virtue of their education or employment. There are approximately three times as many affluent men as women, and they are all surprisingly young – 86 percent are under the age of 46. The newly affluent enjoy products and pursuits that have long been unaffordable – and even forbidden. This is especially true of travel; whereas personal trips overseas were virtually unheard of prior to 1998, more than 30 million Chinese ventured abroad in 2006 for personal reasons.

Benchmarking relevant leisure experiences

Our benchmarking analysis included tours of premier Las Vegas hotel-casinos, particularly those in the MGM Mirage family. During our visits, we sought inspiration for a signature architectural feature to incorporate into the MGM Grand Macau design.

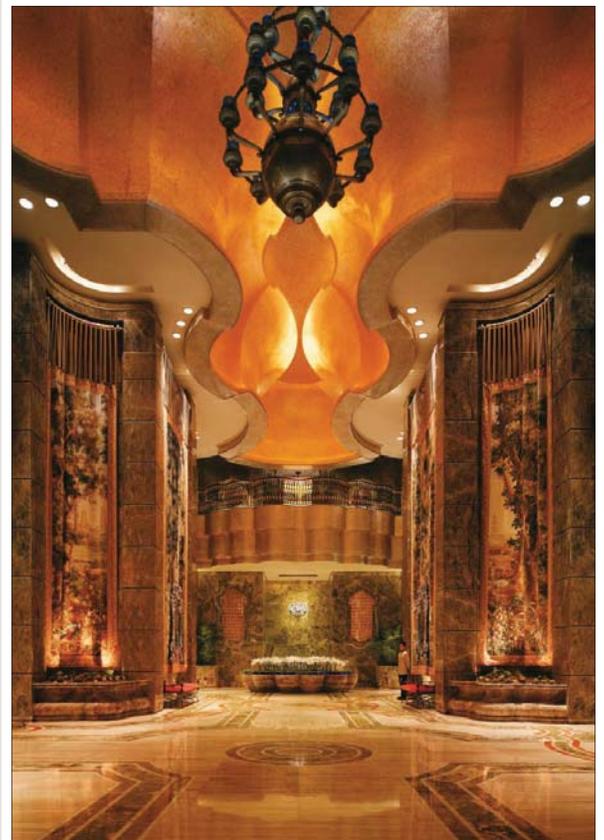
We also familiarized ourselves with the Pacific Rim's newest, most remarkable achievements in design and architecture, to which MGM Grand Macau would inevitably be compared. This also facilitated a more intuitive understanding of Asian tastes and preferences.

Developing a distinctive leisure experience consistent with MGM Grand's brand

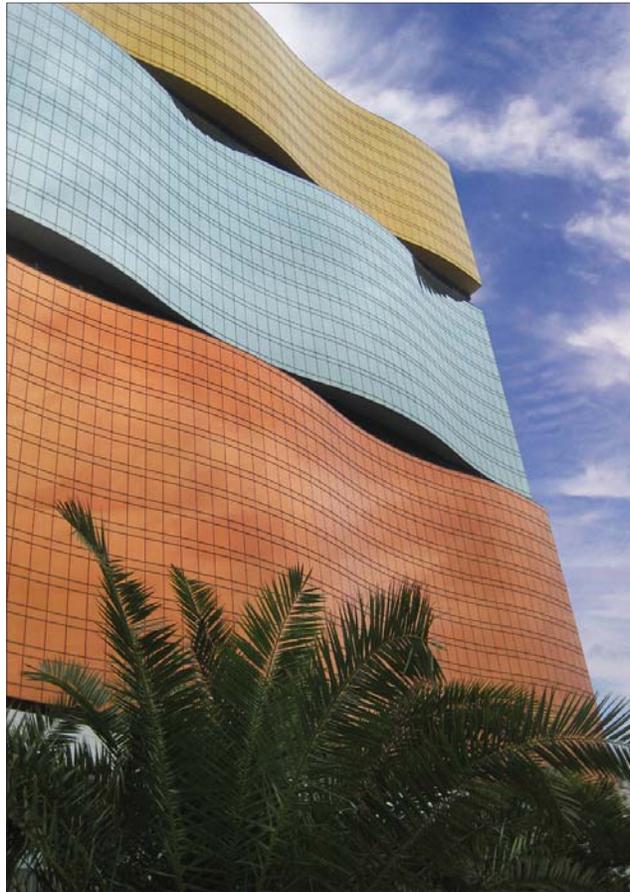
Having accomplished our target guest and property benchmarking analyses, we were now equipped with the insights needed to create an experience like no other. Fundamentally, the MGM Grand Macau would represent a tempering of the high-end Las Vegas casino experience according to Asian cultural and stylistic sensitivities. To that end, an initial design decision was to use a warmer, friendlier elegance to suit Asian tastes, in contrast to the austere, minimalist environments that affluent western guests are partial to.

Our intention was that the experience – the 'show' – should commence the instant the guest enters the lobby. Following the monumental impression of the entry façade, the cozy lobby environment is unexpected, yet complementary. Most strikingly, a low, 12-foot ceiling affords a close-up examination of the luminously red glass flower sculptures hand-blown by Dale Chihuly. Walls behind the check-in desk come alive with 52 abstract, vividly colored glass squares, also crafted by Chihuly.

Expectations are again defied as the guest transitions from the lobby into the breathtaking Grande Praca atrium, which is the resort-casino's signature feature. Whereas the lobby's low ceiling gives it a comfortable intimacy, the Grande Praca's glass ceiling delicately hovers 82 feet above the ground. The sensation created by the open, sun-bathed space is one of freedom, of decompression. In this way, the atrium serves as a transition space. The architectural style of the Grande Praca is distinctly Portuguese, a tribute to Macau's history that was included at Ms. Pansy Ho's request.



It takes a lot to impress the well-traveled members of China's new, elite economic class. The VIP lobby succeeds.



The elegance of MGM Grand Macau's flowing, 3-tiered tower has made it the most memorable feature amid Macau's evolving skyline.

Yet another dramatic contrast awaits as the guest transitions from the serenity of the open atrium into the palpable, contagious intensity of the contemporary casino floor. In contrast to western casinos, slot machines are visible but not dominant, and table games, especially baccarat, generate the casino's energy for Asian gamblers. There are also 16 private salons for preferred patrons, each accommodating anywhere from a single table to as many as 20. When the guest exits the casino environment back into the blissful Grand Praca, its function as a transition space is all the more evident – and welcome.

Elsewhere throughout the property, restaurants, bars and lounges, meeting spaces, courtyards, corridors and the Six Senses Spa each offer a treat for the eyes. Each environment is fresh, impressive and inviting, delivering a calculated contrast to those adjacent to it. Together, they add up to an overall leisure brand experience that is distinctly MGM Grand, expressed with a contemporary Asian dialect.

MGM Grand Macau's success

MGM Grand Macau has been heralded by the media as an achievement of architecture and design. The property, together with Wynn Macau, Venetian Macau-Resort-Hotel, and most recently, City of Dreams with its Hard Rock and Crown hotels, also represents a paradigm shift that transformed the peninsula from a collection of small, simple, no-frills casinos into a premier worldwide gaming destination. This evolution, connected with a recent loosening of gaming concessions, resulted in Macau's gaming revenues overtaking those of Las Vegas in 2007.

About YWS

YWS, a Las Vegas-based architecture firm founded in 2001 by Tom Wucherer and Jon Sparer, is a leader in leisure design and architecture, including hospitality, gaming, dining, entertainment and fun! The firm has set the bar high, having helped Las Vegas become a world-class destination through their years of designing some of the most significant integrated resort properties on the planet, including Bellagio, Mirage and Treasure Island, as well as the Borgata in Atlantic City. As the design architect for the MGM Grand Macau, YWS recently opened in Singapore to enable the firm to expand its presence in Asia. YWS Asia is located in a newly renovated and stylish “shophouse” in Singapore’s Chinatown, and will leverage its deep understanding of integrated resorts for the benefit of hospitality, gaming and food service clients throughout the region.

Committed to transforming a plain space into a distinctive place that provides for compelling customer experiences, YWS is focused on the serious business of leisure. For more information, please visit www.ywsinternational.com.

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