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City Chic

MGM Grand Builds
Entertainment Destination
in the Heart of Detroit



PHOTO BY CURT CLAYTON STUDIOS

By Mary E. Kremposky, Associate Editor

The familiar slogan, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” happily did not hold true during the creation of the award-winning MGM Grand Detroit. Las Vegas-based MGM Mirage brought its project management expertise directly to downtown Detroit, building this new 2.65-million-square-foot play-

ground two-and-a-half months ahead of schedule and \$15 million under budget. This gaming empire and international hospitality company did not leave success to chance. MGM Grand Detroit II assembled a team of internationally renowned interior designers, and enlisted the talents of Detroit-based Hamilton

Anderson/SmithGroup, a joint venture with strong local roots anchored in the urban experience.

At the same time, MGM Grand Detroit II also recruited the management skills of Tré Builders, LLC, a project management contractor with a team that has the qualifications, experience and capability of

managing a project of this size. Glamour without the glitz, this timeless building rises 18 stories above Third Avenue, its stone base and soaring vertical lines blending with Detroit's rich stock of early Twentieth-Century Art Deco skyscrapers.

"We were trying to achieve what we refer to as 'city chic,' a stylish look that respects the history of Art Deco in Detroit," said Ben Mammina, senior vice president of construction for MGM Grand Detroit II. "Basically, we wanted to bring some of the Las Vegas product to Detroit without the glitz. As architect-of-record, Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup did great work for us, and Tré Builders succeeded in gathering together a workforce of personnel whose talent was surpassed only by their enthusiasm for this project.

"Tré Builders handled not only the bidding and negotiations for price, schedule, terms and scopes of work, they also negotiated the contracts and supervised the daily work on the jobsite," Mammina continued. "MGM Grand Detroit handled all the payments and accounting." In addition to their administrative experience and qualifications, Tré Builders supervised and managed the day-to-day construction activities of 105 local subcontractors. The liaison between Tré Builders and the management of these contractors brought this vision of 'city chic' to life at the intersection of Third and Bagley Avenues in downtown Detroit."

The opportunity to expand contract opportunities to companies outside MGM's traditional base was not left to chance. SSmith & Associates, a consulting services firm with offices in Southfield and Las Vegas, was engaged because of its success in helping companies utilize small, local, minority and women-owned businesses. In addition to the Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup, some 100 companies were awarded contracts because of MGM Grand's commitment to diversity.

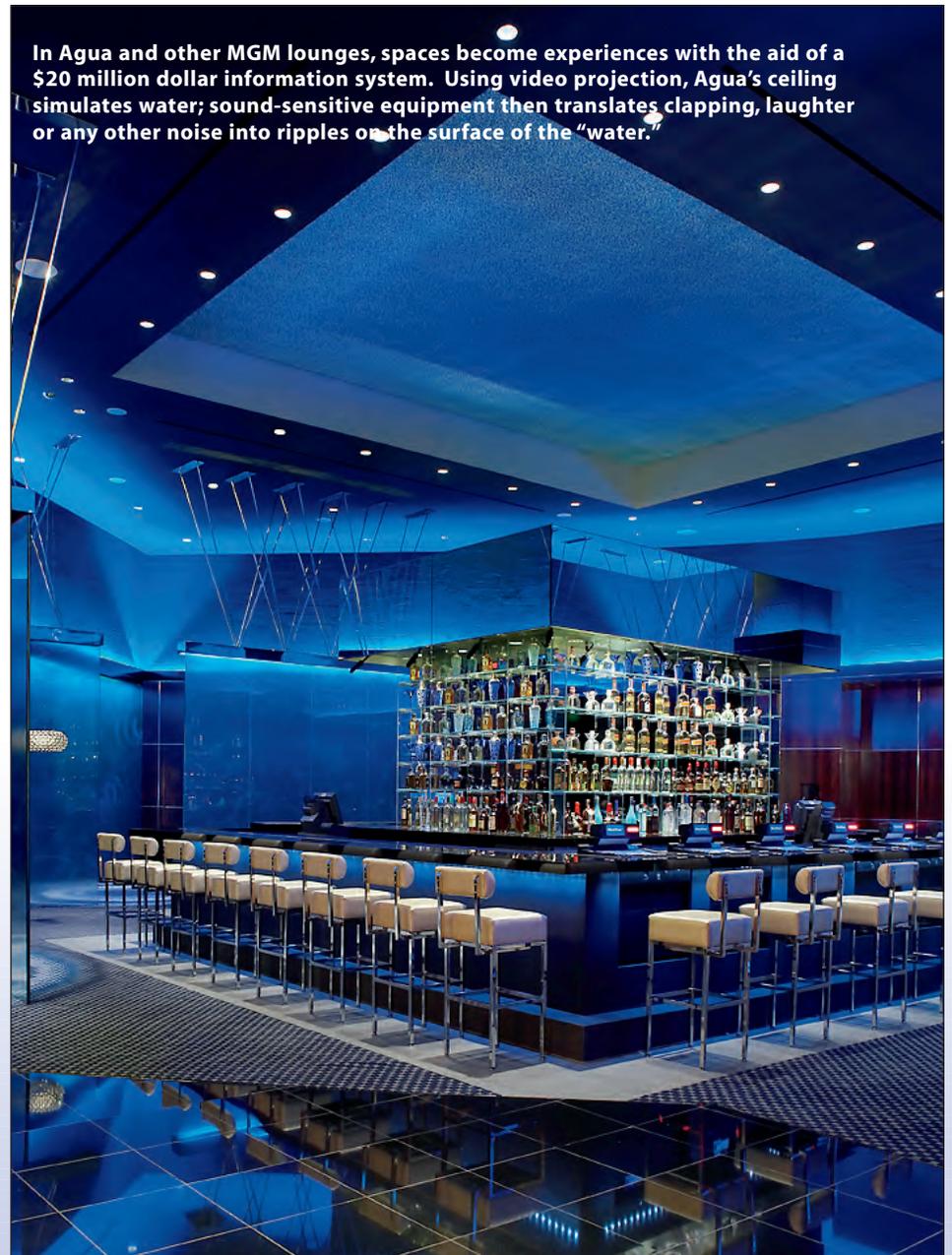
This commitment extended to construction contractors and suppliers, as well as professional service companies, including architects, engineers and consultants. "Only a handful of companies were large enough to bid directly, so we 'teamed' them with larger contractors as subs, so they could participate," stated Susan Smith, president of SSmith & Associates, a firm dedicated to improving the utilization of emerging businesses by major corporations in construction and operations. "The project had been anticipated since the opening of the temporary casino in 1999. Some companies, who were on the brink

of going out of business, remained afloat as a result of this opportunity. For others, it allowed growth and for others expansion into the Las Vegas market."

"The workforce in Detroit is amazing," said Mammina. "I have worked in 75 percent of all the states and I have never come across a workforce like they have in this area. They did it quickly, and they did it right. I hated to put the ceiling up, because even the ductwork is beautiful."

While the ductwork is hidden, the well-crafted interior unfolds and reveals a series of intimate spaces, some serene and others sizzling with some serious nightlife,

but all clad in a sophisticated interplay of inspired finishes. At MGM Grand Detroit, everyone can follow his or her own bliss, whether its floating like a lotus petal in the pool of the incomparably lovely IMMERSE Spa or ramping up your relaxation levels in the "night fever" of the award-winning V lounge. Water and fire, serenity and excitement are all under one roof in this destination entertainment complex housing a 400-room hotel, 9,000 square feet of nightclub space in six different lounges, 6,000 square feet of retail, an 18,000-square-foot resort spa for both hotel guests and day visitors, and a



In Agua and other MGM lounges, spaces become experiences with the aid of a \$20 million dollar information system. Using video projection, Agua's ceiling simulates water; sound-sensitive equipment then translates clapping, laughter or any other noise into ripples on the surface of the "water."

PHOTO BY BETH SINGER PHOTOGRAPHY



MGM's soaring 18-story hotel tower easily blends into the fabric of Detroit's downtown business district and its stock of early Twentieth-Century Art Deco skyscrapers.

PHOTO BY CURT CLAYTON STUDIOS

A TIMELESS BUILDING BUILT IN A TIGHT TIMEFRAME

MGM played its cards right in selecting a fully assembled parcel of land, avoiding the hassles and higher costs of painstakingly acquiring properties from diverse owners. The 25-acre parcel was a former parking lot for DTE Energy located close to freeways and facing the heart of the downtown business district, said Mammina.

Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup created a utilitarian and a city edge for this massive complex. Utilitarian or back-of-house services are placed along the site's western border near the Lodge Freeway. Moving north to south, the massive complex stretches along Third Avenue, bends at a 45-degree angle, and aims the south end of the hotel tower directly towards the heart of downtown Detroit. "The south face is the property's symbolic front door to downtown Detroit," said Tom Sherry, AIA, LEED AP, Hamilton Anderson Associates design principal and Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup joint venture design lead. "This corner offers an exciting opportunity to address traffic flowing to MGM Grand from the major thoroughfare of Michigan Avenue in downtown Detroit."

Approached from downtown Detroit, the south end's clever angle of placement gives this sprawling, suburban-size development the appearance of being a free-standing, pencil-thin skyscraper comfortably woven into the existing urban fabric. MGM Grand's extensive length along Third Avenue is broken into a series of three entrances, again translating what could have been a typical suburban building into an urban vernacular. "The length along Third Avenue is so substantial, we were trying to present more of an urban solution to the street," said John Sobetski, project manager, Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup joint venture. The joint venture is a perfect fit for this project. Both firms are strongly committed to revitalizing Detroit's urban fabric. Under its original name of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, SmithGroup is a 155-year-old architectural firm responsible for designing many of the prominent Art Deco skyscrapers woven like a bright thread through downtown Detroit.

This citadel of stone and glass blends with downtown Detroit and with some of the lighter limestone-colored buildings of the DTE Energy campus next door. "It is very important that the building looks like it belongs in essentially a 100-year-old downtown," said Sherry. "The real driver

host of restaurants, ranging from name chef establishments to quick serve, as well as a third level devoted to convention and meeting space. For gaming buffs, the casino floor in the heart of it all has 4,500 slot machines and 90 table games.

Over 2.3 million work hours were poured into the creation of this massive entertainment emporium, including the construction of 7,300 parking spaces located in a subterranean valet area below the casino and in a nine-level self-parking garage anchoring the north end. Design, craftsmanship, and project management coalesced into this amazing \$800 million dollar entertainment hub in Detroit. "About 47 percent of all the money we spent was with targeted businesses, meaning women, minority and Detroit-owned businesses," said Mammina. "Some believe that if you have high levels of

diversity, your projects take longer and cost more money. We had a totally opposite experience in Detroit where we came in under budget, we finished early, and our project is winning awards all over the United States."

MGM Grand Detroit has already been named the American Lodging Investment Summit development of the year, a prestigious honor possibly unknown to the average person but ranking as the Academy Award of the hotel business. "That award is the equivalent of the Oscar," said Mammina. "MGM Grand Detroit was competing against major projects on the West and East Coasts. I don't think that in the 30 years I've been in this business, I have ever seen anybody outside of the East Coast or West Coast ever win the award."

of the design was to place a high-quality, timeless building on the downtown site versus a trendy type of entertainment venue. For this reason, we used timeless materials, such as precast concrete with natural stone aggregate, a black polished precast base with some use of granite toward the very base of the building, and a glass curtain wall system of high quality."

This timeless building, however, was constructed on a very tight timeline. In the short span of only two years, MGM Grand Detroit's entertainment empire took root and rose from a mere concept on a blueprint to the towering building and host of specialty spaces contained within its stone and glass walls.

Design and construction of this sophisticated entertainment complex occurred almost simultaneously, taking place within a brief stretch of time from September 2005 to September 2007. "The core design challenge was the raw speed of the project," said Sobetski. "We had to be very nimble on our feet and make good decisions very quickly."

Easing the process, MGM Grand and the joint venture architectural team have a long history of working together as a tight unit. MGM enlisted the services of Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup for the design of the temporary MGM complex and for assistance in winning the competition for the current casino license. The current project was set in motion several years before September 2005, but legal issues put all casino construction on hold in Detroit from 2003 to 2005. Once resumed, the programming of the building was altered. "The basic footprint of the building remained the same, but there were some pushes and tugs on the building as the program had changed from the earlier program," said Sobetski. "Our first priority was to make sure the structure was accurate. We had to make sure that the entire 'box' was correct, so the steel could be ordered and fabricated while caissons were installed in the ground."

THE BEST PARKING SPOT IN TOWN

With building permits for foundations and structure in hand, the "game" officially began on Sept. 19, 2005. Lady Luck in the form of good weather aided in the rapid placement of 150 caissons below the entire complex from hotel tower to parking structure. MGM's strategy was to place the caissons and structural frame swiftly, leaving ample time for the intricate, labor-intensive finishes blanketing the interior of this entertainment hub. "Because our projects have a great deal of finishes, we often have 800 to 900 people working at the end or finish portion of the job," said Mammina. "To accelerate jobs with that many people costs a great deal of money at that time, so we always accelerate at the beginning of the job when fewer people are involved. We hit the caisson portion of it very hard with several rigs on site."

Rohrscheib Son Caissons, Inc., New Hudson, worked six days a week to install caissons by January 2006, drilling through the soft clay of downtown Detroit to hit bedrock at about 120 feet below grade. Almost in the blink of an eye, caissons for the self-parking garage were finished in October 2005, followed in rapid succession by caissons or drilled piers for the casino in November 2005 and hotel tower caissons in December 2005.

As the clay-encrusted auger rose from the last drilled pier, Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup began preparing blueprints for the building envelope and interior in January 2006. In this tightly sequenced job, the construction team then turned towards the task of bringing the first post-tensioned, cast-in-place concrete tier out of the ground. Detroit saw its first glimpse of MGM Grand as the concrete parking deck poked through the cold mud and reached grade in January 2006. "There was one level below grade,



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but we reached the street with structure in January 2006, and our last pour for the nine-level parking deck was in August 2006," said Mammina.

Rapid construction was essential to service DTE employees who once used the MGM site as a parking lot. "DTE had to rent spaces in downtown Detroit, so our goal was to get the parking deck open and bring back DTE personnel as soon as possible," said Mammina.

DTE clearly emerged as a winner in the parking sweepstakes. "They had this big piece of land that they were really only using for parking," said Mammina. Parking outdoors in Michigan's fickle weather is no longer an issue for DTE employees who now enjoy reserved areas in the newly built parking deck.

MGM opted for a parking deck with a post-tensioned, cast-in-place structural concrete frame, a seldom-used structural system for a Michigan parking garage. "Aesthetically, we believe the cast-in-place looks nicer, because the ceilings are flat rather than waffled," said Mammina. "We also painted them white and raised the ceiling by about two feet above a standard parking garage, creating a bright facility with a more welcoming and less confining feel. Functionally, the cast-in-place structure has fewer maintenance requirements."

Sobetski summarized the advantages of using post-tensioned concrete: "The use of post-tensioned concrete is a little unusual in a parking deck. The advantage of post tensioning is the concrete is always in compression, so the garage is not subject to cracking. Without cracks, road salt from cars cannot enter and corrode the rebar. If any cracks did occur post-tensioning would keep them tight and closed."

The parking deck opened in December 2006, two-and-a-half months ahead of schedule. MGM and its team of local subcontractors maintained the accelerated pace throughout the course of this well-sequenced project, saving time and money. "Most of the savings came from the early completion of the project," said Mammina. "Just as if you had a construction loan, the actual cost of the money is about a million dollars a week."

WORKING WITH A SAFETY NET

Next on center stage was construction of the three-story casino's structural steel frame and the hotel tower's post-tensioned, cast-in-place concrete frame, again a relative rarity in Michigan. "The casino is a steel-framed building, mostly because

it has much larger expanses and much larger bays," said Sobetski. "With the hotel, we could obtain a very compact structural system with good ceiling heights by going with a cast-in-place concrete frame. It is a very efficient use of space."

The hotel tower began its rise 18 stories above grade in March 2006 with Colasanti Specialty Services, Inc., Macomb Twp., performing the seemingly impossible: pouring almost a floor a week using slip or flying forms as the building rose skyward. MGM worked with Colasanti on a guaranteed maximum price (GMP), cost plus fee basis to meet the rigorous schedule. "Working with us, not only were they building the 18-story hotel at about a floor a week, but they also saved us \$10 million dollars over what the low bid was," said Mammina.

MGM Grand issued the concrete, mechanical and electrical work on a GMP, cost plus fee basis. "It's a negotiated fee ranging between 5 and 10 percent," said Mammina. "Essentially, they are not at risk, for as the job continues they are reimbursed for their costs and get a negotiated fee on top of it. The pressure is off. The good thing is we get greatly reduced fees because we don't put anybody at risk."

In MGM Grand's game, timely payment is not a gamble. "We had 105 subcontractors, and by the end of 2007 about 90 percent were closed out," said Mammina. "Everybody was paid 100 percent. By February, 100 percent were closed out, meaning everyone was paid."

MGM Grand's owner-controlled insurance program saved costs and boosted safety. "All of the contractors bought the insurance from us," said Mammina. "We saved about \$4 million, and we had a \$4 million refund on the insurance as well because the workers were very safety conscious. We ended up with a Projects Days Away case rate of 1.01 as compared with the industry average in Michigan of 4.2."

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Essentially, divide and conquer was the basic strategy for delivering this mammoth \$800 million dollar project early and under budget. The project was split into four pieces: the guest and employee parking structure; the subterranean valet parking below the casino; the hotel tower; and the casino. "Plus, we had about a dozen superintendents on the job versus the three or four that might typically work on a large project," said Mammina.

However, one crucial facet was not



PHOTO BY BETH SINGER PHOTOGRAPHY

MGM Grand's hotel guest lounge on the 17th floor offers patrons a relaxing ambiance and fine hors d'oeuvres.

MGM Grand offers guests the opportunity to get away from it all in this penthouse living and dining room.

subdivided, shaving time and money off the project. "We set the estimators – our project managers – in the designer's offices, making estimating part of the design process," said Mammina. "I think we are very good at understanding the designer's intent. We can grab hold of the design vision and make it cost effective. For example, say we are going to spend a \$1,000 dollars a square-foot on a particular restaurant. Perhaps, \$75 dollars a square-foot is reserved for the ceiling, but the design comes in at \$85 dollars a square-foot. We then give the designer the option of keeping his design or taking \$15 dollars a square-foot off of the floor or walls. Essentially, when the designers and estimators are finished, the price negotiations have already been done. The first time our people actually ever see a design we know it is in budget."

THE RACE TO THE FINISH

The MGM Grand juggernaut continued its swift march toward completion, topping off the hotel in October 2006 and installing the single-ply roof in November 2006. As the concrete tiers rose into the skyline, the precast base and glass tower swiftly enclosed the building only five to six stories below the tower's leading edge.

PHOTO BY BETH SINGER PHOTOGRAPHY



The schedule never slackened despite tight market conditions for glass around the globe and the installation of the detailed mullion patterns on the glass tower, said Mammina.

The same tight sequencing played out in the hotel interior. "With a hotel with so many floors, we were actually finishing the interiors before there was even a roof on," said Mammina. "We were installing drywall, plumbing and other interior components before the building actually was enclosed, taking precautions and using temporary protection."

The same strategies were used to build-out the diverse interior. "Because of the building's size, we contracted with a whole host of different interior designers," said Mammina. Interior construction flowed from north to south. "Construction-wise, the metal deck and steel framing started on the north side of the project and worked its ways south," said Mammina. "There were areas in the casino that were finished with drywall ceilings, all the mechanical work and all the electrical installed, and everything even painted, but when you got to the other end of the casino there was nothing but a shell."

With its grand opening on Oct. 2, 2007, MGM Grand Detroit now brightens this corner of downtown Detroit. At night, the play of white light washes over the glass tower and softly accents its precast base of natural stone aggregate. The dramatic backlighting and accent lighting brings the building to life, turning white light almost into a material cladding. "We tried to



This boardroom is only part of MGM Grand's extensive meeting and conference space.

PHOTO BY BETH SINGER PHOTOGRAPHY

heighten the building's presence through detailing and lighting," said Sherry. "We tried to give the building the energy of an entertainment or hospitality property in a tasteful way that doesn't fight the look and feel of downtown Detroit."

The material palette is traditional but the details are contemporary. "The building is more traditional at the base and becomes more contemporary as the eye travels up the tower," said Sherry. "The metal accents for the MGM logo, medallions, and the curtain wall columns or pilasters all have a silvery sheen emulating stainless steel to add sparkle and a contemporary feel to the building."

The exterior of MGM Grand Detroit adds a tangible excitement to the city's streets. Anchored at the south end by the hotel and the at the north end by the main parking garage, people pour into the massive gaming emporium from both ends of the complex, energizing the interior every night of the week. The hotel, garage and back-of-house area together form a U-shaped cradle holding the main expanse of the casino floor.

On the gaming floor, the wide arc of a broad curvilinear ceiling serves as a wayfinding device along the perimeter, intuitively channeling visitors into a curved "street" lined with a buffet of sophisticated restaurants, lounges, and retail shops. "We tried to create more of a street experience around the entire perimeter of the casino," said Sherry. "There is a powerful kind of organic shape to the ceiling, and we very deliberately designed it the way we did to create visual sight lines across and through the casino linking the guest's eye to all the offerings within the casino floor and around its perimeter."

Like the exterior, MGM Grand wanted to focus on a timeless

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The casino interior is similar to a city street with a "buffet" of sophisticated restaurants, lounges and retail shops arranged along the perimeter of the central gaming area.

design rather than a specific theme. "We wanted it to be stylish and contemporary but not cold, so warm colors and millwork were chosen as part of the casino spaces," said Barrie G. Borovsky, vice president of planning and development, MGM Grand Resort Development. Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup coordinated the design intent of the team of renowned interior designers. Borovsky managed and interfaced with the entire design and architectural team.

A collaboration between Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup, Cleo Design and Archavision, the main casino never overwhelms the visitor with a cavernous, overbearing expanse. "The casino floor is a large space broken up into a dozen or so smaller spaces through different types of lighting and varied colors," said Sherry. The entire interior is broken into a series of warm, intimate spaces all designed on a comfortable, human scale.

MATERIAL SPLENDOR

MGM Grand searched the globe to obtain the expertise of a select cadre of internationally renowned interior designers, including Superpotato, Tokyo, Japan; Tony Chi & Associates, New York City; Jeffrey Beers International, also of New York City; Cleo Design, Las Vegas; Archavision, New Port Beach; and Harris Design, a Hamtramck firm that designed the video poker bar, the executive offices, and Breeze, an upscale food court. As a result, inspired materials blanket virtually every square inch of interior space. A wall of small, gray pebbles serves as the entrance to the restrooms, small blocks of polished wood, arranged at varying angles and assembled in an intricate jigsaw puzzle, form the entrance to one of the many eateries; and a massive tableau of polished stone forms the backdrop of the hotel lobby. The casino buffet, called Palette, is a large dining facility with a 580-person seating capacity. The massive eatery is subdivided so skillfully by curvilinear metal louvers and art walls of bottled vinegars no one would ever guess its true size. Panels formed of molded fiber reinforced polymers and backlit by shifting LED lights add to MGM Grand's long list of unusual, inspired materials.

Bourbon Steak House is an artful arrangement of reclaimed wood beams from old Maine barns, a feature wall of blue and glass bottles, and reclaimed brick from Detroit buildings. "The grout is placed far back from the edge, giving a floating effect to the entire brick wall," said

Borovsky. Teak blocks and an ornamental metal screen complete the upscale eatery's material showcase. SALTWATER contains mosaic tile ceilings, beautiful millwork, and plaster placed free-form on the walls to resemble rippling pools of water.

More than static spaces, the interior is "a collection of very unique, very well-thought out experiences," said Sherry. Masters of showmanship, MGM Grand invested in a \$20 million dollar information system as part of the interior experience. In the popular lounge called Ignite, video screens simulate a wall of ice cubes each melting in a ring of fire. The tableau subtly shifts across the wall every 7 minutes. Even Ignite's elevator floor contains hidden video screens simulating flames flickering below your feet. The screen changes to a pool of water as the elevator descends and exits at the aquatically themed Agua lounge. "Using video projection, the ceiling inside Agua simulates water, creating the effect of being under water," said Mammina. "The sound-sensitive equipment picks up laughter, clapping or any other noise and translates it into ripples on the surface of the 'water.'"

The building's actual systems also contain some unusual infrastructure. "The HVAC system is tied into a smoke release system, meaning in the event of a fire the HVAC enters a mode designed to actually control the smoke," said Sobetski. "Such a system is not often used." Plus, the HVAC system is designed for over 90 percent fresh air, an uncommon level of air exchange.

As another seldom-used building system, MGM Grand has four 2,000 kva generators able to place approximately 75 percent of the building on emergency power. "Typically, a building has about 10 percent of its electrical needs on emergency power," said Sobetski. In yet another unusual approach, the casino floor has what is known as an electrified floor system. "It is a series of trenches built into the concrete floor which allows the casino to run cabling for all the gaming machines," said Sobetski. "It is a very flexible system. If they want to reorganize the placement of gaming machines, this system allows rerouting without drilling new holes in the floor or rerouting wires."

MGM Grand's sophisticated finishes and efficient systems extend into large sections of the 250,000-square-foot back-of-house area designed by Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup for MGM Grand's 3,200 employees. The employee dining room rivals most corporate cafeterias and



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is one of the best of any MGM facility, said Borovsky. This appealing eatery features Pewabic tile, a bubbling fountain, and millwork. MGM staff also enjoys a break room called Chill and a smoke room named Puff. The joint venture also provided the landscape design, master planning, space planning and programming for MGM Grand Detroit. An impressed MGM has enlisted Hamilton Anderson to work on its new CityCenter project in Las Vegas, where Hamilton Anderson has now even established an office.

The lavish living room of the hotel with its fireplace extending the width of an entire wall and towering columns clad in rich millwork. The tower contains 400 hotel rooms, 20 percent being suites as opposed to the 10 to 15 percent in a standard hotel, said Mammina. "We were challenged with delivering a property that embodied the corporate standard," said

Sherry. "It has been well received within the corporation, and ranks as one of their top properties nationally and globally."

Far beyond a casino, MGM Grand's entertainment venues are attracting people from throughout metropolitan Detroit and beyond. With its diverse offerings, people who never dropped a token into a slot machine but love fine food can dine on the creations of two name chefs, namely Michael Mina and Wolfgang Puck. "For example, Oakland County is a great customer in Las Vegas, but they had not been a great customer in their own backyard," said Borovsky. "What do they end up doing in Las Vegas? They were going to all the new stylish restaurants with all the chef names, so we decided to bring those restaurants closer to them."

MGM Grand's floorplan offers visitors the option of staying at the hotel, imbibing at the lobby bar, dining at Wolfgang Puck

Grille, and unwinding at IMMERSE Spa, all without even entering the casino floor. Business and pleasure is a beautiful mix at MGM's third-level convention area, containing six meeting rooms, two boardrooms, a grand ballroom, and 8,000 square feet of pre-function space.

Open for less than a year, metropolitan Detroit and the Midwest are only beginning to discover the treasure in their own backyard, courtesy of the efforts of hundreds of companies, the long-standing joint venture of Hamilton Anderson/SmithGroup, and MGM Grand Detroit II. Blessed with such a phenomenal entertainment destination, any roll of the dice is bound to land on a winning combination. ♡

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