CREATING CITYCENTER

MGM MIRAGE’s urbane and sustainable “city within a city” redefines Las Vegas
CityCenter is for people who want the Las Vegas they’ve never seen before.”

Jim Murren, Chairman and CEO, MGM MIRAGE

“This is the future of Las Vegas—CityCenter is in an entirely different category.”

Bobby Baldwin, President and CEO, CityCenter

“CityCenter is the best example anywhere of a collaborative design process.”

Art Gensler, Founder and Chairman, Gensler

REINVENTING LAS VEGAS

Once a generation, Las Vegas reinvents itself. In the Rat Pack era, it embraced midcentury modernism. Then, The Mirage and Bellagio remade The Strip as an entertainment resort destination. Early in this new century, MGM MIRAGE envisioned a “city within a city”—a new symbol of Las Vegas that, in the words of CityCenter’s Bobby Baldwin, combines “the vitality of Las Vegas with the experiences tourists seek in great cities around the world.” In 2005, master plan in hand, MGM MIRAGE asked Gensler to join it and make CityCenter a reality. How our team helped reinvent Las Vegas is a case study in design leadership.

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Bobby Baldwin on CityCenter: “This is one of the few places in the world where we had a completely clean canvas—and the resources for the best of everything possible. There is no such development anywhere in the country. There’s going to be Las Vegas and there’s going to be CityCenter—it’s in an entirely different category: the largest, the highest density, and by far the largest list of amenities. We offer the best entertainment and the best accommodations, with unparalleled access to Las Vegas. It’s only eight minutes from the airport. Unlike other would-be world destinations, CityCenter combines leading-edge design with an overall vision, well-conceived and executed. It will stand the test of time.”

CityCenter gives The Strip an urban core—a new city-scale development that supports a rich, full, 24/7 life. Calibrated to a Manhattan density, CityCenter encourages people to cover longer distances using the three-station PeopleMover and then explore each neighborhood on foot. Of the major projects on The Strip, only CityCenter connects directly to adjacent resorts—Monte Carlo and Bellagio—to create a walkable, accessible urban district. CityCenter is a whole greater than any of its distinctive parts, a world-class destination for leisure and entertainment.

It took strong design leadership to bring the initial plan and building program to a fully realized vision of an urbane and dynamic place, the heart of a new world city of entertainment.
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A CITY WITHIN A CITY
THE CHALLENGE

MGM MIRAGE is no stranger to large-scale development. The company previously led the design and delivery of The Mirage and Bellagio, two projects that redefined The Strip and made the city’s reputation as an entertainment resort destination. CityCenter is exponentially bigger. The world’s largest LEED-registered development, planned from the outset for a December 2009 opening, CityCenter posed unprecedented challenges for its design leaders, MGM MIRAGE and Gensler.

67 acres
CityCenter is essentially an urban district, 67 acres (27.1 hectares) or about 12 Manhattan blocks in area. This made compact, high-density development possible. Connecting CityCenter by transit with the adjoining Bellagio and Monte Carlo properties, also owned by MGM MIRAGE, creates an even larger setting that residents, guests, and visitors can experience on foot, without ever having to use cars or taxis to get to their destinations. This is part of what makes CityCenter a true “city within a city.”

18 mil sq ft
CityCenter is a remarkable mix of uses—18 million square feet (1.67 million square meters)—of high-end residential, hospitality, entertainment, shopping, and recreational buildings and settings. These uses are connected not only by a PeopleMover system, but also by underground circulation and infrastructure, minimizing the impact of parking and servicing to ensure a walkable experience. Integrating these individually stunning buildings as a rich, compelling whole was one of the main design challenges.

LEED gold
CityCenter is the single largest development in the world to pursue LEED—a LEED Gold project in one. MGM MIRAGE is committed to sustainability, so design leadership meant defining the green opportunities and then creating the framework to ensure that every project and every participant worked to accomplish them. The Gensler-led sustainability effort addressed the entire development, from site clearance and the operation of the buildings and settings.

5 years
In late 2004, MGM MIRAGE committed to opening CityCenter in December 2009—from concept to completion in just five years. Accomplishing this meant leading multiple teams of architects, designers, engineers, specialists, and—with the construction leaders—an army of contractors and subcontractors. The leadership had to be seamless—MGM MIRAGE and Gensler were joined at the hip, with the expertise and resources to guide a development of unprecedented scope and scale to an on-time finish.
In 2004, MGM MIRAGE Design Group was given the assignment of assembling the team of leading architects, interior designers, and specialty consultants that would create CityCenter. After traveling around the world, conducting hundreds of interviews, MGM MIRAGE Design Group realized it would need to partner with a global design firm that could seamlessly integrate and complement its in-house capabilities to orchestrate a project of unprecedented size and complexity. To make a challenging, fast-track schedule. At 5:00 p.m. on January 3, 2005, MGM MIRAGE asked Gensler to join the CityCenter design leadership team as its partner. At 8:00 a.m. on January 4, Gensler’s senior design delivery leaders were on the job.

Drawing talent from 12 different offices across its global network, Gensler mobilized a core group of 50 design professionals at MGM MIRAGE’s CityCenter project office. Among them were specialists for such specific assignments as brand strategy, development of tracking tools and databases, and LEED guidance and research. Gensler set to work on the most pressing priorities: get the full CityCenter design and implementation team in place; establish an upfront sustainability strategy, refine the retail master plan for CityCenter; with a design vision, brand strategy, and pragmatic rigor; and put methods and systems in place to help simplify this complex project and expedite its completion.

Delivering CityCenter in just five years required a full-throttle, fast-track process. To give CityCenter a more manageable scale, the design leadership team redefined the project teams to developing building concepts and everything that followed simpler, from choosing with distinct programs and uses. This framework made CityCenter as three blocks plus common areas—each manageable scale, the design leadership team to oversee the architects, designers, engineers, and specialists responsible for the different blocks and their projects. The block structure simplified the task of managing this massive, 18-million-square-foot development.

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Leading designers usually focus on individual signature projects. Only rarely are they called on to work together to create a city. There are famous instances of forced marriages that produced acrimony and mediocrity. To counter this, Gensler’s Andy Cohen proposed a design charrette that would spur collaboration and innovation. Invited teams spent time in Las Vegas understanding the plan and vision for CityCenter. They returned to their home cities, came back a second time to collaborate and learn, left again, and then reconvened to present to the CityCenter design leadership team and each other. The energy and synergy the charrette process generated resulted in a rich and seamless set of overall design ideas for CityCenter that transcended any one building concept.
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Gensler’s design of the CityCenter Residential Sales Pavilion settings immerses prospective owners in MGM MIRAGE’s vision of a new Las Vegas and introduces them to each of its world-class offerings.

BRANDING THE DESTINATION

Las Vegas is ripe for a new paradigm. CityCenter provides it.

Sven Van Assche, Vice President, MGM MIRAGE Design Group

Gensler helped MGM MIRAGE capture its vision of CityCenter—a big, bold, and brilliant vision that it will transform Las Vegas for generations. Part of the challenge, as CityCenter’s Tony Dennis explains, was to “establish a hierarchy of brands to differentiate CityCenter’s business units and residential properties from each other and from all non-CityCenter offerings” to create a complementary whole. To achieve this, the Gensler brand design team analyzed CityCenter’s market segments and then developed strategic positioning for the residential and retail properties. This included naming many of the buildings and creating the look and feel—words and visual language—to attract potential buyers and support MGM MIRAGE’s multi-step sales process.

In just five months, MGM MIRAGE and Gensler developed strategic positioning for CityCenter and the majority of its components, all of the collateral material, scripting of the film that introduces the development, and the planning and design of the sales pavilion settings that would introduce prospective owners to MGM MIRAGE’s vision of Las Vegas as the world’s leading urban entertainment destination. Drawing on its global experience in planning, positioning, and designing high-end mixed-use development in a world city context, Gensler was able to assemble a team of brand strategists, designers, and writers to help MGM MIRAGE create everything needed to bring CityCenter and its unique properties to market.

A series of museum-like galleries, like this one for Vdara, allows people to familiarize themselves with the different CityCenter properties.

The Sales Pavilion’s settings preview the experience of living at each CityCenter property. Shown here is the Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas.
DELIVERING THE BRAND

The Gensler brand design team extended the CityCenter vision to many of its residential properties and to the “connective tissue” of environmental graphics and signage. Services included naming several of the residential properties and designing their identities; creating collateral to support their marketing and sales; and leading the design of landmarks, directional signage, and other environmental cues to make CityCenter easy to navigate and give each of its areas a distinctive character. Even the PeopleMover’s trackage, as a ribbon of light, contributes to this.

Part of the extension of the CityCenter brand was to name the CityCenter projects, design their identities, and create the collateral material to support their marketing and sales.

Brochures like this one for the Veer Towers express the look and feel of the property in a way that’s immediate and compelling to its audience.

A series of short films present CityCenter and its properties. The overview is an important feature of the Sales Pavilion, to introduce people to an entirely new way of looking at Las Vegas. The individual films can be packaged with a viewer for serious buyers.

The renowned Mandarin Oriental brand was applied to the CityCenter hotels’ collateral materials.

The brand identity for Crystals and other CityCenter properties was applied to everything that supported the sales process, even the bottled water.

Gensler designed the bundled “metal and light”vlanchers that are an important part of a program that ranges beyond more conventional directional and wayfinding signage (bottom) to provide visual landmarks that can hold signage in some instances and become part of the visitor’s experience in others.
CityCenter posed numerous challenges to its builders. When the cost of steel and other materials and products went through the roof, Gensler helped MGM MIRAGE accelerate procurement and tap suppliers and manufacturers on a global basis. Gensler also set up the organizational framework for directing, managing, and coordinating the work of all the different project teams. This made it easier for them to document, report, and share information digitally in a consistent and timely way. Gensler continually updated project data to support MGM MIRAGE’s program and procurement decisions and inform key negotiations with public agencies, utilities, and others—efforts that helped CityCenter stay on track, despite its complexity.

When the leadership team constantly updated the CityCenter plan (below) and program during design and delivery, the photo (opposite) shows the massive development’s urban scale and complexity.
CONCEPT TO COMPLETION
FIVE YEARS
CityCenter is the world’s largest LEED development. The CityCenter eco-charrettes, held in Las Vegas and led by Gensler’s Nellie Reid and Jim Oswald, established goals for sustainability in design, construction, and operations, and created a framework for achieving LEED Gold certification for the CityCenter projects.

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The LEED team briefed every project’s consultants—700 people in all—on LEED goals, design credits, and submittals. To set a high sustainability baseline, Gensler provided green “master” specifications for all of the projects; convened annual LEED summits with the experts; held weekly calls to resolve problems; and helped fine-tune the process with the US Green Building Council (USGBC). This spirit of collaboration led to new strategies and innovative solutions. And it paid off in LEED Gold—as MGM MIRAGE’s Cindy Ortega notes, “We achieved every design certification point we went for.”

**HOW WE DID IT**

1. Setting the stage for LEED. Gensler helps MGM MIRAGE assemble a 40-person LEED team of experts and develops LEED tools and procedures, including green master specs.

2. Analyzing LEED strategies. After analyzing potential LEED credits, the 40-person LEED team selects the most appropriate for CityCenter and records them in a LEED scorecard.

3. Registering with USGBC. Gensler registers the CityCenter campus with the US Green Building Council (USGBC), making it the largest single project ever registered.

4. Preparing the LEED design phase submittal. The LEED team works with each project’s architect of record (AOR) to assemble the LEED design phase submittal to obtain design credits.

5. Preparing the LEED construction phase submittal. Working with the general contractor and CM, the LEED team assembles the construction phase submittal to obtain construction credits.

6. Presenting the LEED project plan. The LEED team meets with USGBC to discuss CityCenter’s unique challenges and gain agreement on the logistics of its complex certification process.

7. Developing LEED manuals. With buy-in from the entire CityCenter team, the LEED team develops LEED manuals outlining detailed compliance strategies for all LEED credits pursued.

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From the start, CityCenter was envisioned as a transformative development. MGM MIRAGE viewed sustainability as a crucial way for Las Vegas to meet the challenges of a new century. This reflects a widely shared concern with global warming and resource shortages, as well as a consumer preference for environmentally safe, healthy settings. MGM MIRAGE also saw sustainability as a huge source of added value for CityCenter and its owners, guests, and visitors. As part of the design leadership team, Gensler worked closely with the company and its construction partners to achieve sustainability at CityCenter in every aspect of its development: demolition, design, construction, and operations.

MGM MIRAGE and Gensler agreed on the sustainable strategies for CityCenter at the eco-charrette, and then set them out as performance criteria for every project. The goals were to optimize energy performance, reduce water use, and improve indoor air-quality. Construction and demolition waste was almost entirely diverted from landfill, and construction waste was minimized.

Among the sustainable design measures are high-performance façades with low-emittance insulating glass and sunshades, cool roofs, and the pervasive use of materials with locally sourced and/or recycled content. Achieving LEED Gold at CityCenter was by design—and Gensler helped make it happen.

An important development in urban sustainability is the recognition that higher-density development served by transit can dramatically reduce traffic congestion and pollution by encouraging people to leave their cars behind and walk. The Gensler-designed Las Vegas Monorail introduced this concept to the city. The size and density of a typical district in Manhattan, CityCenter provides transit access to its major destinations. This allows people to experience the entire area on foot, including the adjoining Bellagio and Monte Carlo properties, without having to use taxis or their own cars. This sustainable pattern is the future of Las Vegas.

### RESULTS THAT MATTER—LEED GOLD

The US Green Building Council launched the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system in 2000. Six CityCenter projects are LEED Gold-certified, a remarkable achievement that reflects an unwavering commitment to sustainability.

**Added cost to achieve LEED Gold:**

5%

**Energy savings due to LEED Gold:**

>30%

| Reduction in building potable water use: | 33% |
| Reduction in in building potable water use: | 60% |
| Reuse of demolition and construction waste: | 87% |
| Wood products in ARIA and Crystals that are Forest Stewardship Council certified: | 94% |

**WALKABLE URBANISM**

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“To open CityCenter in December 2009, as we predicted in 2004, is a remarkable feat.”
Jim Murren, Chairman and CEO, MGM MIRAGE

MGM MIRAGE teamed with Gensler to lead seven world-class architects, 43 interior designers, and over 200 consultants to deliver this game-changing development. Together with our esteemed MGM MIRAGE colleagues, we celebrate its opening. CityCenter’s completion achieves Jim Murren and Bobby Baldwin’s vision of a new and urbane Las Vegas, reinvented for the 21st century.
A TEAM OF THOUSANDS DESIGNED AND DELIVERED CITYCENTER

Design Leadership Team
MGM MIRAGE and Gensler

Construction Management:
Tishman Construction

General Contractor:
Perini Building Company

CityCenter Project Teams: Block A:
- ARIA Resort & Casino—61-story tower and 54-square-tower with 4,054 guestrooms, including 1,268 suites.
- 559,946 sq ft Cirque de Soleil theater.
- 250,000 sq ft casino, 37,664 sq ft restaurants, 219,401 sq ft of restaurants, 42,510 sq ft of bars/lounges.


Project-wide elements:
- Project: Flack & Kurtz; Landscape Architect: Melendrez; Ada: Wong; Retail: Deborah Berke; Engineering Consultants: Mark Gibson/DigitalVision/Getty Images: page 20 middle left; page 21 middle; page 22 right; page 23 middle; page 24 bottom right.

Architecture Design:
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