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WELCOME TO PARADISE TOWER

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Paradise Tower's blue-tinted glass skin allows pool patrons to watch the reflection of clouds drifting across the sky. Photo: Erik Kabik/Retna

When the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino rose from the ground at Harmon Avenue and Paradise Road in 1995, it arguably rebranded Las Vegas. Sin City was America's playground, but it wasn't necessarily associated with youthful energy, hedonistic expression and living the rock n' roll lifestyle. The Hard Rock changed that overnight, raising the bar for nightlife with a state-of-the-art club inside its casino and creating an environment infused with an unprecedented exuberance in every inch of the property.

Fifteen years later, the Hard Rock (via its parent company, Morgans Hotel Group) is putting the finishing touches on a \$770 million expansion that includes two new music venues, a new poker room, a European-style pool and two new towers. While elaborate, upscale HRH Tower is set to open at the south end of the expanded Hard Rock property by the end of the year, its sister structure Paradise Tower began accepting guests in August. Once the doors opened on the 18-floor, 490-unit "rock 'n' roll manor-style" tower, a new era was ushered in for the Hard Rock. The hotel that rebranded Las Vegas is rebranding itself, practically becoming an all-inclusive resort that has grown with its clientele of loyal guests. "The Hard Rock is evolving," says Vice President of Marketing Phil Shalala. "It's not losing its identity, it's just evolving with its customer."

Hard Rock devotees that may have already taken in a concert at the property's new, 4000-seat The Joint or Wasted Space will be blown away by what they see. Paradise Tower's interior was the vision of Manhattan designer Mark Zeff, save for six of ten ground floor pool suites—two of which are duplexes—created by Vegas-based Chemical Spaces. While the building itself, including its blue-tinted glass skin that allows pool patrons to watch the reflection of clouds drifting across the sky, was designed by longtime Hard Rock architects Klai Juba, Zeff was given carte blanche to take the look of the interior to the next level.

The South African-born designer produced a 15-minute film that was shown for a small group of Morgans Group/Hard Rock VIPs and insiders at a screening room at Soho House in New York that depicted the guest experience at a post-expansion Hard Rock. "Based upon the movie we created a look book, or a design bible, and that became the brand language going forward into the design process."

Zeff's intention was to take the brand and blow it up, "meaning take Hard Rock Hotel & Casino and make it seriously the sexiest hotel in Las Vegas, if not America." Returning Hard Rock guests would be catered to with a variety of new environments and experiences, while the HRH Tower would expand the brand into previously uncharted territories of luxury and sophistication.

The poker room experienced the first overhaul, with leather walls, custom-made chairs with studded trim, and large framed black-and-white photos (most notably a smoldering, cigar-smoking Billy Bob Thornton) on the walls creating a film noir feeling. Zeff expanded on that look for Wasted Space, emphasizing dark woods, paneling and rich upholstery.

The towers were where Zeff intended to "hit it out of the ballpark," where the soul of the rebranding would emerge. The North Tower, as Paradise Tower is informally referred to, would be all about youthful energy, good times bordering on decadent excess and taking the party-like-a-rock-star concept to a unprecedented level. The HRH Tower (or South Tower) would provide a whole new dimension of sophisticated experiences for the seasoned hotel guest, with luxurious suites, restaurants, a spa, a new nightclub and 60,000 square feet of convention and meeting space.

"In the North Tower we did moody, party-oriented rooms that will come alive at night," says Zeff. "We did a sexy wallpaper that is reminiscent of tribal tattoos or old English or Scottish tapestries. We went for a very rock 'n' roll furniture palette—lots of studs and leather and denim, very iconic materials. It has a sense of playfulness, whereas South Tower will be more quiet and subdued, more elegant."

Not that Paradise Tower would be spared elegance. Zeff describes the Penthouse as "Very James Bond-like. Futuristic, but in the manor house style." Inspired by HBO comedy series *Entourage*, the Penthouse Suite's 3460 square feet of space enables a 360-degree view of Las Vegas through floor-to-ceiling windows, and has a living room and lounge, platinum tile walls and ceilings, a hot tub, and interactive digital pool table.

Zeff designed four of the lower level pool suites, with Chemical Spaces creating contrast with the six suites it was assigned. Most of the rooms are 421-square-foot king and double queens, with 210 rooms containing connecting



Zeff's Paradise Tower guestroom—notice the Strip view.
Photo: Erik Kabik/Retna

doorways. The corner king rooms are larger at 633 square feet.

"If you look at rock 'n' roll and you look at a manor house, it predominately has wooden floors and old Chesterfield sofas," says Zeff. "That was the background for this. If you look at David Bowie's house or you look at how Led Zeppelin lived, they had these big beautiful baronial mansions outside of London or in the countryside, and they lived like royalty. They knew how to live. They weren't tasteless; they had a lot of style. I took a lot of inspiration from that and brought it to the room."

Dark mahogany wood dominates, although two color schemes were employed: Ox-blood brown, black and gray; and pewter gray and black. Paneling contains leather insets. Bathrooms have wallpaper like an old baronial home. Carpeting was inspired by tattoo design. Zeff used studs for trim, denim and leather in the all-custom furniture, while the Hard Rock's trademark rock memorabilia images and poster art adorn the walls. Forty-two inch LCD high definition televisions and iPod docking stations provide sight and sound. "The rooms are very dark and atmospheric," says Zeff. "You can have a good time in these rooms. This is not about being shy about why you are there. They're vicious rooms."

Chemical Spaces' Mark Tracy was given the task of creating several pool suite environments that would contrast with the rest of the tower. "I knew they were party suites so I was thinking in my head as if I was designing a small ultra lounge, something really funky," he says. "I just wanted the people to walk in and be really shocked at what they were seeing in the rooms. I didn't want them to think they were in a hotel room at all. I wanted it to look completely different." Tracy, who contributed the drum-shaped lamps that give Wasted Space its glow, created several designs for his five 1000-square-foot suites and duplex, which have direct access to the Hard Rock's celebrated Rehab pool as the new pools are being completed. He thought: "Party pad, with a lot of 'wow' factor," and visualized wild graphics, bold colors, mirrored grids on ceilings, tall sheer drapes, giant wall murals. The shimmering Miami Blue Room is marked by large,

high-gloss, blue tiled walls and a white hardwood floor that glitter with silver flake. One wall is a grid of squares, each housing an old-school boom box. The room's "wow" is the C-shaped bed made of blue tile that climbs the wall and curves back over the bed, with a mattress made to look like it is floating.

The Elk/Treeline Room has a row of trees traversing the room, rising up to a mirrored ceiling that makes them look like they're growing into the next floor. The Metallic Gorilla Room is dark chocolate, with Warholesque murals on the walls and a dark hardwood floor. The Black and Red Graffiti Room has a grid of black mirrors lining the walls and ceiling, with "blasts of punk rock-type images all in red," says Tracy.

While the pool suites will surely bring sophisticated partying to the next level, the Paradise Tower symbolizes something more important. It's the first hospitality project to open since the first glimmers of economic recovery for Las Vegas emerged. Carrie Messina, the Hard Rock's vice president of human resources, estimates the number of applicants at a recent job fair for expansion jobs at 4000. "We interviewed every single person!" she recalls. "We felt if you took the time to come down and wait in line, we owed you the time to meet you and interview you. We stayed open until every person was seen." Messina estimates that the Hard Rock will have added 1200 jobs by the end of 2009, with 200 going into housekeeping and front desk positions for Paradise Tower. "With this economy we are being extremely patient, as we do not want to over hire and later lay off as other hotels have done."

Those new employees will be at the epicenter of a paradigm shift for the Hard Rock, and maybe Las Vegas's hotel industry at large. "We've got a much nicer product, a more sophisticated product," says Shalala. "We have a lot of diversity now, so there's a little bit for everyone when it comes to our restaurants, pools and all of our different outlets and venues. It's really melded into the perfect property for the young, hip affluent consumer that is into music, fashion, technology and lifestyle in general. That's what it's all about. It stands for that perfect balance."