

# LAS VEGAS SUN

## THE STRIP

# Mandalay Bay undergoing renovation of property to 'create our own demand' with five-star amenities

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By most measures, Mandalay Bay had a banner year in 2012.

It sold out its convention center. The Shark Reef aquarium set an attendance record with 900,000 visitors. Carlos Santana signed a residency at the House of Blues.

That wasn't good enough.

Owner MGM Resorts International embarked on a massive renovation of the 3,000-room resort, the first since it opened in 1999. Construction began late last year and is expected to be completed by summer.

"I've got more construction walls than I have real walls," Mandalay Bay President Chuck Bowling said.

Many of the resort's original venues haven't changed in 14 years.

A second phase of construction, slated to start this summer, will rebrand The Hotel as the Delano Las Vegas, with a projected 2014 opening date. MGM officials would not disclose the cost of the projects.

Bowling recently sat down with VEGAS INC to discuss the changes.

### Why embark on such an ambitious project now?

Coming out of this recession, the biggest question was: What does Mandalay Bay stand for, and how are we going to separate ourselves from the competition?

We have to create our own demand.

As we go back to redefining

the resort experience, we knew there were a couple of elements we weren't pristine at. There were some shortfalls, so we were able to reinvest in it.

### What did you think was lacking?

We have a great entertainment footprint. We have the events center. We have the beach and our concerts, where you can sit out in your shorts under the stars and listen to great music. We have the House of Blues. But we didn't have that A-list show. One of the things that frustrated all of us was seeing people catch cabs to go to another show somewhere else in town.

So we were fortunate to create the partnership with Cirque du Soleil and the Michael Jackson estate. On May 23, we're going to open what we hope is one of the most amazing shows (a full-time-residency production dedicated to the King of Pop) not only in Las Vegas but around the world. We think that's really going to cement our entertainment.

The other long line getting out of here was going to find great nightlife. We did not have that. Many years ago, Mandalay Bay had Rumjungle, but that closed.

We went out on a search and came to an agreement with the Light Group, one of the leaders in nightlife. They partnered with Cirque du Soleil, and in March, we're going to open Light (Cirque's first standalone nightclub, which will feature acrobatic performers). You're going to have this experience that is above you and around you. It's going to be very different.

### What about the hotel rooms?

We have three hotels (Mandalay Bay, The Hotel and the

Four Seasons). Some of the amenities at the Four Seasons weren't up to snuff, so we did this amazing renovation. That was finished last month.

Another thing it didn't have was a great lobby-lounge experience. We're in the process of opening a lobby-lounge this spring where locals and power brokers can come. It will be indoor/outdoor with fire pits, like you'd find at Red Rock or Green Valley Ranch. That's going to really cement our five-star level.

We also have The Hotel, which has a very high occupancy rate. But I had always referred to The Hotel as the Abbott and Costello brand: What hotel are you staying at? The Hotel. What hotel? The Hotel!

We partnered with the Morgans Hotel Group, which has one of the great brands in the Delano. It's very popular in South America, which is one of our fastest-growing markets. It will open in the first quarter of next year.

(No changes are planned for the rooms at Mandalay Bay.)

### Are you renovating the restaurants and casino?

We've worked with the Light Group on several new restaurant concepts.

We've got a great new Japanese restaurant. Chef Akira Back, from Yellowtail, will design the menu. We're still working on the name, but that will open in April.

Where Red, White and Blue was, the Light Group is going to open **Citizen's Kitchen and Bar**, a casual breakfast, lunch and dinner bar and bistro. They also went into Red Square, which was popular, and remade the menu and vodka locker.