

Cleaning Las Vegas

By Robert Kravitz

Anyone who has visited Las Vegas must find it hard to believe that the biggest gambling-entertainment-hotel resort area in the world was once little more than a sleepy, cow-poke town—that just happened to have legalized gambling.



Las Vegas got its big start in 1946, when mobster Bugsy Siegel spent \$7 million of other people's money to build the 200,000- square-foot Flamingo Hotel. Considered huge for its day—and a very risky investment—the hotel sat all alone in the Nevada desert in what is now known as the Las Vegas Strip.

Gunned-down at his girlfriends, Beverly Hills, CA, home, most likely by nervous investors, Siegel never saw the huge and prosperous gambling resort he had once envisioned. But, within a few short years, several new hotels were built along the strip such as the Desert Inn, the Sands, the Riviera, and the Stardust, each bigger and swankier than the one before, and Siegel's Las Vegas dream became reality.



Yet, none of these hotels—or any of the multitudes of others built throughout the 1980s—could compare with what was to come. By 1990, the enormous, \$630 million, 3,044-room

Mirage Hotel was open for business, becoming Las Vegas' first true mega-resort hotel. It was soon dwarfed by the \$1 billion MGM Grand, another mega-resort hotel that this time sat on 112-acres and included a casino and theme park.

Scene Behind the Scene

Bellagio, which opened in the late 1990s with its famous lake and water show, is one of Las Vegas' grandest hotels and, with 3.5 million square feet of public area and 2.5 million square feet of guest rooms, it is also one of the town's largest.

Clearly, these hotels are impressive to see and visit; so are the operations behind-the-scene, required to keep them clean, well-maintained, and running smoothly.



“Cleaning Las Vegas takes nothing less than training, excellent customer/guest relations skills, patience, speed, and a good sense of humor,” says Joseph Carlo, director of Housekeeping and Public Areas at Bellagio.

Carlo, who started out in the cleaning industry as a building service contractor in 1978, worked at the Mirage Hotel and Casino before coming to Bellagio more than five years ago. He was involved in the early conferencing on the hotel regarding issues that would affect cleaning the giant facility once it opened. With his staff of 1,400 people, Carlo tested, evaluated, and then employed cleaning systems for the daily maintenance of the hotel as well as carpet cleaning and floor care. Apparently, his planning, evaluation, and cleaning systems have paid off. Bellagio has won the coveted AAA Five Diamond Award three years in a row, which evaluates

and critiques the hotels cleanliness, overall and overall maintenance among other things.

Planning for Cleaning

“When you build a hotel as big as Bellagio, you’ve got to plan ahead on how to clean it,” says Carlo. “Sometimes architects and designers are more concerned about look and design than maintaining a facility.” Luckily for Bellagio and his staff, Carlo was involved while the facility was still in the planning stages.

“We knew this was going to be a very busy place,” says Carlo. “I thought it was very important to have electrical outlets everywhere possible throughout the building.”

Following Carlos direction, architects placed power outlets every 25 feet so that electric cords do not need to be extended across floor areas, which could cause a safety issue for the hotel’s thousands of guests. He also asked for

power outlets to be installed at all building entries to eliminate electrical cords extending through doorways.

“I also wanted the designers to be sure and separate electrical circuits and electric lines for cleaning operations,” says Carlo. Powering and wiring a mammoth structure like Bellagio is a huge undertaking. Should a buffer or extractor blow a fuse, it could be very difficult to locate the actual circuit affected and, if that circuit is a source of power for other areas of the hotel, an outage could inconvenience guests in hotel rooms or on the casino floor.

Another thing Carlo asked for—and received—were janitor’s closets and water spouts throughout the resort. The public restrooms in Bellagio are very large, often with 30 or more fixtures each. Carlo insisted on a janitor’s closet in each bathroom to make it easier for his workers to access their supplies as well as water for cleaning anywhere in the

building. “We don’t want our guests seeing us carrying buckets of water up and down corridors, it makes it much easier for our cleaning staff as well,” he says.

Carpet Care: “We Do It in Sections”

Though cleaning is performed throughout the day, most of the heavy-duty cleaning is performed after midnight, and for special cleaning projects like carpet and upholstery cleaning, during the early part of the week when the hotel is usually less-busy.



Obviously size and quantity dictates that carpet cleaning be an ongoing project. “We do it in sections,” says Carlo. “That’s the only way we can do it safely.” According to

Carlo, about half of the carpet in the public areas is cleaned

on a set schedule while the other half is cleaned based on visual inspections and the hotels volume, occupancy, and traffic.

As for equipment, “we have to use portable hot water extractors rather than truck mounts because we can’t have the hose snaking throughout the casino,” Carlo says, “that’s an accident waiting to happen.”

Carlo looks for machines with new technologies that can bolster productivity and efficiency. One of the portables Carlo uses is the [HHP 310 by U.S. Products](#). The HHP 310 provides instant heat up to 212° F at the wand tip improving cleaning effectiveness and reducing the time it takes to clean. The high temperature also shortens drying times, an important consideration in a 24/7 facility such as Bellagio.

“Heat and pressure are very important in cleaning,” says Carlo. Variable pressure of 300 psi for carpet cleaning and lower pressures of 75 psi for upholstery cleaning, make the machine more versatile for the large numbers of cleaning tasks we must handle.

Carlo also believes it is important to “specialize” cleaning responsibilities at the Bellagio. “I like to keep the same person who cleans carpets working in the same area,” he says. “That way they become very familiar with there area and know when it needs to be cleaned again.”

Floor Care: A Cleaning Revolution

Most of the early hotels built on the Las Vegas strip had terrazzo floors. Terrazzo was very popular at the time and made for relatively easy maintenance. However, most of the major hotels have been replacing their terrazzo floors with marble and granite flooring, which has dramatically changed

the way floors are maintained and requires a whole new set of floor care cleaning and maintenance skills and procedures.

Ron Finken, a Building Services Contractors Association International member and owner of Accurate Building Maintenance in Las Vegas, has considerable experience helping major Las Vegas hotels with their stone floor care. “In the early 1990s, they installed the marble floors but few people really knew how to care for them,” says Finken.

“Most of the Las Vegas hotels use very high-end, expensive marble,” says Finken, “you have to be very knowledgeable about marble and know what you are doing to avoid damaging the stone.”

In fact, some marble floors were not cared for properly many years ago. The result is that they now need a considerable

amount of restoration work. One such example is Las Vegas Flamingo Hilton.

“They had been pouring floor finish on the marble floors for years,” says Finken, “we had to strip and then polish over 60,000 square feet of marble floor. It took us over three months.”

Finken says that the so much finish was on the floor that it required as many as three strippings to remove it all. “Then the real work began,” he says referring to the diamond grind process used to restore the marble. “You can only do a 5 foot by 5 foot area at a time; it’s a very slow process.”

Mechanical honing marble, sometimes referred to as a diamond grind, creates a very smooth, high-gloss shine on

the marble. This is followed by buffing to a polished finish with slightly abrasive synthetic felt or wool pads.

For daily marble floor maintenance, Finken recommends:

- Dust mop all marble floors with a treated dust mop
- Wipe up spills as soon as they are detected (especially acid-based spills, such as coffee, orange juice, and colas, that can stain marble)
- Damp mop using a neutral, no-rinse floor cleaner, with an evaporative formula that leaves no streaks or film

Periodically, and based on traffic, the marble floors will need to be honed or polished, which also significantly inhibit resoiling and deterioration of the floor.

“Overall, daily maintenance is crucial to the appearance and durability of the polished finish,” says Finken. “The hotels can also save a lot of money with daily maintenance,

reducing deterioration and the need for more extensive professional treatment.”

Las Vegas is not only a hotel, gambling, and resort Mecca, but also, because of the size and demands of its mammoth facilities, has become both a testing ground for cleaning products and systems as well as a teaching center for the cleaning industry. Evaluating new cleaning procedures and technologies, as well as ongoing education, training, and planning are the only way to clean Las Vegas.

Based on the size and scope of their responsibilities, cleaning experts like Carlo and Williams, have had to learn more cleaning skills, be better organized, and more knowledgeable about many cleaning issues than many of their peers around the world servicing more traditional facilities. According to Carlo, “When you are cleaning a 5.5 million-square-foot hotel like Bellagio that is 90 percent to 95

percent occupied every night of the year, you have to know what you are doing and how to do it every minute of the day.”