

WORLD-CLASS ARTISTRY IS NO SMALL GAMBLE

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN EMBRACES THE MONUMENTAL DETAILS

By Steve Freeman

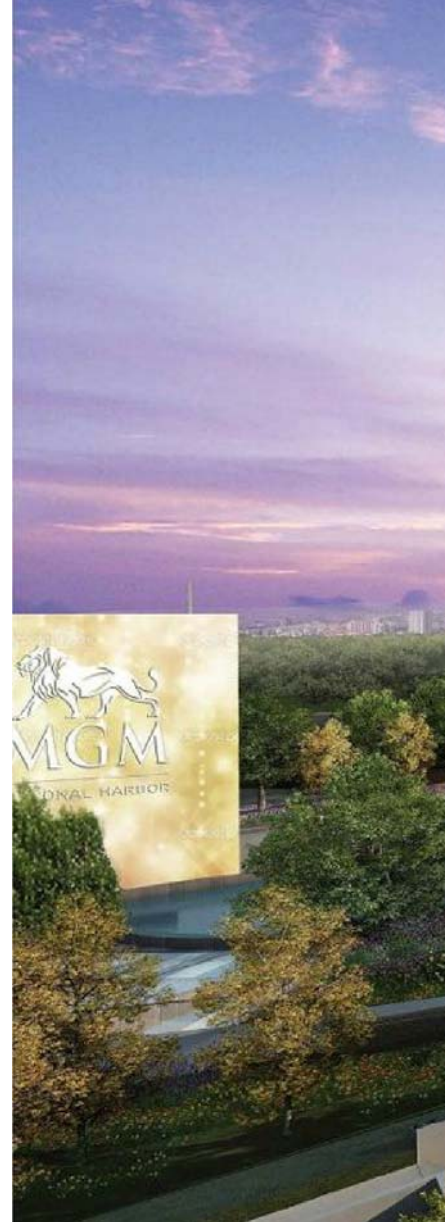
In a place where great buildings like the U.S. Capitol, the Jefferson Memorial, the Old Post Office Pavilion and the National Cathedral are known on sight, MGM Resorts is set to achieve the latest monumental addition to that list.

The new \$1.3 billion MGM National Harbor Resort and Casino (MGM National Harbor) is located near Washington, D.C., and is scheduled to open in the fourth quarter of 2016. The luxury hotel tower will resemble a monument in many regards—one that epitomizes impressive design and construction for a large project while retaining a balance with nature and proximity to the nation's seat of power.

"It is one of the largest projects [1 million square

feet] currently being built in the mid-Atlantic," says Russell Perry, FAIA, Vice President and Co-Director of sustainable design at SmithGroupJJR, the architect and engineer of record. "On any given day, as many as 1,700 construction workers work on the property under the shadow of 10 tower cranes. The complexity, quality and importance of this venture are a perfect match for our integrated, multi-disciplinary practice."

MGM Resorts International, the parent company for MGM National Harbor, is no stranger to creating world-class buildings. From Las Vegas to China, elite MGM properties include the MGM Grand Las Vegas, Mandalay Bay, ARIA and The Mirage. Each is a luxurious attraction for travelers wishing to enjoy the destination's many memorable offerings.





An artistic rendering shows the completed \$1.3 billion MGM National Harbor Resort and Casino overlooking the Potomac River.

As conceived by HKS, the design architect, this new MGM site—rising more than 200 feet above the Potomac River and situated next to major thoroughfares, airports and power centers—is no different. Occupying a slice of prime real estate just minutes away from the nation’s Capitol, the resort is located on the Beltway Parcel at National Harbor, a premier multi-use waterfront development. MGM National Harbor is ideally situated at the crossroads near I-495, I-95, I-295 and the Woodrow Wilson Bridge connecting to historic Alexandria, Va.

SmithGroupJJR manages over 40 consultants contracted to design the resort hotel, entertain-

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ment and conference destination. The massive structure sits atop a stair-step-like pedestal, reminiscent of a pyramid’s base and designed to evoke the plinth of a grand monument.

The main floor and outdoor terrace atop the pedestal are met by a long and broad opaque rooftop



The design of the hotel tower, rising vertically above the expansive horizontal plinth, was inspired by the Washington Monument.

that imitates the horizon and points to the shimmering hotel tower. An exterior landscaped roof deck serves as a platform for indoor and outdoor dining, offering guests a panoramic view of the Potomac River.

Each piece of the building complements other pieces of the structure to create a dynamic visual effect. The pedestal of pre-cast cladding conceals a 7-story, 5,000-square-foot parking garage made of 245,000 cubic yards of concrete. Installed amid that were 6,400 concrete foundation piles. Some 10,000 structural steel pieces comprise

the casino portion alone. Whiting-Turner Contracting Company served as the general contractor.

The expansive, swooping roof—which appears to float over the glass-walled space below—is made of a thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) roof membrane and covers the exterior glass walls. It allows refreshing natural light to filter into the space below during the day; at night, interior illumination spills out, casting a dramatic glow along the edges of the top of the building.

Beneath the roof sits a 125,000-square-foot casino featuring

table games and slot machines, top-name retail stores sharing 18,000-square-foot of promenade space, a world-class spa and salon, 12 fine dining restaurants, a 3,000-seat theater, and a 27,000-square-foot convention area.

The 24-story, glass-walled tower boasts of a 308-room layout. Guest rooms continue the theme of a contemporary, bold, and progressive design in their presentation of simple, yet elegant, spaces. Each room is like a luxurious retreat with the incorporation of light-colored woods on the walls and floor-to-ceiling windows. The hotel includes 74 suites ranging in size from 600 to 2,000 square feet. The two presidential suites measure 3,600 square feet. Together, the pedestal and tower are precisely positioned to maximize sightlines from the luxury hotel to Washington, D.C. and the Maryland countryside.

MGM sets artistry as a prominent element of its newest resort. Its indoor and outdoor public spaces will be adorned with sculptures, paintings and photography from a dozen renowned artists. As guests drive up to the casino, they will encounter Whirlpools, an 80-foot-long Alice Aycock sculpture using wave-like aluminum to mimic swirling waters. Greeting visitors at the hotel's entrance will be Unity, a piece comprised



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of three 60-foot-tall stainless steel figures designed by modern monument sculpture artist John Safer. These visionary pieces of art and others will offer a unique sensory experience to guests, said Jim Murren, Chairman and CEO of MGM.

“Art is one of the cornerstones of the sensory experience at our resorts, creating environments that are interesting, exciting and distinct,” added Murren. “The experience at MGM National Harbor will be exceptional, offering the community and visitors from around the world access to a high-quality special collection.”

Perry oversaw other facility design aspects that might surprise people. “We think of MGM as a destination resort, but two aspects of their internal policy are diversity and environmental performance of their properties,” he said.

Both corporate and social responsibilities are ev-

ident in MGM’s hiring practices, bid approvals and the demographic diversity of employees. Minority business participation in construction of MGM National Harbor totaled 31 percent. Construction crews employed 1,700 construction workers from the Greater D.C. area. The company believes that true sustainability is more than just environmental stewardship, as important as that is.

The MGM National Harbor is being designed and constructed to meet LEED® Gold certification standards, including the extensive use of natural light, LED lighting and water-saving fixtures. The expectation is to achieve energy efficiency at about 30 percent better than comparable buildings. The 700,000-gallon rainwater cistern alone will feed the resort’s landscaping, lessen cooling needs, and reduce water usage for back-of-house restrooms.

In an article featured this year in Washington Life magazine, Murren succinctly proffers his thoughts on this noteworthy addition to Maryland’s architecture collection: “When we began this journey, we set out to design a property that would rival any in our portfolio, [and] bring great pride to Prince George’s County and the State of Maryland. Looking at the project now, it is clear that we are well on our way to delivering on that vision.”