

The upscale, the upbeat, the unusual

Unique retail concepts drive business

What do couture lollipops, Prada purses and Chihuly sculptures have in common? They can all be purchased at an MGM MIRAGE resort.



Flip Flop Shops at Mandalay Bay, currently under construction but set to open Friday, will resemble one of three sister stores in California.

With the opening of two new resort retail offerings – Flip Flop Shops at Mandalay Bay on Friday and a couture lollipop store called the Sugar Factory at The Mirage later this month – *momentum* editors wanted to meet the people who make these decisions and learn more about the strategy behind the selection of the unique specialty shops in Company resorts.

Andrew Hagopian, Senior Vice President of MGM MIRAGE Retail, sheds some light.

"We are constantly seeking new, exciting, and unique retail venues and merchandise to stay ahead of our competition and to provide a memorable shopping experience to our guests," said Mr. Hagopian.

And while couture lollipops seem to be at the extreme end of unique, there have been even more unusual store concepts, believe it or not.

"Several concepts have been presented to me that I felt were not appropriate for MGM MIRAGE Retail (for example, a store concept that features a video camera in the fitting room so shoppers can watch a videotape of themselves to assess how they look in tried-on clothes)," Mr. Hagopian said.

Some store concepts may be overly outrageous, but many specialty shops are guest favorites that bring repeat customers back to MGM MIRAGE.

"You generally do not want to pre-judge an idea or concept; it is best to meet and see if the idea is worth pursuing," said Mr. Hagopian.

Las Vegas retail graduated from a world of dice clocks and printed T-shirts long ago. It is now one of the driving factors drawing Vegas visitors, ranking among dining, entertainment and conventions. Savvy visitors aren't just looking for souvenirs. They are looking for items and shops they cannot find at home, or ideally for that purchase they can't find anywhere else.

Exclusivity is a major factor in decisions made by the retail team.

"We have the only Chihuly store in the United States, and the only Fred Leighton, Giorgio Armani, Prada, and Yves Saint Laurent stores in Las Vegas, all of which are located in Bellagio," Mr. Hagopian said. "I refer to our high-end shopping experience in Via Bellagio as the 'Rodeo Drive of Las Vegas.'"

So how does an unrivaled retail experience, or a Rodeo Drive in Las Vegas, come to be? Mr. Hagopian says it is the result of a lot of hard work on the part of a talented group.

"Our most precious resource, the resource that breathes life into our operation, is our team of employees."

The Corporate Retail Department oversees 134 leased outlets and 142 Company-owned stores.

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Andrew Hagopian
Senior Vice President
MGM MIRAGE Retail

Employee education

Good taste:

MGM Grand holds first employee restaurant tasting



Pearl Chef Kai Yau (left) and General Manager Chris Chiu served Chinese barbecue pork steamed buns at a recent resort-wide tasting event for MGM Grand employees.

MGM GRAND – You can't sell what you don't know.

That was the premise behind a recent employee event that invited employees to taste items from the menus of every restaurant at MGM Grand. More than 300 employees gathered on June 11 in a ballroom to sample dishes from Joël Robuchon, Craftsteak, Seablue and many others.

"It was all of our fine dining restaurants," said Dara Pierce, Reservations Manager at Robuchon, who helped organize the event. "Here at MGM, we have one restaurant for each type of cuisine, and not everyone realizes that. The whole idea was to raise awareness so employees can help our guests understand all of the options they can get right here without leaving the property."

It's the first time in the resort's history that such an event has been held for property employees. While it would be impossible to reach out to all of the thousands of employees at the property, hundreds of employees from departments with the most direct guest contact were invited to sample Robuchon le caramel desserts, braised short ribs from Craftsteak, truffled potato chips from Wolfgang Puck, and many more. Wet Republic had a DJ supplying music throughout the afternoon as employees explored the different fare.

"We had about 320 employees turn out: dealers, concierges, people from front desk, spa and salon and food and beverage team members," said Ms. Pierce. "It went very well. We're definitely exploring doing another one of these at the end of the year."

Signature Concierge Brandon Porterfield attended the tasting and would definitely RSVP for a second, he said.

A team of three, including President of MGM MIRAGE Retail Frank Visconti, Mr. Hagopian, and Vice President and General Manager of Mandalay Place Brian Robison, manages leasing relationships with retailers.

"There are certain retail concepts that we will seek out, and we also receive calls daily from companies that want to lease space from us and vendors that would like us to carry their clothing lines or other products. We work with tenants to ensure that their design, concept, and merchandise assortment are in line with our strategic plans," Mr. Hagopian said. "We select tenants that share our high service standards, and we require them to operate their stores in accordance with those standards."

In addition to overseeing leased spaces, a Corporate Buying team is responsible for merchandising Company-owned stores, including I Love NYNY at New York-New York, Castle Keepsakes at Excalibur, and Jewel Box at Beau Rivage. Buying anything from I love New York T-shirts to Criss Angel bling, the Corporate Buying team dabbles in a little bit of everything.

"We develop a concept using the property strategic plan as a guide. We then present to senior management at the property to make sure the concept is appropriate," Mr. Hagopian said. "We can design, merchandise and operate virtually any store we wish to pursue."

Travel reminder:

Las Vegas Blvd. closed tomorrow for Cirque du Soleil event



Cirque du Soleil will be taking to the streets tomorrow, June 16 to break the Guinness World Record for the most people to simultaneously walk on stilts. Marking Cirque du Soleil's 25th anniversary, the hour-long event will take place on the sidewalk in front of Bellagio beginning at 12:30 p.m.

Lane closures between Flamingo and Bellagio Drive will begin at 11 a.m. and end at 2 p.m. The right turn lane onto Bellagio Drive will not be impacted. Pedestrian barricades will be set up on

the sidewalk at 10 a.m. and will be removed at 2 p.m.

MGM MIRAGE employees wishing to attend must have their employee ID to access the smaller alcoves along the sidewalk in front of the fountains.

Approximately 300 people will participate in the local event, with a total of 1,300 participating worldwide. Events in Montreal, Orlando, Moscow and Macau will be counted toward the record as well.

"It was nice that all of the employees can see how good our restaurants are for our guests. It's always best to know what we're selling and recommending prior to telling the guest about it – to sample before we recommend," he said.

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Brandon Porterfield
Signature Concierge

Mr. Porterfield noted that, while concierges sometimes are invited to smaller tasting events and individual

restaurants, it was nice to have an event on a larger scale for more employees.

"It was great that so many employees got the opportunity to see how good our restaurants are for our guests," he said. "It was nice that employees who wouldn't normally get to experience that were invited."

So what is Mr. Porterfield recommending now?

"The Tuna Kibbeh at Seablue and the barbeque pork sliders from Nobhill were phenomenal," he said.



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