

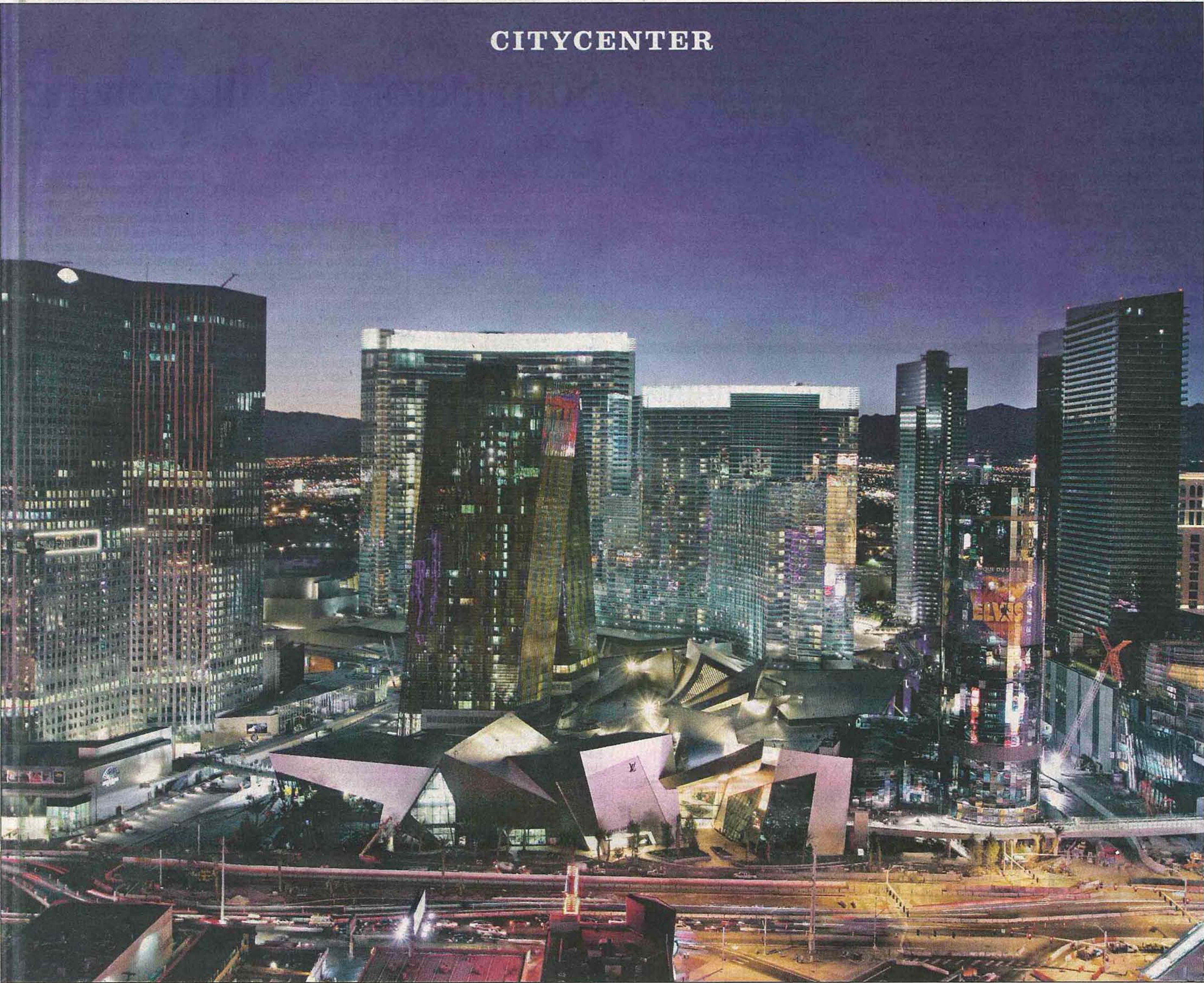
# TRAVEL

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2009 :: LATIMES.COM/TRAVEL

**New Zealand:** Rich, lively — that's Auckland and its wines. **L7**

Netherlands L2 :: Calendar of the West L2 :: Virginia L3 :: Santa Barbara L6 :: Readers Recommend L8

## CITYCENTER



Photographs by RICARDO DEARATANHA Los Angeles Times

**THE STRIP:** The CityCenter features hotels, shopping, entertainment and more. "It's a gift to the community... at a time when the community needs it," says one executive.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- 18 million**  
Square feet
- \$8.5 billion**  
Construction cost
- 4**  
Hotels (three set to open in December)
- 5,891**  
Total rooms opening in December
- 6,291**  
Total hotel rooms when completed
- 4**  
Spas
- 42**  
Restaurants, lounges and bars
- 1**  
Casino (150,000 square feet)
- 897**  
Residences

# A NEW VEGAS

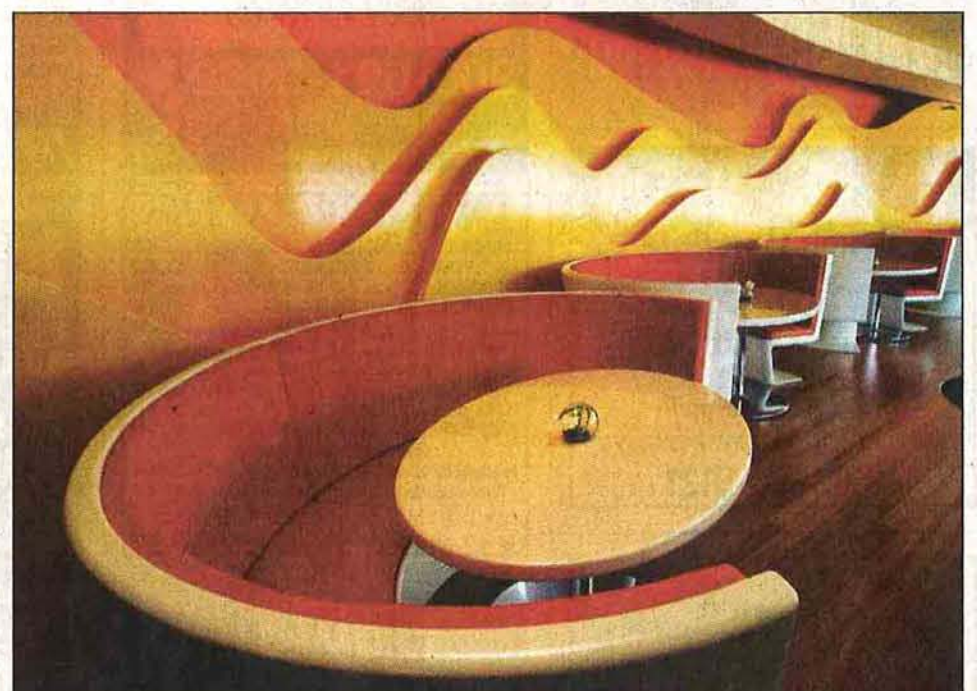
Never mind the recession. This complex, with its chic hotels and condos, dining and shops, is seen as the dawning of a sophisticated Sun City.

**JAY JONES** REPORTING FROM LAS VEGAS >>> Even along the Las Vegas Strip, where extravagance and overindulgence are the norm, people are wondering this about the new CityCenter project: Has it blown the lid off the definition of "over the top"?

"My first impression was, 'This was either completely crazy or the greatest project in the world,'" said Daniel Libeskind, the renowned architect who designed the exterior of the project's Crystals retail center.

"It turned out to be the latter," Libeskind said as he wandered through CityCenter, the \$8.5-billion behemoth of hotels, private residences and super-chic retail that begins its debut this week. Conceived well before "recession" became a household word, CityCenter is touted as the largest privately funded construction project in North America.

Almost as important as the enor- [See CityCenter, Page L4]



**EVOLUTION:** By day, the Vdara restaurant Silk Road is a quiet spot to grab a breakfast croissant; by night, it's a sleek nightclub.



## LAS VEGAS

## Re-branded as an urban oasis

[CityCenter, from Page L1]

mousness of it, the project represents a turning point as Vegas leans away from themed resorts and instead focuses on creating a welcoming environment amid a metropolitan hub-bub.

"It's a re-branding of the whole idea of Vegas," said Libeskind, among the many top-tier architects whose touches you can see throughout CityCenter.

During the planning of CityCenter, its developers, the gaming gurus at MGM Mirage, traveled from Chicago to Shanghai and from Denver to Dubai to try to capture the essence of the urban vibe.

"That kind of energy is what we've tried to harness," said Sven Van Assche, vice president of the MGM Mirage Design Group. "We really had to think outside of our own box... This is a whole new ballgame we're playing in."

The 67-acre property is full of parks and plazas lining broad boulevards in the heart of the complex. Sculptures from such world-class artists as Maya Lin (the Vietnam Veterans Memorial) and Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen add to the metropolitan mood.

In recent months, however, the mood hasn't been as frenetic as it once was. Visitors haven't forsaken Vegas, but they haven't embraced it with the same fervor, either. Although September's visitor count rose more than 4%, thanks largely to more traffic from Southern California, it followed 17 straight months of declines. Gaming revenues through September were down 12% year over year in Clark County.

Far from ignoring the bad news, MGM Mirage Chief Executive Jim Murren thinks CityCenter is a giant life preserver for southern Nevada.

"I can't think of a better time to launch the most important development in the state's history," he said. "It's a gift to the community... at a time when the community needs it."

Here is a look at the components of CityCenter. The first set of room rates contains introductory offers; the second set, researched in mid-November, reflects the lowest rates available for Jan. 16, a three-day weekend for many.

**Vdara**

Dec. 1

Vdara will be the first property to open at CityCenter. This 57-story hotel is at the back of the development, just a few steps from the northern lobby of Aria Resort & Casino and linked to Bellagio by a covered walkway. Gaming- and tobacco-free Vdara will likely appeal to those who want the feel of Vegas without the noise and smoke.

Vdara's 1,495 suites, from 500 to 1,650 square feet, all with full kitchens, are available to rent by the night or to purchase.

The hotel, which has a bright, contemporary feel, features the standard Sin City amenities, including a pool and an 18,000-square-foot spa on two levels.

Silk Road, its ground-floor restaurant, will evolve throughout the day from a quiet place for coffee and a croissant in the morning to a full-service restaurant for lunch and dinner to a hip nightclub during the wee hours. Some guests will recognize the hotel's executive chef, Martin Heierling, from Sensi, his restaurant next door at Bellagio.

2600 W. Harmon Ave.; (866) 745-7767, [www.vdara.com](http://www.vdara.com). Opening specials from \$129; Jan. 16 weekend from \$229. Purchase prices begin at \$443,000.

**Crystals**

Dec. 3

The eye-catching Crystals, a shopping and entertainment district that fronts Las Vegas Boulevard, features A-list stores, said general manager Farid Matraki.

"God knows that Las Vegas doesn't need another mall, so Crystals is going to be a very, very unique destination," Matraki said.

Its half-a-million square feet will feature the boutiques of such designers as Roberto Cavalli, Carolina Herrera and Ermenegildo Zegna.

"Even if you don't want to go to Lanvin [opening in 2010] and buy an \$800 T-shirt, you still can come here," Matraki said. "You still can eat. You still can people-watch."

A great place for doing that is from the terrace of Mastro's Ocean Club. The terrace, situated in an abstract "treehouse," overlooks carpets of real flowers and an innovative water fountain with ever-evolving ice sculptures.

A monorail will link the shopping center to neighboring Bellagio to the north and Monte Carlo to the south.

**Mandarin Oriental**

Dec. 4

Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas will be the Hong Kong-based chain's second West Coast property. (The other is in San Francisco.) The sky lobby on the 23rd floor divides the tower, with residential units above and hotel rooms and suites below.

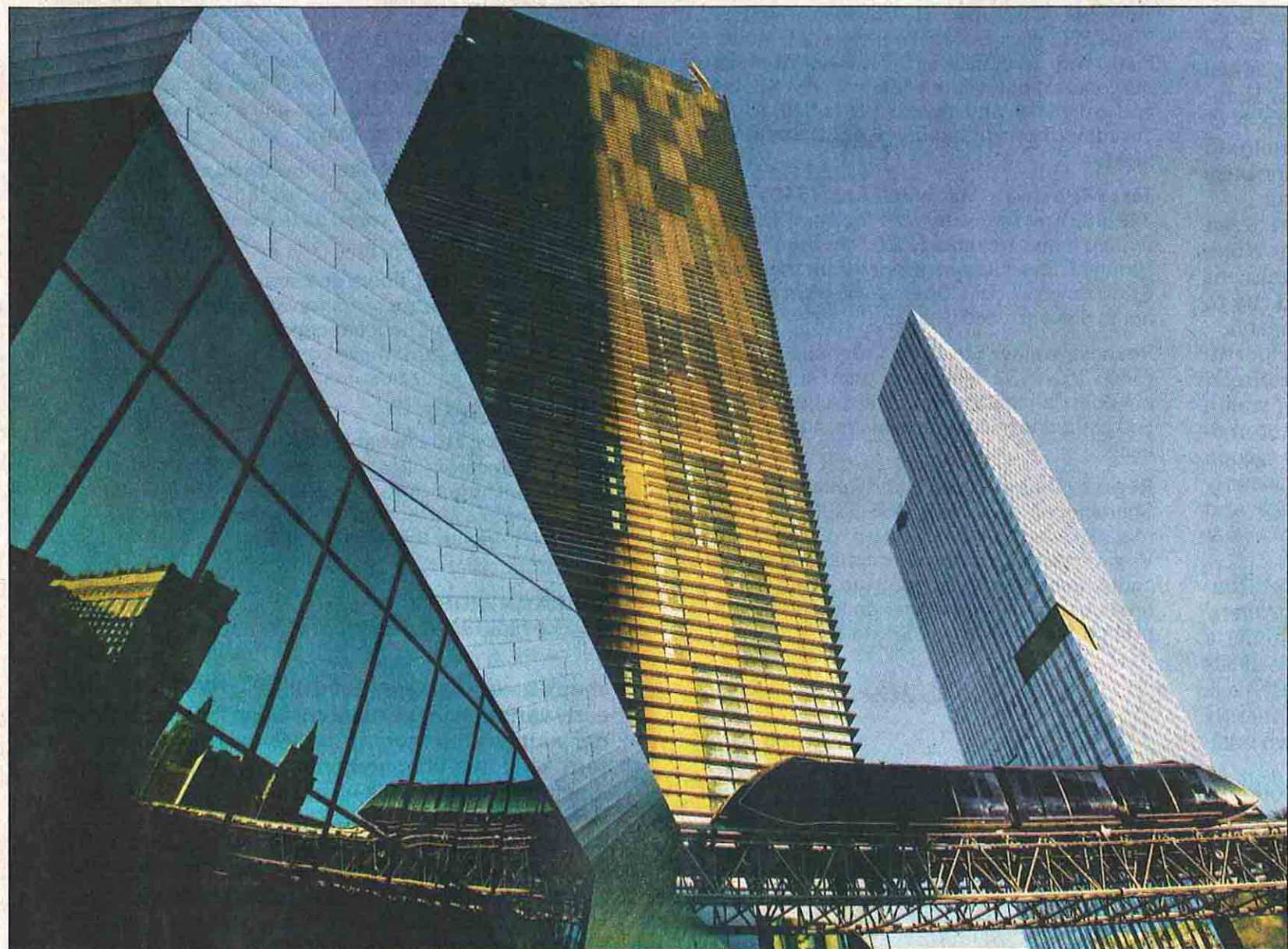
The rooms feature modern, Asian-inspired design. General Manager Rajesh Jhingon expects the hotel to draw discerning customers who appreciate "the mystique of the [Mandarin] brand."

"Bellagio and the Aria and the Wynn — etc., etc. — are casino hotels with 4,000 to 5,000 rooms each. They have a different model," he said. "I have a 392-room hotel. It's got a totally



Photographs by RICARDO DEARATANHA Los Angeles Times

**THE VIEW:** The bar at Aria is bright. Gamblers, take note — Aria is the only hotel at CityCenter with a casino. And for fans of the King, there's the Cirque du Soleil's "Viva Elvis," a tribute to his life and music.



**TRAVELING MADE EASY:** A monorail zips past, from left, the Crystals shopping center, the Veer Towers and the Mandarin Oriental. The train will link Crystals with the neighboring Bellagio and Monte Carlo.

different paradigm."

During a Nov. 13 interview, Jhingon acknowledged that the hotel, then advertising a \$545-a-night rate that was more than twice that of his closest competitors, might need to be more flexible in pricing. Two days later, the price had dropped to \$325.

"People will want to pay that extra premium [for] the tangible and intangible service elements that they actually receive," he said.

3752 Las Vegas Blvd. S.; (702) 590-8888 or (888) 881-9578 (reservations); [www.mandarinoriental.com](http://www.mandarinoriental.com). Opening rates from \$295; Jan. 16 weekend, \$325.

**Aria Resort & Casino**

Dec. 16

With 4,004 rooms, Aria is the larg-

est hotel at CityCenter and the only one with a casino. Guests are welcomed at two bright and bold entries. The reception lobby features a Maya Lin silver sculpture of the Colorado River, and the northern lobby showcases four brightly illuminated translucent walls of water.

The hotel features nine restaurants, some of them by top chefs making their first forays into Las Vegas.

"The chef talent out here is pretty inspiring," said Shawn McClain, who, for the first time, is venturing outside Chicago, where he has three distinctive restaurants. Unique offerings at Sage, his Vegas property, will include a scallops-and-oxtail dish and a foie gras custard brûlée.

Aria is also home to "Viva Elvis," Cirque du Soleil's seventh Las Vegas

production-in-residence.

Nancy Nitchse, the chief concierge, said this feature is generating the biggest buzz. The production is a tribute to Presley's life and music and will include rare, never-before-seen footage of the King, she said. Ticketmaster says "Viva Elvis" performances begin Dec. 18. Ticket prices start about \$95.

3730 Las Vegas Blvd. S., [www.ariaslasvegas.com](http://www.ariaslasvegas.com), (866) 359-7757. Opening rates from \$149; Jan. 16 weekend from \$259.

**Veer Towers**

Mid-January

The aptly named Veer Towers is CityCenter's sole "residents only" property and possibly its most architecturally interesting: The two struc-

**CITYCENTER'S BIG NAMES**

The list of creative talent at CityCenter reads like a Who's Who from the worlds of architecture, design, fashion and food. Here's a sampling of some big names associated with the project:

**JHANE BARNES**

The fashion designer, whose upscale clothing sells at Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue, created the uniforms for employees at Aria Resort & Casino.

**DALE CHIHULY**

The multimedia artist, who created the ceiling of colorful glass flowers for Bellagio, will have a gallery showcasing his work at Crystals retail center.

**TOM FORD**

The fashion designer (and filmmaker) is credited with turning around Gucci before launching his own line of menswear. He'll have a shop at Crystals.

**PIERRE GAGNAIRE**

The New World is a new conquest for this French chef with restaurants in Paris, Hong Kong and Tokyo. Twist, his restaurant at the Mandarin Oriental, overlooks the Strip.

**FAWAZ GRUOSI**

The founder and president of a high-end Swiss watch company, Gruosi brings one of his flagship De Grisogono stores to Crystals, just his second outlet in North America.

**GUY LALIBERTÉ**

The poker-playing Canadian billionaire, who created Cirque du Soleil, brings the King back to Vegas with "Viva Elvis" at the theater in Aria.

**DANIEL LIBESKIND**

The architect, son of Holocaust survivors, created the Jewish Museum Berlin before designing the eye-catching exterior of Crystals.

**MAYA LIN**

The artist and architect, best known for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., used reclaimed silver for her linear sculpture of the Colorado River. It is showcased inside Aria.

**EVA LONGORIA PARKER**

The actress, who already has a successful Beso restaurant in Hollywood, opens her second eatery. The Crystals venue includes a chichi lounge.

**RICHARD MACDONALD**

The California-born artist, known for his sculptures of the human form, opens his second gallery at Crystals.

**DAVID ROCKWELL**

The acclaimed architect and designer, who created Hollywood's Kodak Theatre, envisioned the bright, airy interior for Crystals.

**ADAM TIHANY**

The hospitality designer put his distinctive mark on the Mandarin Oriental, creating public spaces and private rooms.

**JEAN-GEORGES VONGERICHTEN**

The chef with three Michelin stars opens a second Vegas restaurant. His namesake steakhouse at Aria will feature fresh beef flown in from South America.

**PETER WEGNER**

The artist, known for creating sculptures from reams of paper, brings two massive works contrasting day and night to the lobby of Vdara.

**latimes.com**

/citycenter

**Urban vibe**

Go online for more photos of Las Vegas' new CityCenter.

tures lean in opposite directions. Architect Helmut Jahn designed them that way so the 37-story towers are infinitely more stable than their distant Italian cousin in Pisa.

Only owners can access amenities such as the infinity pools atop both buildings. But the lobbies will be open to the public. Units are priced from \$348,000.

**Harmon Hotel**

Late 2010

The lights are on at the Harmon Hotel, but nobody's home. With its curvilinear exterior of blue glass, it's a knockout. Originally planned to rise 49 stories, the hotel was downsized to 28 floors after building inspectors discovered improperly installed rebar on some of the upper floors. Hotel officials decided earlier this year to eliminate the Harmon's condo component, leaving a 400-room hotel.

When the property opens, it will be a stubby stepister to other members of the CityCenter family. The hotel will feature a Mr. Chow restaurant and "whenever, wherever" butler service.

[travel@latimes.com](mailto:travel@latimes.com)



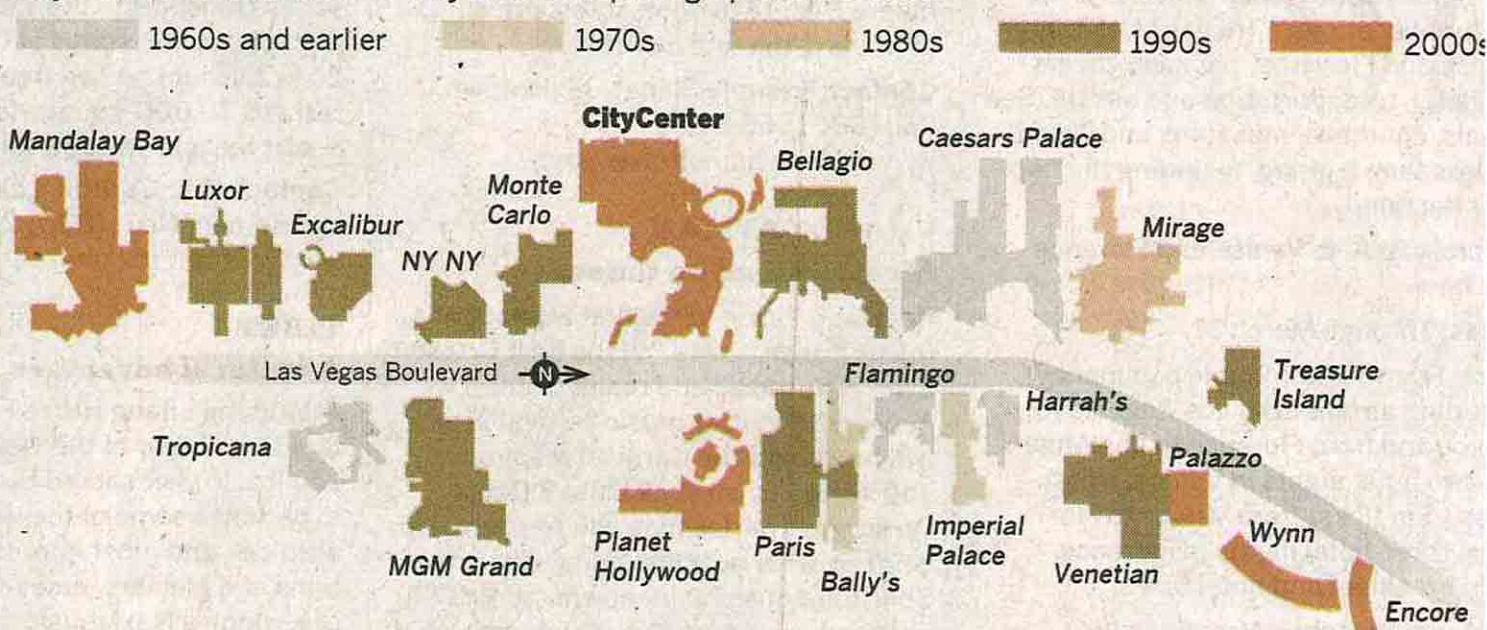
LAS VEGAS

# A new center in the city

Even in Las Vegas, a town not given to architectural subtleties, CityCenter looms large. The 67-acre, \$8.5-billion, 18-million-square-foot "city within a city" combines size and flourish with environmental consciousness. Here are some of the highlights.

**When the resorts opened**

CityCenter is located amid many of the Strip's high-profile resorts.



**Aria Resort & Casino**  
Opening: Dec. 16  
Multiple towers with 4,004 rooms, 568 suites in 61 stories; convention center and theater.

**Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas**  
Opening: Dec. 4  
47-story, non-gaming hotel with residences; 392 rooms and suites, 215 residences /condos.

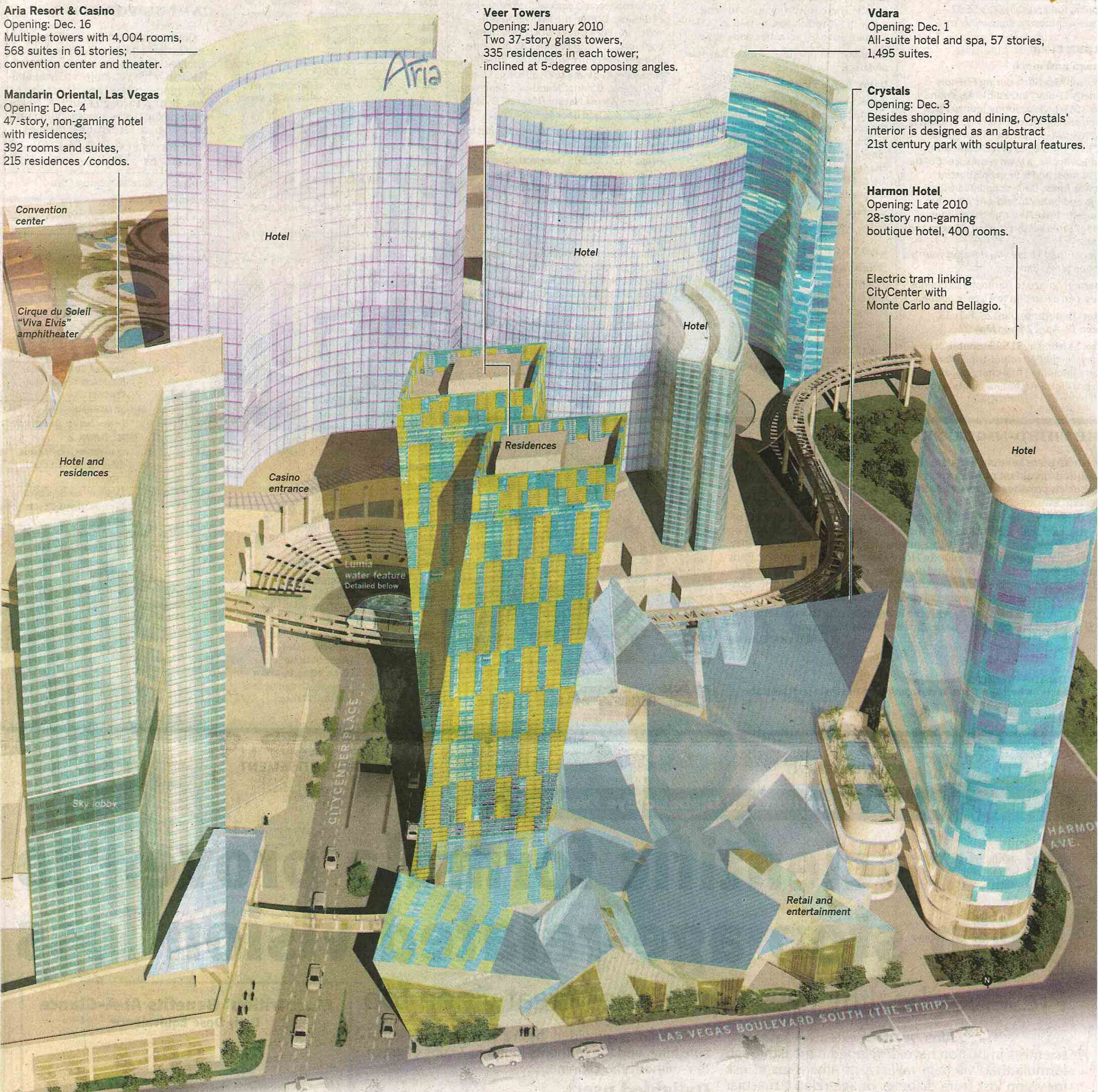
**Veer Towers**  
Opening: January 2010  
Two 37-story glass towers, 335 residences in each tower; inclined at 5-degree opposing angles.

**Vdara**  
Opening: Dec. 1  
All-suite hotel and spa, 57 stories, 1,495 suites.

**Crystals**  
Opening: Dec. 3  
Besides shopping and dining, Crystals' interior is designed as an abstract 21st century park with sculptural features.

**Harmon Hotel**  
Opening: Late 2010  
28-story non-gaming boutique hotel, 400 rooms.

Electric tram linking CityCenter with Monte Carlo and Bellagio.

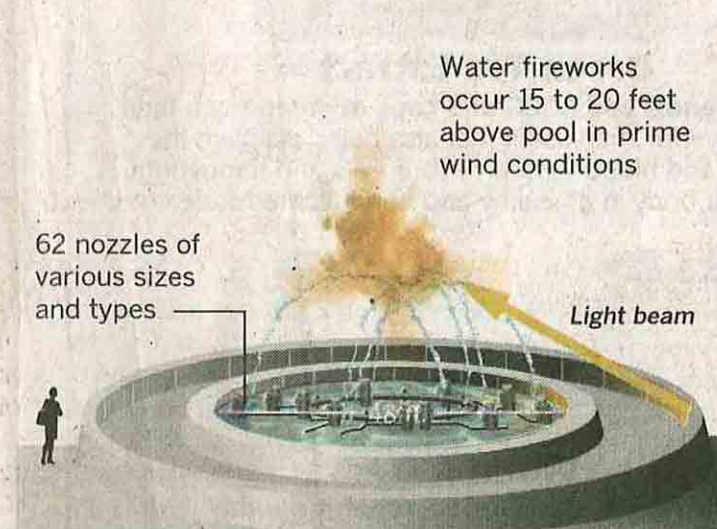


**Green features**

- Light-colored thermoplastic membranes on tower roofs reflect sunlight instead of absorbing heat into buildings.
- Dual-pane windows minimize heat absorption from sun rays, limit heat leaking in or out of building during hot or cold weather.
- Sun shades project from Aria and Veer windows, provide shade and limit the amount of heat reaching the building without compromising views.

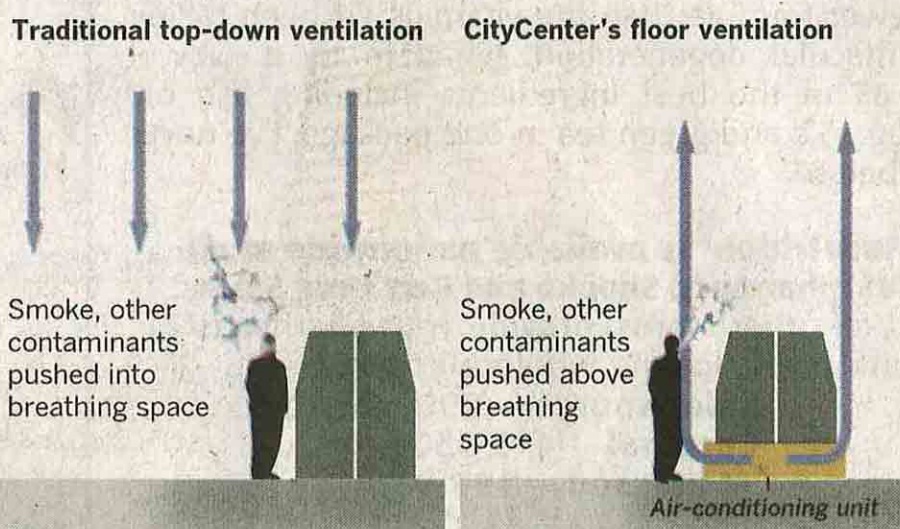
**Sparkling water**

Lumia, the largest of CityCenter's five water features, uses high-powered colored lights and nozzles to create varied water collisions and spark-like patterns.



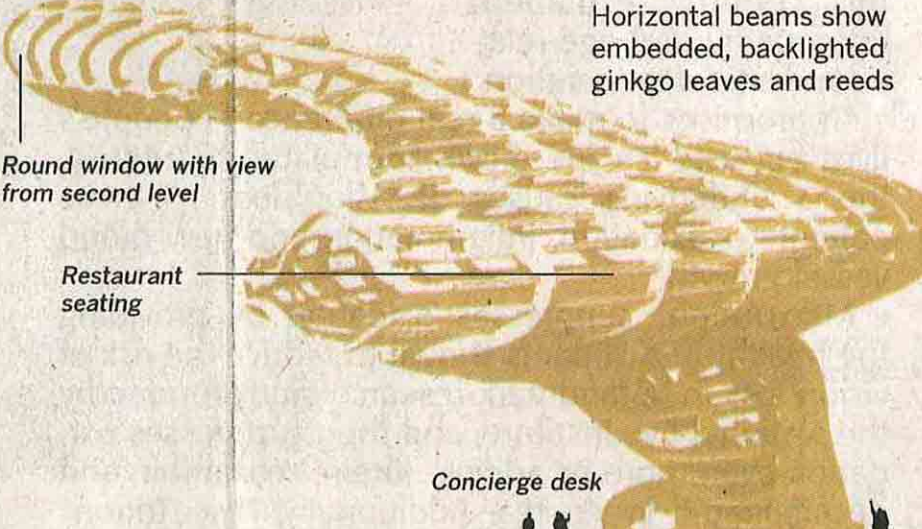
**A new, cool way**

Bases of slot machines in Aria operate as floor air-conditioning units, cooling at floor level and venting contaminants up and out rather than down toward the floor.



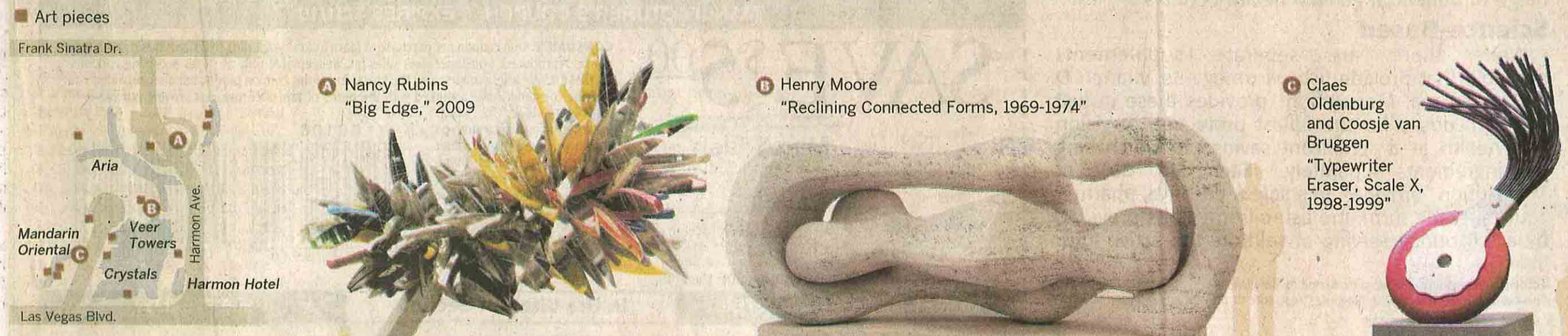
**Crystals Tree House**

The three-story, 70-foot-tall sculptural structure is constructed of interwoven horizontal mahogany and vertical sapele wood panels and is visible from anywhere in Crystals.



**Integrated art**

A fine-arts collection combining several styles and varied media, including paintings and sculptures, is distributed throughout CityCenter at indoor locations and outdoor walkways. Among them:





## In and around Las Vegas' CityCenter



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)

An early-evening view of the CityCenter, from the rooftop of the Marriott.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)

The 57-story Vdara, an all-suite hotel and spa, will open Dec. 1.





(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
Canopy over the porte-cochere of Aria Resort & Casino.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
The monorail at CityCenter.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
A worker climbs on part of the protruding roof of Crystals.



(Ricardo DeAratanha, Los Angeles Times)  
A close-up look at the roof of Crystals.





(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)

A pedestrian walks along Las Vegas Boulevard across the street from Crystals.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)

Skylights bring natural light into Crystals.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
One of the Sky Suites (25th floor and up) at Aria Resort & Casino.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
A sitting nook in an Aria SkySuite.





(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
A dining room of an Aria SkySuite.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
An Aria SkySuite bedroom.





(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
Dawn breaks over the CityCenter.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
Crystals opens Dec. 3.





(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
The living room of an Aria Sky Suite.



(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
A living room of an Aria Sky Suite.





(Ricardo DeAratanha / Los Angeles Times)  
An Aria SkySuite bathroom.



