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IT'S GOOD TO BB KING

RECREATING THE SIGNAGE OF HISTORIC BEALE STREET IN AN ALABAMA CASINO



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IN life, as in song, with everything eventually the thrill is gone. So, when planning a renovation of the existing Wind Creek Casino in Montgomery, AL, the ownership teamed up with BB King's Blues Club in Memphis, TN to not only expand the facilities, but also to add an exciting venue to the property.

Lorenc+Yoo Design (Roswell, GA) assisted in recreating Memphis' famous Beale Street by creating festive signage and theming for the property. We had previously completed two other Wind Creek properties with PCI Gaming; however, this design was a bit more challenging. It required a much more energetic and layered development to mimic the historic entertainment district with its years of renovations, blunders and white-washing. For example, Beale Street's convenience stores were to become beverage stations; the police station,



Lorenc+Yoo was responsible for all site and building signage, including graphics for the up-lit building screen. Shown here is the primary building and entrance identification signage.

casino security; a theatre and marquee, the high-limits section; and, as the centerpiece – BB King's Blues Club.

"HOW BLUE CAN YOU GET"

When we were approached to take on the project, the concept for recreating Beale Street was already being developed by Dale Partners Architects (Jackson, MS). Jimmy Peavy, project manager for the Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority, allowed us to use the streetscape as a canvas to maximize the environmental graphics' impact.

Our work complemented the architecture and interior design with an overlay of signage, large hand-painted murals, marquees, and features such as vintage bulbs lighting the restroom signage.

For the major elements in the design, we used neon for an authentic Beale Street look. We researched signage from Beale Street, Route 66, Vegas and other famous installations as well as what others have achieved with neon and incandescents for lighting, script and illustration. Varying techniques of lighting and letter

BB King's Blues Club, hotel entry identification and gift shop signs include a hand-painted mural of B.B. King as a cohesive element.

construction made it look as if different hands were creating the signs. In many instances we had to step back and let go of our more trained predilection to hide wires and hardware, scratches and cracks.

Marty Peck, the lighting designer from Creative Lighting & Design (Germantown, WI) chose Color Kinetics' LED lighting system, controlled by an ETC Mosaic system in the ceiling plane, as a complementary programmed light-and-sound show inspired by Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*. The architect incorporated many planes of mirrored panels on walls, columns and the ceiling, to visually carry all lighting. Creating an environmental experience where the streets are filled with gaming machines was challenging. Thankfully, the central corridor to the expansion was 25 ft. tall, allowing for floor-to-ceiling visuals.

We also engaged illustrators to create a variety of themed images that muralists then hand-painted. The exterior of the property was treated with a vibrant modern skin that hid this extremely different world within. A series of horizontal bands comprising perforated aluminum panels with a direct-print neutral pattern composed the façade, "floating" in front of the building. A light trough with programmed RGB LED fixtures split the panels at the base of the bands. When everything came together, it turned out to be an intentional collage of experiences rarely seen outside of Las Vegas. The property transformed from casino-only, to a casino, hotel and nightclub destination.



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"I'M MOVING ON"

With the successful expansion complete, PCI Gaming engaged Dale Partners and Lorenc+Yoo to carry the same type of theming through the rest of the property. This included continuing the bands described

earlier, onto the rest of the building in a more free-form, undulating pattern. We also developed the identities and storefront design for Lucille's casual diner, the Bus Depot casino entryway and Non-Smoking Gaming, which was themed as a factory.



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The casino floor gathers a large blues mural, a Beale Street welcome sign and restroom signs.

EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

ARCHITECT/INTERIOR DESIGNER: Dale Partners Architects, P.A., dalepartners.com

SIGN CONTRACTOR: Henry Inc., henryincorporated.com

LIGHTING DESIGNER: Creative Lighting Design & Engineering, cld-e.com

LED LIGHTING: Color Kinetics (interior lighting system, exterior wall grazing fixtures) colorkinetics.com; ETC (controller), etcconnect.com; Bitro Group (LEDs), bitrogroup.com

SOFTWARE: Adobe Suite, Illustrator CC and InDesign CC, adobe.com; CorelDRAW X8, coreldraw.com; AutoCAD 2018, autodesk.com; SOLIDWORKS 2017, solidworks.com; FlexiSIGN-PRO Cloud v11, thinksai.com; Enroute 3.3 Pro, enroutesoftware.com; Hot Door-CADtools; hotdoor.com; SketchUp, sketchup.com

ROUTER: MultiCam 1000 6 x 12 ft., multicam.com

PRINTER: Mimaki JV33-160 64 in., mimaki.com

PLOTTERS: Mimaki CG-130FX 48 in., mimaki.com; Graphtec FC3100-120 48 in., graphteccorp.com

LAMINATOR: Royal Sovereign RSC-1650C 64 in., royalsovereign.com

VINYL: 3M, 3m.com; ORACAL, orafol.com

PAINTS: Matthews Paint, matthewspaint.com; Valspar, valspar.com

MURALIST: Buckhead Murals, buckheadmurals.com

The Bus Depot was a major endeavor. Inspired by Greyhound terminals of the 1930's and '40s, we clad the overhead fascia horizontally in scalloped, chromed panels with neon bands running the length and dimensional letters supported in front. Two vertical internally illuminated columns terminated the sides of the entry with a center sign element placed at the bottom of the bulkhead.

As the renovation proceeded, the client asked Lorenc+Yoo to identify the zones of the gaming floor through dramatic ceiling-mounted elements. We developed EZ Street, Fortune Freeway and a series of other musically-themed, iconic elements that we sprinkled throughout the rest of the gaming floor. The central piece was a 12-ft. neon guitar suspended from the ceiling and surrounded by 3-ft. spinning records and programmed LED lighting.

“IN THE MIDNIGHT HOUR”

Given the fast pace of fabricating so many custom-graphic elements with so many types of lighting, we recommended that Henry Inc. (Decatur, GA) join the team. Lorenc+Yoo has a 30-year history with Henry on various projects across the US. We had some ideas on how to create what we were looking for, but Henry’s resourcefulness and communication allowed us the freedom to realize our complex designs. Knowing what our client was expecting, we gave them more than what they asked for, which is always our goal.

“When I first worked with Henry in 1983, I recall going to their shop and learning about how to put projects together and they led me into their neon shop,” said Jan Lorenc,



High Limits and event center signs utilize incandescent bulbs for the marquee sign with a combination of polished brass and stainless laminate.

principal/design director of Lorenc+Yoo. “The variety of colors and the intensity was an amazing experience to

see firsthand, but what was [more] amazing was seeing their craftsman bending the neon tubing against



The neon sign wall and casino floor.

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PHOTO BY LORENC-YOO, ROSWELL, GA



PHOTO BY LORENC-YOO, ROSWELL, GA

Great pains were taken to make each sign along the neon sign wall look as though it were made by a different signmaker.



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Lucille's restaurant sign, named after B.B. King's guitar, uses vintage, rusted, corrugated steel, as well as dimensional and hand-painted text.

asbestos patterns. It was a craft that has remained a part of what was originally named Henry Neon Company."

The property ownership agreed that the use of real neon here was important. In fact, they wanted more and more neon, and at one point,

they asked us to populate the 175-ft. connector wall between the expansion and existing casino with signage and awnings. In a week we developed eight options for neon signs, of which six were selected. Half of these were flag-mounted and half, wall-mounted, to add dimensionality and to truly

convey that street-side feel.

In all, we used dozens of colors of neon, chase lights, LED and incandescent bulbs – as well as murals and other signage – to create a lively, fun and attractive expression of one of the most vibrant, cultural sites in the US. ■