

Reno Revisited

The slick, history-steeped, 1,720-room Silver Legacy resort and casino signals the emergence of an updated Reno.—By Sigrid Bathen

THE OLD T-BAR ski lift at Mount Rose near Reno is permanently etched in my memory—the stark, swinging columns of green, with short, C-shaped seats at the base, so two people could sit, somewhat precariously, hanging on to the center bar as we inched up the mountain. Precursor to the swiftly moving chairs that now scoop up skiers in bunches, the old T-bar was faster than the slippery, shoulder-dislocating rope tow, but you had to be sure to get out of the way quickly on de-barking or risk being whacked on the rump by the T.

Perhaps I remember it so well because it was at the top of that hill, when I was about 12, that I once lost a ski and watched in horror as it careened, by itself, down the mountain. I had neglected to fasten the safety strap, and my dad had to wrestle the ski back up the mountain on the T-bar. To say he was not pleased is inadequate to describe his steely blue-eyed glare when he delivered my ski. I did not forget to fasten the safety strap again.

In the evening, Dad liked to spend some time at the blackjack tables in the nearby casinos—he always said he came out “about even,” as my mother looked skeptical—and I remember my amazement at the numbers of silver-haired women playing the nickel slots near the coffee shop where we had breakfast before heading back up the mountain. I had the feeling they had been there all night.

Once, on New Year's Eve, they left us three kids and some grumpy children of their friends (these trips were often major, multiple-family gatherings) at a function billed as a New Year's Eve “kids night” in the old Harold's Club, which is now a historic landmark being renovated into a club with an Australian theme. It will be called “Harold's Club Down Under,” which might have served as an appropriate description of that windowless 1950s room on New Year's Eve.

While our parents presumably partied somewhere upstairs, the “kids night” turned out to be a few tired cartoons beamed by an old projector onto a small portable screen. I think there might have been some popcorn.

These days, Reno is much more sophisticated, offering more than ever in the way of skiing, gambling, food and entertainment. For information on packages, prices and accommodations, call 1-800-FOR-RENO. Casinos and hotels also

Try your luck in Reno, where casino expansions and additions bring a few changes to the landscape.



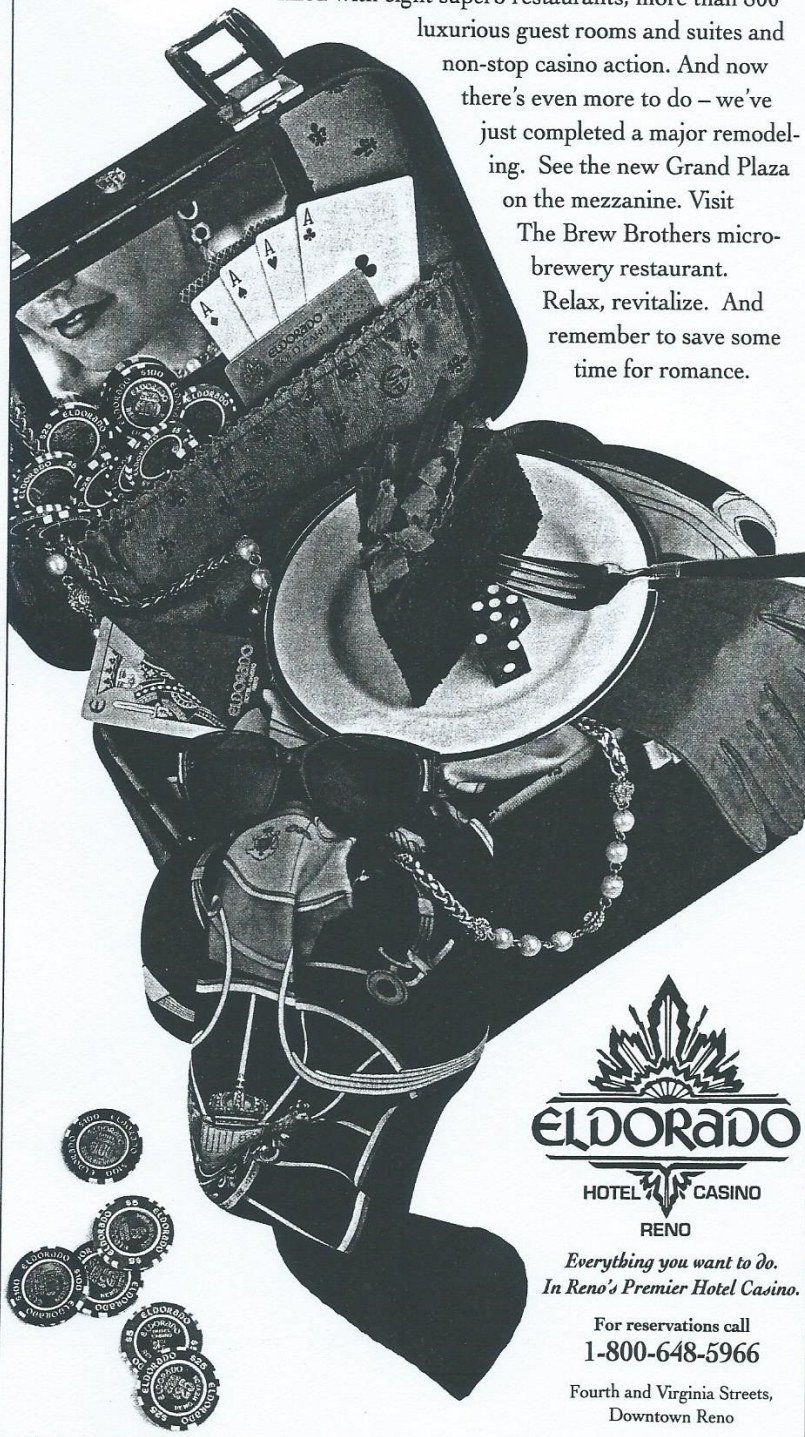
offer a variety of packages, and many offer shuttle services.

One of the biggest changes in the Reno landscape is the addition of the new Silver Legacy, a slick, history-steeped and technologically glitzy 1,720-room resort and casino that covers more than two city blocks in downtown Reno and includes gaming, food, entertainment and specialty shops.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LONNIE PECK

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The huge casino is topped by a 75,000-square-foot structure, described in brochures as "the world's largest composite dome" with a "unique environment using lighting, sound and special-effects technology" depicting a sunrise-to-sunset panorama of Reno skies.

The dome also features a 120-foot-high automated "mining machine," reflecting the casino's historical theme of Nevada's silver mining legacy. It was constructed to duplicate the original device commissioned by silver baron Sam Fairchild (known as "Old Silver"), who, according to the legend, discovered a deep vein of blue quartz ore beneath the site of the Silver Legacy. Fairchild hired Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel, designer of the Eiffel Tower, to build the machine.

The replica of Sam's machine is directly above the Silver Baron's Bar and Lounge, so patrons can watch the 170-ton system "mine" ore and "mint" the silver to coins that can be used in the casino's slot machines. The machine was a major tourist attraction in Reno when the mine was operating, and Legacy backers are hoping the replica will generate the same keen level of interest.

In keeping with the silver-mining theme, the Legacy is also displaying an extraordinary collection of silver-baron wealth and conspicuous consumption, the Mackay Silver Collection, loaned to the casino for display by the University of Nevada, Reno. Part of the 1,300-piece silver service commissioned by John W. Mackay, silver baron of Virginia City, for his wife, Mary Louise, the service was created with a half-ton of Comstock silver shipped to Tiffany & Co. in New York in 1876. It took two years to finish, and reportedly the labor of 200 workers. Mackay purchased the dies so that no similar pattern could be made, and it is believed he destroyed them.

Management of the Legacy, a joint venture of Circus Circus Enterprises, Inc., and the Eldorado Hotel/Casino, say the ambitious new resort will help to "rewrite the downtown Reno skyline" and is the start of a major "modernization and rebuilding of the biggest little city in the world," with the aim to make Reno more competitive with its even glitzier sister to the south, Las Vegas.

"It is a re-launching of Reno's gaming and tourist industry," says General Manager Gary Carano. "It is the flagship development that will put Reno back on the map."

Plans are for the Legacy to be connected via skywalks to the nearby Circus Circus Hotel/Casino and the Eldorado Hotel/Casino, which features a new turn-of-the-century-style micro-brewery called The Brew Brothers, complete with copper and brass brew tanks and waitstaff wearing period clothing.

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Other major changes in the offing for the Reno landscape:

- A \$90-million expansion project at the Peppermill Hotel & Casino, adding two adjoining towers with nearly 500 rooms and a 1,900-square-foot outdoor swimming pool next to a 40-foot-high artificial mountain that resembles a volcano, spouting steam.

- Plans by the new owners of the historic Harold's Club, American Gaming & Entertainment Ltd., to change the landmark casino into a replica of a turn-of-the-century Australian railroad station, renaming the club Harold's Club Down Under. Plans are for a 300-room, 17-story hotel tower.

- The new owners of the Holiday Hotel Casino, Buccaneer Gaming, Inc., plan to renovate and expand the hotel into a 350-room tower and multilevel parking garage. The \$64-million project, part of redevelopment plans for the Truckee River corridor in downtown Reno, will include a 30-lane bowling facility.

Bowling appears to be a big draw in the new Reno, with the opening last February of the National Bowling Stadium with 80 championship Brunswick lanes and a state-of-the-art scoring system. Designed for tournament bowling, the stadium opened with the six-month American Bowling Congress Centennial Tournament, featuring more than 182,000 bowlers and guests.

If bowling, gambling and skiing aren't your things, Reno offers a host of entertainment and special events, ranging from a senior rodeo ("you're never too old to be thrown from a bull") and Celtic New Year's festival (in November) to fishing and ice skating, antique slot machine and vintage automobile displays, golf (miniature and standard), art and history museums, even a planetarium and an arboretum.

You can take a side trip to historic Virginia City, once the richest mining settlement in the world, or the state capital in Carson City, home to Victorian architecture and the Nevada State Railroad Museum.

Travel to historic Genoa, Nevada's oldest settlement, south of Carson City in a place called Jack's Valley nestled at the base of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Genoa's other claims to fame? Well, there is Walley's Hot Springs Resort—and the oldest bar in the state.

Given the, uh, unstructured nature of the society of miners, gamblers, fortune-hunters and assorted ne'er-do-wells who made the trek west in search of gold and silver in the 1800s, there's no telling how Nevada historical authorities determined where the first bar was opened. But in this neo-fantasy world of gamblers and silver barons, truth is often stranger than fiction. ■

What's Happenin' in Reno

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Boomtown Hotel—Located seven miles west of Reno on I-80, the Boomtown Hotel features a 40,000-square-foot casino, three restaurants, a huge family fun center, 122 hotel rooms and an indoor pool. (800-648-3790)

Circus Circus—World-renowned circus stars perform every day 11 a.m.–midnight under the pink-and-white Big Top, free to the public. A carnival midway surrounds the center ring, along with resplendent, state-of-the-art video games. Hickory Pit Lounge features live entertainment: Kenn Pettiford: Vocals/Keyboard 7 p.m.–midnight, Friday–Tuesday. (800-648-5010)

Eldorado—The Eldorado's Cabaret has been named Reno's No. 1 lounge for the past five years. Danny Marona 10/17–11/4, tickets \$13; Rob Hanna impersonates Rod Stewart 11/7–11/26 and 12/22–12/31, tickets \$8–\$12; *My Brother and Me* 12/25–1/7; two-drink minimum. Keno Tournament 11/5–11/7; Golden Dollar Slot Marathon 12/10–12/12. Major expansion project has added a new 12-story "Spa Tower" with 36 more luxury suites. The 12,400-square-foot convention center now features a lobby and ballroom area. See the first microbrewery in a hotel casino: The Brew Brothers on south end of skywalk. Eight restaurants to suit every taste. (800-648-5966)

Flamingo Hilton Reno—Flamingo Showroom: American Superstars—ongoing Sunday–Friday: Nightly at 9 p.m., Saturdays at 8 and 10 p.m.; Showspot Lounge: Kat Wilson "Vamp" 10/30–11/13, Sonny Turner 11/14–11/27, Gary & Sandy 11/28–12/31; Top of the Flamingo: Terry Thompson 10/10–12/18; Tournaments: Pool Billiards Tournament 11/6–11/12, Roulette Tournament 11/10–11/13. Show prices \$9.95, children under 12 free. Package prices: Food Fantasy Buffet and American Superstars \$11, Top of the Flamingo and American Superstars Sunday–Friday \$18. Showroom closed Tuesdays. (702-785-7210)

John Ascuaga's Nugget—Celebrity Showroom: Herb Reed & the Platters, Mark Schiff 11/2–11/15; Michael Martin Murphey, Colen Sweeten 11/16–11/25; Room Dark 11/26–12/26. Show price of \$15 includes two drinks; Rose Ballroom: Engelbert Humperdinck 11/24–11/25, \$25; Casino Cabaret: Wild at Heart 10/23–11/4, Steel Breeze 10/24–1/5, Stew Stewart 11/6–11/18, Penny Gilley 11/7–11/19, Motifs 11/20–12/2, Louis Fontaine and the Rockets 11/21–12/3. Shows complimentary. (800-843-2427)

Peppermill—The hotel's the star at the Peppermill. In early 1996, Peppermill will expand to 1,070 rooms and Reno's only super suites. Also featured are new restaurants and a world of other exciting extras. (800-648-6992)

Silver Legacy—Largest working indoor mining machine simulates Nevada's Comstock-era mining process and produces actual coins. Mackay Silver Collection is on display courtesy of UNR. Five restaurants, including Sterling's Seafood Steakhouse and Fairchild's Oyster Bar. Champagne brunch on weekends at Sterling's. Specials at Fairchild's include New Orleans-style shrimp Creole. Silver Baron's Bar and Lounge: Wally Jones and Perry Joe Schirmer, a banjo and piano duet of ragtime and Dixie. Thursday–Monday 12 p.m.–6 p.m. Gary Xavier "The Original Piano Man" nightly except Monday 6 p.m.–midnight. (800-687-7733)