



The Mirage

Veteran Computer Whiz Clement Mok, No Stranger to Creating American Icons, Tries His Hand at American Kitsch With a Sleek Identity for a Las Vegas Resort.

They do things differently in Las Vegas.

San Francisco-based Clement Mok designs found out just how differently when asked to design a logo for the Mirage, which enjoyed a brief reign as the world's largest hotel when it opened in 1989. Mok, who gained fame at Apple Computer before he formed his own firm in 1988, took the job to broaden his firm's experience beyond computer-related subjects. In a way it was a proverbial baptism by fire, a fire much more real than that spewed by the Mirage's miniature volcano — only one of its unusual attractions.

While most hotel developers strive for an elegant, understated identity or a mass-market "sleep-cheap" look, the Mirage needed something different. "The unexpected was the criteria," Mok says. Las Vegas hotels demand unique and flamboyant identities closely tied to their often unique and flamboyant owners — in this case developer Steve Wynn, who hoped to accomplish for the family market what he'd done with his adults-only Golden Nugget casino on the infamous Las Vegas Strip.

Las Vegas, Mok says, has its own design aesthetic. His problem was interpreting that aesthetic. "How do you integrate something that is bold and appropriate in what is essentially American kitsch?"

Another problem was timing. While most hotel developers work with designers for months or even years to come up with a mark, sometimes engaging a firm before ground is ever broken or purchased, in Las Vegas little details like identity and marketing occasionally get overlooked. When the Mirage's market-

ing firm (hired only eight months before the \$600 million hotel was set to open) invited Mok to submit designs, the deadline was only weeks away. The structure was built, the rooms were being furnished. Matchbooks, soap, towels, stationery and hundreds of other items to be printed, embroidered or embossed with the non-existent logo had to be ordered. Four immense illuminated signs, in a typeface never to be used again, were already lighting the Nevada sky.

Mok had three weeks to submit his first designs. Other firms — some well-known New York groups — had already failed the Wynn review. Mok and tow staff members sent a range of designs based on an art deco approach the advertisements were supposed to take.

"Then they switched the approach totally," Mok says. The developers wanted a second round of sketches, but no art deco. Mok turned to photographs of the project and took a looser, natural approach. In about a week, he sent drawings based on the Mirage and its attractions — a volcano, fish, the sun, birds and palm trees. With more than 400 palm trees around the property, Mok says, the subject was obvious.

And palm trees were the winner. Wynn approved a logo with five of them, but asked for a change in the type. Mok had recommended a brushed look, but worked up a new logo that seemed as if it might have been dashed off with a ballpoint pen. Again, Mok had a winner. And another deadline.

After Wynn made his choice, Mok had a week and a half to deliver the final color ren-



dering and two weeks after that to complete a standards manual to govern the logo's application on collateral material of all kinds. "This was in early June," Mok says, "and the hotel opened at Thanksgiving."

Though Mok and his staff did all the initial sketches by hand, once Wynn made his choice the designers switched to a computer to work out the final proportions and colors. "We basically used Adobe Streamline for the illustration and did all the color studies and the corporate style guide through that. We used Illustrator to do the staging and color issues. The computer is our production and development tool, not the concept tool."

Mok says he didn't worry about keeping the logo simple or modifying it for various uses. Instead of creating an unchangeable logo, he tried for what he call "rigid flexibility," a balance between a necessary consistency and unbending rule.

"The Mirage is an adult theme park," Mok says. "You need a certain consistency for corporate communications, but for application in a theme park I honestly feel that the rules can be loosened up quite a bit."

"And there are really some stupid rules about legibility, when in fact you can look at some very complicated logos which, though they don't read like a Saul Bass icon you can read from a half mile away, do reduce quite well."

The most difficult part of applying the logo turned out to be not the width of the lines or loss of details in reproduction, but color. Because of Mok's association with Apple, Wynn expected a lot of color in the logo, and

Mok gave it to him. The treatment also meshed well with the hotel's tropical theme. But the five PMS colors plus black that Mok spec'd proved a problem for several reasons. Cost was one, and a four- or six-color treatment wasn't always available on all items. Some manufacturers could only apply a limited number of their own proprietary colors.

Mok worked out more than 25 possible color combinations, including six-color, four-color, two-color, one-color and black-and-white treatments. In addition to combinations of the six project colors, he also approved gold for some instances, such as the hotel's ashtrays. "The windows were tinted gold, so it made sense," Mok says.

The time frame prompted Mok to confine the manual to colors and proportions. "There was no way to address everything on a technical level, so we addressed the logo on a philosophical and conceptual level," Mok says. He hoped to help the Mirage's in-house design staff understand the principles behind the seemingly simple design that would help them make difficult application choices.

Though the Mirage project gave Mok a chance to broaden his portfolio, it wasn't the lucrative sort of job the designer is used to. "I broke even in the end," Mok says, admitting that he had to tone down production and presentation costs. He charged \$10,000 for the first sketches, \$10,000 for the second sketches and \$5,000 for the final pass. The standards manual, which included 20 pages of reproduction art, added \$15,000 to his fee. A few smaller jobs such as press kits, gaming guides and sketches for casino chips, added another

By Gail Deibler Finke



Breaking new ground

Web legend Clement Mok turns his design genius to The Examiner's Bay to Breakers

\$10,000, bringing the total to \$50,000.

Not a bad deal, some would say — but then, Wynn paid almost \$375,000 apiece for the hotel's four signs (one reason the original logo still twinkles in thousands of tivoli bulbs).

The Mirage's souvenir shop is one of the city's largest. Every day, guests from the hotel's 3,500 rooms take home bathrobes, cups, T-shirts and other items bearing the Mirage logo. The Mirage makes a killing — and Mok doesn't see why he shouldn't get a little.

Getting royalties for design work is a new idea, one that Mok recognizes isn't likely to go over well with Wynn, or any of his other clients. But that kind of thinking is what has made Mok a success. And it'll go over anywhere, it'll go over in Las Vegas.