

= Desert Inn =

The Desert Inn , also known as the D.I. , was a casino hotel on the Las Vegas Strip in Paradise , Nevada , which operated from April 24 , 1950 , to August 28 , 2000 . Designed by architect Hugh Taylor and interior design by Jac Lessman , it was the fifth resort to open on the Strip . It was situated between Desert Inn Road and Sands Avenue .

The Desert Inn opened with 300 rooms and the Sky Room restaurant , headed by a chef formerly of the Ritz Paris , which once had the highest vantage point on the Las Vegas Strip . The casino , at 2 @, @ 400 square feet (220 m2) , was one of the largest in Nevada at the time . The 9 @-@ storey St. Andrews Tower was completed during the first renovation in 1963 , and the 14 @-@ storey Augusta Tower became the Desert Inn 's main tower when it was completed in 1978 along with the seven @-@ story Wimbledon Tower . The Palms Tower was completed in 1997 with the second and final renovation . The Desert Inn was the first hotel in Las Vegas to feature a fountain at the entrance . In 1997 , the Desert Inn underwent a \$ 200 million renovation and expansion , but after it was purchased for \$ 270 million by Steve Wynn in 2000 , he decided to demolish it and build a new hotel and resort . The remaining towers of the Desert Inn were imploded in 2004 . Today , the Wynn and Encore stands where the hotel once stood .

The original performance venue at the Desert Inn was the Painted Desert Room , later the Crystal Room , which opened in 1950 with 450 seats . Frank Sinatra made his Las Vegas debut there on September 13 , 1951 and became a regular performer . The property included an 18 @-@ hole golf course which hosted the PGA Tour Tournament of Champions from 1953 to 1966 . The golf course is now a part of the Wynn resort .

= = History = =

The hotel was situated at 3145 Las Vegas Boulevard South , between Desert Inn Road and Sands Avenue . The original name for many years was Wilbur Clark 's Desert Inn . Wilbur Clark , described by Frank Sinatra biographer James Kaplan as a " onetime San Diego bellhop and Reno craps dealer " , originally began building the resort with his brother in 1947 with \$ 250 @, @ 000 , but he ran out of money . Author Hal Rothman notes that " for nearly two years the framed structure sat in the hot desert sun , looking more like an ancient relic than a nascent casino " . Clark approached the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for investment , but they were struggling financially . In 1949 , he met with Moe Dalitz , the head of the notorious Cleveland gang , the Mayfield Road Mob , and Dalitz agreed to fund 75 % of the project with \$ 1 @. @ 3 million , and construction resumed . Much of the financing came from the American National Insurance Company (ANICO) , though Clark became the public frontman of the resort while Dalitz remained quietly in the background as the principal owner . The resort would eventually be renamed Desert Inn , and was affectionately called the " D.I. " by Las Vegas locals and regular guests .

The Desert Inn opened formally on April 24 , 1950 , at a two @-@ day gala which was heavily publicized nationally . Journalists from all of the major newspapers and magazines were invited , and the hotel paid \$ 5 @, @ 700 to cover air tickets . 150 invitations were sent out by Clark to VIPs with a credit limit of \$ 10 @, @ 000 . About half the attendees at the opening were from California and Nevada . At the opening show in the Painted Desert Room were performers such as Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy , Vivian Blaine , Pat Patrick , The Donn Arden Dancers , Van Heflin , Abbott and Costello and the Desert Inn Orchestra , led by Ray Noble . In attendance were a number of mafiosi , including Black Bill Tocco , Joe Massei , Sam Maceo , Peter Licavoli and Frank Malone in a gala which Barbara Greenspun believed marked the beginning of heavy involvement of the mafia in the development of Las Vegas . Sidney Korshak was one of its early investors .

The Desert Inn became known for its " opulence " and top @-@ notch service . The first manager of the Desert Inn had previously worked as the manager at the Clift Hotel in San Francisco . Lew and Edie Wasserman were frequent guests of the hotel . During the 1950s , the hotel often hosted the Duke and Duchess of Windsor , Winston Churchill , Adlai Stevenson , Senator John F. Kennedy , and former President Harry S. Truman .

In 1959 , Lawrence Wien , owner of New York City 's Plaza Hotel purchased the hotel , but signed a management deal for Clark to remain as manager . In the early 1960s , the mafia @-@ financed casino hotels of the Las Vegas Strip and Nevada came under close scrutiny by the FBI , and they placed increased pressure on the Nevada Gaming Control Board to force the mobsters out of Las Vegas . After Sam Giancana was spotted on the premises of Frank Sinatra 's Cal Neva Lodge & Casino at Lake Tahoe , his gambling license was removed by the Board and he was forced to sell up and forfeit his share in the Sands Hotel and Casino . The Desert Inn faced similar scrutiny by the FBI , attracting controversy at the same time for the involvement of Dalitz and his mobster associates , but simultaneously called for the prosecution of the FBI for illegal wiretapping . In 1964 , Clark sold his remaining share in the hotel to Dalitz and business associates Morris Kleinman , Thomas McGinty and Sam Tucker . He died of a heart attack the following year . The bell captain of the Desert Inn , Jack Butler , remembered Clark : " Wilbur was the greatest guy . Without him this town never would 've got off the ground . Everyone came into the club just to see him and he was all over the postcards . He was the only boss who would agree to have his picture taken " .

The Desert Inn 's most famous guest , businessman Howard Hughes , arrived on Thanksgiving Day 1966 , renting the hotel 's entire top two floors . After staying past his initial ten @-@ day reservation , he was asked to leave in December so that the resort could accommodate the high rollers who were expected for New Year 's Eve . Instead of leaving , Hughes started negotiations to buy the Desert Inn . On March 27 , 1967 , Hughes purchased the resort from Dalitz for \$ 6 @.@ 2 million in cash and \$ 7 million in loans . This was the first of many Las Vegas resort purchases by Hughes , including the Sands Hotel and Casino (\$ 14 @.@ 6 million) and the Frontier Hotel and Casino (\$ 23 million) . However , Hughes refused to include the PGA Tour Tournament of Champions in the deal , so Dalitz moved the tournament to his Stardust Resort and Casino in 1967 and 1968 .

The reclusive Hughes continued to live in his penthouse suite at the Desert Inn for four years , never leaving his 250 square feet (23 m2) bedroom . Usually unclothed , he spent his time " negotiating purchases and business deals with the curtains drawn and windows and doors sealed shut with tape " , and did not allow anyone from the hotel staff to come in and clean his room . On the eve of Thanksgiving 1970 , he was removed from his room on a stretcher and flown to the Bahamas . After Hughes 's death in 1976 , the hotel remained under the Summa Corporation , who completed the extensive renovation that he had ordered . Summa sold the hotel to Kirk Kerkorian and the Tracinda Corporation in 1986 , and it became known as the MGM Desert Inn . Kerkorian sold it to ITT @-@ Sheraton in 1993 for \$ 160 million .

= = = Modern history = = =

In 1992 , Frank Sinatra celebrated his 77th birthday at the hotel in an event which generated much media attention . Dick Taylor , the CEO of public relations firm Rogers & Cowan recalled : " We had the stars assemble in the casino 's presidential suite and then took them in limos to the entrance of the hotel , where the press and hundreds of fans were gathered , like a Hollywood movie premiere . The stars were interviewed on the red carpet and in they went to the famed Crystal Room . It was a very big deal . "

In 1997 , the Desert Inn underwent a \$ 200 million renovation of the Augusta Tower and St. Andrews Tower and expansion , with the building and completion of the Palms Tower and it was sold the following year to Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide . Due to losing money , Starwood immediately put the hotel back up for sale , and sold it to Sun International Hotels Ltd. on May 19 , 1999 for \$ 275 million . That year , Sinatra 's and the Rat Pack 's estate managers , Sheffield Enterprises Inc . , sued the Desert Inn , claiming an infringement of rights in their use of Sinatra 's name and persona in its advertising and sales , including the words " Frank " , " Ol ' Blue Eyes , " " the chairman of the Board " and " The Rat Pack " . Sinatra 's estate specifically objected to their use in " billboard advertising , marquees , alcoholic beverages and wine menus , and on the front and back of tee @-@ shirts and caps at its gift shop " and alleged photographs of Sinatra and his signature on the walls behind the bar near the entrance to the Starlight Lounge of the Desert Inn .

The Desert Inn celebrated its 50th anniversary on April 24 , 2000 . Celebrations were held for a

week and a celebrity golf tournament was held with the likes of Robert Loggia , Chris O 'Donnell , Robert Urich , Susan Anton , Vincent Van Patten and Tony Curtis . As part of the festivities , a time capsule was buried in a granite burial chamber on April 25 , to be reopened on April 25 , 2050 . Three days later , on April 27 , the resort was purchased for \$ 270 million by Steve Wynn . Wynn closed the Desert Inn at 2 : 00 a.m. on August 28 , 2000 .

On October 23 , 2001 , the Augusta Tower , the Desert Inn 's southernmost building , was imploded to make room for a mega resort that Wynn planned to build . Coming a month after the September 11 attacks , the implosion was marked with less fanfare than previous Las Vegas demolition spectacles due to its similarity to the implosion of the Twin Towers . Originally intended to be named Le Rêve , the new project opened as Wynn Las Vegas . The remaining two towers , the St. Andrews Tower and Palms Tower were both temporarily used as the Wynn Gallery , spanning 1 @, @ 316 square feet (122 @. @ 3 m2) to display some of Wynn 's art collection . The St. Andrews Tower and Palms Tower were finally imploded on November 16 , 2004 .

= = Architecture and features = =

The initial hotel , a \$ 6 @. @ 5 million property set in 200 acres , was designed by Hugh Taylor who was hired after Wilbur Clark and Wayne McAllister could not agree on the design . Interiors were by noted New York architect Jac Lessman . The property conveyed the image of a " southwestern spa " that was " half ranch house , half nightclub " . It was built of " cinder blocks but trimmed with sandstone and finished throughout the inside with redwood " . The logo of the hotel was a Joshua tree cactus . The driveway into the hotel passed under an " old @-@ fashioned ranch sign " bearing the name Wilbur Clark 's Desert Inn in scripted letters . The Desert Inn was the first hotel in Las Vegas to feature a fountain at the entrance . A " Dancing Waters " show involved the fountain jets choreographed to music .

The interior of the hotel was finished in redwood with flagstone flooring . The public space included a registration area , a casino , two bars , a coffee shop , a restaurant , various commercial shops and services , and a broadcasting station for K @-@ RAM radio . Guest rooms were located in wings situated behind the main building , surrounding the figure @-@ eight swimming pool . The hotel originally had 300 rooms , each outfitted with air conditioning with individual thermostats .

The lounge was located in a three @-@ story , glass @-@ sided tower at the front of the hotel known as the Sky Room , which was the largest structure on the Strip at the time of its construction and commanded views of the mountains and desert all around , as well as overlooked the " Dancing Waters " feature . The Sky Room restaurant was headed by a chef formerly of the Ritz Paris .

The original performance venue at the Desert Inn was the 450 seat Painted Desert Room , later the Crystal Room , which opened in 1950 with 450 seats . Charles Cobelle created the handpainted murals , and a " band car " was used to move the orchestra within the showroom . Next door was a restaurant , the Cactus Room . The Kachina Doll Ranch was a supervised play area for guests ' children . The hotel had a ladies salon and health club from the outset . Another performance venue at the hotel was the Lady Luck Lounge .

The hotel first underwent renovation in the early 1960s , during which the St. Andrews Tower was built in 1963 . In the 1970s , the hotel underwent a \$ 54 @-@ million renovation under Howard Hughes , which resumed under the responsibility of the Summa Corporation after his death in 1976 . The 14 @-@ story Augusta Tower became the Desert Inn 's main tower when it was completed in 1978 . The seven @-@ story Wimbledon Tower contained duplex suites , and resembled a modern version of a Mayan pyramid . It overlooked the golf course and was built at the same time , bringing the total room count to 825 . By 1978 , most of the 1950s structures on the property had been replaced with modern buildings and the property was renamed the Desert Inn and Country Club . It featured full country club amenities open to guests of the hotel , including a club house , driving range , pro shop , restaurant and lounge at the golf club ; 10 tournament @-@ class outdoor tennis courts ; and a 18 @, @ 000 feet (5 @, @ 500 m) spa . Three restaurants were added : the " small , intimate " Monte Carlo Room , the " gourmet " Portofino Room , and the Ho Wan Chinese restaurant . At the time of its sale to ITT @-@ Sheraton in 1993 , the Desert Inn had the largest frontage of any

casino hotel on the Las Vegas Strip , measuring 1 @, @ 700 feet (520 m) feet .

In 1997 , the Desert Inn underwent a \$ 200 million renovation and expansion by Steelman Partners , giving it a new Mediterranean @-@ looking exterior with white stucco and red clay tile roofs . The room count was reduced to 715 to provide more luxurious accommodations . The nine @-@ story Palm Tower was completed , the lagoon @-@ style pool was added , and notable changes were made to the Grand Lobby Atrium , Starlight Lounge , Villas Del Lago , and new golf shop and country club . The seven @-@ story lobby , fully built in marble , was also a major part of the renovation .

= = = Casino = = =

At its opening in 1950 , the casino , at 2 @, @ 400 square feet (220 m2) , was one of the largest in Nevada at the time . The windowless room included " five crap tables , three roulette wheels , four black jack tables and 75 slot machines " , together with a sportsbook . Hundreds of coin @-@ operated gambling machines ? including slot machines , video poker , 21 , and keno ? were installed during the 1978 renovation . The casino acquired a reputation for attracting the high rollers . On January 27 , 2000 , the Megabucks jackpot record for Las Vegas was broken when \$ 34 @, @ 955 @, @ 489 was won by an anonymous gambler at the Desert Inn , playing a bank of six Megabucks machines near the hotel 's coffee shop .

= = = Golf course and country club = = =

The 18 @-@ hole , par @-@ 72 Desert Inn Golf Club opened in 1952 . Initially , Dalitz had pushed the idea of opening a golf course next to the hotel with an entrance off the Strip , which would be accessible to other hotels and boost the city 's profile as a resort destination . When other hotel owners rejected this idea , Dalitz built the course on the hotel premises . He also opened an outdoor dining area , to accommodate golfers and swimmers who might prefer a more informal atmosphere . The course hosted the PGA Tour Tournament of Champions from 1953 to 1966 , attracting professional golfers such as Sam Snead , Arnold Palmer , and Jack Nicklaus . Allard Roen was director of the tournament for many years , and was instrumental in breaking down the racial barrier on the Strip . He broke the all @-@ white club convention by permitting Sammy Davis , Jr. to play on the course . From 1958 it hosted the Golf Cup Golf Tournament , the largest tournament in the world for amateur golfers .

According to the Las Vegas Sun , the course " held the distinction of being the only golf course in the United States to have annually hosted three championship tour events ? the PGA Tour 's Las Vegas Invitational , the Las Vegas Senior Classic and the LPGA Las Vegas International " . The Panasonic Las Vegas Invitational , now the Las Vegas Invitational , returned to the Desert Inn in 1983 , and became known as the wealthiest PGA event in the world . It has since been won by the likes of Fuzzy Zoeller , Curtis Strange , Greg Norman , and Paul Azinger . The Las Vegas Senior Classic event at the Desert Inn was added to the Senior PGA Tour in 1986 , and has since been won by Bruce Crampton (1986) , Al Geiberger , who equaled the course record at the time of 62 (1987) , Larry Mowry (1988) and Lee Trevino (1992) .

Wilbur Clark was the first to build a home on the golf course in the 1950s . Additional homes were added to the Desert Inn Country Club Estates from the 1960s on . During his ownership of the hotel , Howard Hughes built 100 residential units on the property . After Steve Wynn purchased the resort in 2000 and announced that the real estate was too valuable to leave as a golf course , homeowners were forced to sell their properties to Wynn and his property developer Irwin Molasky . Molasky bought homes closest to the golf course for \$ 2 million each , and homes on the perimeter of the resort for \$ 900 @, @ 000 to \$ 1 @. @ 2 million each . The Junior League of Las Vegas convinced Wynn to save one house from demolition and moved it to a lot in downtown Las Vegas to serve as its headquarters . This was the Morelli House , designed by architect Hugh Taylor for Antonio Morelli , a " rare example of modernist architecture in Las Vegas " . The house was subsequently listed on the City and State historic registers .

= = Performances = =

Almost every major star of the latter half of the 20th century played at the Desert Inn . Frank Sinatra made his Las Vegas debut at the Desert Inn on September 13 , 1951 . He later said of it : " Wilbur Clark gave me my first job in Las Vegas . That was in 1951 . For six bucks you got a filet mignon dinner and me " . Noël Coward performed at the Inn on one occasion for an entire month . In 1954 , after a performance at the Desert Inn , Betty Hutton announced one of her several retirements . Eddie Fisher was heckled by a disguised Elizabeth Taylor during a 1961 performance , in a year which saw Dinah Shore booked for her fourth performance and debut Vegas performances at the Desert Inn by both Benny Goodman and Rosemary Clooney . In 1979 , Jet magazine noted that Wayne Newton was " enthroned " at the Desert inn as king of entertainment idols " , earning \$ 10 million a year , which made him the highest @-@ paid nightclub performer of all time . Other performers in its famous " crystal showroom " over the years included Patti Page , Ted Lewis , Joe E. Lewis , Bobby Darin , Jimmy Durante , Tony Bennett , Paul Anka , Dionne Warwick , Louise Mandrell , and more .

Louis Prima and Keely Smith recorded their 1960 Dot Records LP On Stage live at the Desert Inn . Bobby Darin 's famous album Live ! At the Desert Inn was recorded at the hotel in February 1971 . In 1992 , a week @-@ long celebration of Frank Sinatra 's 77th birthday at the Desert Inn was held and later in January it was announced that Sinatra , Liza Minnelli , Paul Anka , Shirley MacLaine , Dean Martin , Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme had all signed a two @-@ year engagement agreeing to perform at least five weeks annually .

= = Film and television = =

The 1960 film version of Ocean 's 11 was shot at the Desert Inn . It is one of the five Las Vegas hotels robbed on New Year 's Eve by the characters played by Frank Sinatra , Dean Martin and others in the film . Orson Welles ' film F for Fake covers , among other topics , the scandal of a fake biography of Howard Hughes , and the billionaire 's Desert Inn residence is illustrated by Welles . In the 1985 film Lost in America , Julie Hagerty 's character Linda Howard loses the couple 's " nest egg " at the Desert Inn , leading to a memorable scene in which Albert Brooks ' character David Howard tries to convince the Casino manager (Garry Marshall) to give them their money back . David , an ad man , proposes a campaign centered around the generosity of the casino in his case , replete with a jingle : " The Desert Inn has heart ... The Desert Inn has heart . " The opening scene to the 1993 film Sister Act 2 : Back in the Habit took place in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel . The Desert Inn saw its last commercial use in the 2001 film Rush Hour 2 , shortly before it was imploded . It was converted into the " Red Dragon " , an Asian @-@ themed casino set .

The hotel served as the primary backdrop for the TV show Vega \$ which aired on ABC from 1978 to 1981 . The 1980s Aaron Spelling soap opera Dynasty included footage of the hotel , and use of the Presidential Suite . The hit 1980s NBC TV series , Remington Steele , filmed their 60th Las Vegas @-@ set episode at the inn , where both the exterior and interior are shown regularly throughout the episode .

= = Legacy = =

The closure of the Desert Inn in 2000 and subsequent demolition was unpopular with many as it seemed to mark the end of old Las Vegas . Historian Michael Green stated : " To a lot of people outside of Las Vegas , these two places (the Desert Inn and the Sands) really meant Las Vegas . These were the places that represent the images of Las Vegas , in a far greater way than the Dunes , the Aladdin , the Hacienda and the Landmark " . Robert Maheu , Howard Hughes 's publicist for many years , remarked that the " Desert Inn was the gem of Las Vegas " . The hotel remained popular with locals until the end , as the heavily tourism @-@ driven modern Las Vegas emerged in the 1990s .

Desert Inn Road , an east @-@ west Las Vegas Valley roadway , still exists . It is the only major east @-@ west surface street on the Strip that does not connect to Las Vegas Boulevard .