

# Old neon signs glow again in Las Vegas project

Las Vegas – Step through the gate and you enter a world of giants.

A towering pool player readies for a shot that's never taken. Around the corner, some errant Cinderella has left behind a silver slipper, size 600.

This is the Neon Boneyard, where Las Vegas' past awaits preservation.

Sin City, of course, isn't big on history. It regularly implodes casinos to clear the way for the next big creation. But about 100 signs have gotten temporary reprieves from the scrap heap.

Las Vegas' Neon Museum doesn't have a permanent home. But it has restored 11 signs, which now light up the night in a gallery of sorts near Fremont Street.

The others await their fate at the three-acre Neon Boneyard near downtown. They can be seen by appointment on a guided tour, which runs USD 50.

Visitors find that the signs retain their beauty even while at rest. You can see brushstrokes on the handmade creations, most of which were constructed by the Young Electric Sign Co.

The Silver Slipper was modeled on a shoe worn by the sign company's secretary. It's the next sign to be restored, at an estimated cost of USD 200,000.

The Neon Museum project started 10 years ago with the restoration of the sparkling Hacienda Horse and Rider sign. It had marked the old Hacienda hotel, which was destroyed to make way for the Mandalay Bay casino.

Soon followed a genie's lamp from the Aladdin Hotel, a red-glowing milkman from a local dairy, and an Indian. Dating to 1940, the latter is the oldest restored sign and once marked the Chief Hotel Court.

These signs are an important part of history, said Melanie Coffee, who works for the museum. They were designed for a new motor age and were meant to be read while driving by at 50 mph.

Although casinos now use Jumbotron computer screens to flash their messages, neon still has its place. The new Wynn casino has about 80,000 square feet of neon signs, Ms. Coffee says.

But the golden age of neon lives on downtown.

Visitors can marvel at giant martinis and watch a wine bottle empty as liquid (depicted in spaghetti-like tubes of neon) seems to pour into a glass. Around the corner, the Flame Restaurant's sign flashes a curved arrow, meant to lure diners.

Neonopolis, a downtown entertainment area, also has vintage signs gathered from around the country, including one from the Strand Theatre in Shreveport, La.

The signs recall a simpler age.

For contrast, stroll over to Fremont Street.

There, visitors crowd the pedestrian thoroughfare to stare at a three-block-long screen, which comes alive nightly with computerized images and music. It's quite a show. But it's worlds away from a neon Indian chief staring down passing cars in the middle of the night.