

MotorCity aims to be casino classic

One of the first rules of casino design, experts say, is that the gambling halls must look like places where games of chance are played.

The new MotorCity Casino won't break that rule.

Right now, the 400-room hotel and 100,000 square feet of gambling space are just steel girders and concrete pillars, but over the weekend, the casino's owner offered the first glimpse of what the facility will look like.

The temporary Detroit casino has operated since 1999 in historic brick-and-stone buildings once home to the Wonder Bread bakery. The permanent one being built couldn't look more different.

All sleek lines and gleaming steel, the new MotorCity Casino will rise 17 stories on the western edge of downtown near Grand River and the Lodge, in a lot adjacent to the existing casino. The hotel and casino are scheduled to open by the end of 2007.

Chip Foose, a world-famous muscle car and hot rod designer and host of the Learning Channel's popular „Overhaulin' “ show, has signed on as a design consultant.

The existing casino has automotive touches inside the building, but the new hotel and casino appear to be tomorrow's take on Detroit's automotive history.

A low-slung outside corridor brings forth images of a '50s roadside diner. A curving roofline reflects the shape of classic fenders.

„This new, modern design creates an architectural structure

that mirrors many of the characteristics of automotive styling that have become very much a part of our local, national and global automotive prominence," said Gregg Solomon, chief executive officer of the MotorCity Casino.

„The design is the manifestation of a collaborative effort that honors that which is historically endearing about the city, as well as celebrating how Detroit continues to evolve.“

MotorCity plans to add a lounge with live entertainment on the top floor of the hotel. The hotel would be connected by walkways to the existing parking structure and casino, which is scheduled for remodeling.

„The outdoor look is extremely important. The first thing you've got to do is get them in the door, and then you sell them on the gambling," said Bill Friedman, president of the Friedman Management Group in Nevada, which specializes in managing, designing and marketing casinos.

„From the moment a person can first see a casino, it's very important on how that view is set up. It must look easy to enter, even if it's not.

„It has to have an appearance that this is a real gambling place," added Friedman, who wrote „Designing Casinos to Dominate the Competition.“

The hotel tower will include a spa, shops, restaurants, a lounge and additional parking. The food-service building will be remodeled and expanded to include conference meeting space and a 1,200-seat theater.

Marian Ilitch became the casino's sole owner in 2005. She had owned a 25% stake, with the Mandalay Resort Group being the majority owner.

MGM Grand – which owns the MGM Grand Detroit Casino – purchased the group in 2004, forcing the sale of the MotorCity

Casino. Michigan law does not allow a single company to own two casinos, and Ilitch was the winning bidder for the MotorCity Casino.

Ilitch cofounded the Little Caesar Enterprises Inc. pizza chain with her husband, Mike.

The family controls Ilitch Holdings Inc., the \$ 900-million organization that owns Little Caesars, the Detroit Tigers, the Detroit Red Wings and other Detroit business interests. She divested herself from an interest in the Tigers because Major League Baseball rules prohibit interests in gambling enterprises while owning a team.

In 2005, the casino's revenues were \$ 432 million. The general contractor for the \$ 275-million hotel and casino project is Michigan Industrial Group, headquartered in Detroit.

Construction also is under way for the MGM Grand Detroit's permanent casino and hotel, which is scheduled to open in 2008. A 400-room hotel and additional gambling space at the Greektown Casino should be finished by September 2008.