

AP Exchange: Las Vegas casino bids adieu to classic carpet

Written by Administrator

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LAS VEGAS (AP) — Countless were the tears spilled here — both in joy and sadness.

Bottomless were the toppled drinks.

Immeasurable were the scattered ashes of celebratory cigars and bummed cigarettes.

Each was a scar. A scratch on a favorite record. A blemish beneath the feet of millions who walked across this worn pattern of gold leaves and red roses.

On Sept. 27, El Cortez replaced the casino carpeting. It was 13.

The gaudy, beloved and timeless carpet's end has left Las Vegas locals in mourning, steeped in longing for nights passed in its quiet, comforting presence.

"Every day a sign or some beautiful, amazing element of Old Vegas disappears," said Holly Rae Vaughn, an artist who spent her early twenties at El Cortez, where the rug was a familiar face, a backdrop for many sun-down-to-sun-up adventures.

A hideout for hip, young locals and the retirees who ignore them, the Downtown hotel is a low-key clubhouse far from the opulence of The Strip.

In this town of constant demolition and reinvention, El Cortez is a rare time capsule. Preserved there is a postcard spirit of the 1940s, when gangster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel and mob accountant Meyer Lansky owned the property.

Las Vegas is a place where people get hurt if they get too attached. Change is the safest bet.

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Cool detachment is the wisest.

“I’ve become kind of numb to it,” Vaughn said. “It can be really exhausting caring too much all the time.”

In memory of the carpeting she fancied most, Vaughn crafted a chunky, square lapel pin with the same pattern to preserve its memory for future generations — or those simply curious about what once was.

“I found some solace in keeping it alive,” she said.

A wedding minister on the side, Vaughn one time married a couple in the El Cortez casino. A random stranger playing a slot machine signed as a witness. The marriage unfolded between all those gold leaves and red roses.

When she learned of the impending demise, Vaughn took her film camera to shoot the carpet in the yellow-tinted light filtering through the casino doors — a few final snapshots of this city’s latest disappearing act.

The Brintons carpet was woven in Spain. El Cortez installed it in June 2007.

That same year, Apple sold the first iPhone. The last episode of “The Sopranos” aired. Kurt Vonnegut died at 84.

The average life expectancy of a casino carpet is five to six years. This one lasted 13.

Carpet years are like dog years. For every human year, tack on a few more for extra wear and tear.

That means if the El Cortez rug was Wayne Newton's Rhodesian ridgeback dog, it would be 82.

El Cortez bosses knew the carpet would be missed, but there was no saving it.

"The carpet was definitely tired," general manager Adam Wiesberg said. "It gets harder to get it to shine."

Local artist Alexander Meschi was there the night the carpet died.

He felt the cruel grip of nostalgia, a flashback to Parlour Bar nights, when he spent many a Happy Hour in conversations on creativity, purpose, moonshot dreams.

"The hub," Meschi called it. "The hideout."

A melting pot of everyone and anyone — both locals and tourists — passing through El Cortez and across that carpet, an eavesdropping companion that kept every secret safe.

Meschi fought the rising sentimentality and spent a few moments being present with the gold leaves and red roses — a muse to many, a friend to all.

"It's symbolic for all of the day and the night," he said.

El Cortez tossed the old carpet in the trash. But somewhere in the back of the house is a fresh roll the hotel kept for patching holes.

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With no use now, the carpet roll is a record.

Proof the gold leaves and red roses lived long and well, surrounded by loyal friends and many visitors, before leaving Las Vegas as quietly as it arrived.

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