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Getting back to nature

NatureMaker brings the great outdoors inside the casino with its life-like steel tree designs

By Allen Grant

It's all part of the "Wow factor" every hotel, restaurant or casino owner wants to create, so guests or clients leave feeling overwhelmed and amazed by its appeal. From Hawaiian-style restaurants to casino projects resembling European cities, business owners of all types are keen to the advantages of theming their product to attract interest, spark word-of-mouth discussion and create repeat business.

Carlsbad, California-based NatureMaker is helping both commercial businesses and even private residents create the unique-themed structures that set their establishment apart from the competition.

A leading creator of decorative, hand-crafted sculpted trees, NatureMaker grabbed the attention of executives at several casino properties and has continued to grow its client list with the simple mission of creating life-like sculptures to help bring the outdoors indoors.

"Our philosophy is to bring nature indoors," said NatureMaker President Gary Hanick. "We have a passion and

"Every project is as individual as nature itself. No two projects are the same. Everything we create is custom designed and one-of-a-kind."

—Gary Hanick,
president, NatureMaker

love for what we do, and we try to deliver more than the client expects."

Hanick said his company's clients strive for individuality with unique pieces of art, and that's exactly what NatureMaker provides.

"Every project is as individual as nature itself," he said. "No two projects are the same. Everything we create is custom designed and one-of-a-kind."

A 'natural' background

Founded in the 1983, NatureMaker

VENDOR PROFILE



Bennet Adams and Gary Hanick,
co-founders of NatureMaker.

was created by the business plan of Hanick along with the vision of prominent sculptor and naturalist Bennett Adams. In its modest beginnings, the company spent most of the 1980s creating interior-design steel sculptures for retail-industry businesses.

With more than 40 years experience as an artist, Adams found his inspiration for trees while working in the mountains of California. A proponent of "super realism," Adams wanted to elevate the public consciousness of "nature as art."

By the late 1980s, Adams had invented a new proprietary organic compound that when applied, welded and sculpted into the tree shape formed the "tree skin." This organic compound created a life-like look and textural nuances of tree bark used to produce the company's museum-quality sculpted trees.

"It looks like and it feels like a real living tree," Hanick said. "And, that's how we create a total sensual experi-

ence. (The invention of this compound) changed everything for us. Adams had created an entirely new art form."

Building a work of art

Offering a wide-range of sculpted products, NatureMaker's main focus is now Steel Art Trees.

Created by draftsmen, engineers, certified welders, sculptors and painters at the company's 60,000 square-foot studio in Carlsbad, Steel Art Trees are then disassembled and relocated to the project site.

The art staff does not use models or molds to produce the trees. Adams' crew creates each work of art by hand and is individually tailored for the client. His team wants the end product to appear as if it predated the structure, which surrounds it.

"That's the look we are trying to get," said Hanick. "We want it to look like the tree was there before the building was built."

According to Hanick, each project takes approximately one year to complete from start to finish. Even with growth, the company's art staff still utilizes hand drawings for designs instead of computer animation, and Adams still oversees every project.

"He's still involved with each tree," Hanick said.

Although the end product beautifies nature, the project itself is based on science and formulas. From size and weight specifications to building and fire codes, the engineering of these steel treasures is exact, as the stand-alone sculptures do not require tension or mounting wires of any kind.

A casino connection

NatureMaker's casino influence began with capturing the attention of one of the industry's more colorful figures—Steve Wynn. After meeting with Mirage Resorts contractors at a San Francisco design conference, NatureMaker was commissioned to build Steel Art Tree structures for Wynn's Mirage Resort & Casino project in the late 1980s.

"(The Mirage project) revolution-

ized the way we created trees," said Hanick. "We knew we needed to create something that hadn't been done before. (Wynn) gave us artistic freedom to create the artwork that you see in the final product."

According to Hanick, NatureMaker and casino operators have common interests that make the working relationship a partnership.

"We both want to transport people to another world," he said. "(Casino operators) see the appreciation for art and theme," he said. "At Paris Las Vegas, we turned columns into giant trees and created a wonderful ambiance. That couldn't happen without the operators love for theme and art."

Since NatureMaker's casino debut at The Mirage, the company's casino client list has continued to grow, including projects at Foxwoods Resort Casino, Mandalay Bay, Caesar's Palace and Circus Circus Hotel Casino in Reno. The company has also expanded with projects at Native American casi-

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NatureMaker at a glance

NatureMaker has grown from a small Southern California company handling retail-based projects to one of the leading providers of interior life-like sculptures for the gaming and other hospitality industries. With its Steel Art Tree product, the company expects to top \$8 million in revenues for 2004, up 25 percent from last year.

With past and present gaming-industry clients including The Mirage, Mandalay Bay, Caesar's Palace, MGM Grand and Foxwoods, NatureMaker is now entering into more Native American and international projects.

Company Name: NatureMaker

Founded: 1983

Top Executives:

Gary Hanick, president

Bennett Abrams, CEO and director of design

Jim Paul, director of theme design

Number of Projects 2003: 50

Total Revenues 2003: \$6 Million

Number of Projected Projects 2004: 60

Total Projected Revenues 2004: \$8 Million

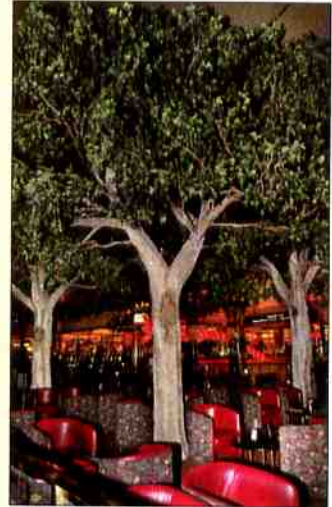
Upcoming Projects: Casino Niagara, Foxwoods, Ontario Lotteries, Cache Creek Casino, Black Oak Casino, Jackson Rancheria, Coeur d' Alene Casino

Number of Employees: 40

Status: Privately held company

Contact Information: (760) 438-4344

—Allen Grant



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nos and international casino properties. Business continues to grow for NatureMaker, which expects fiscal improvements to climb nearly 25 percent to \$8 million in revenue in 2004, predicted Hanick.

A collection of "Hero" trees at Coeur D' Alene Casino and Resort Hotel in Idaho is one of NatureMaker's more recent projects. Designed as major focal points in the table-games area, the Steel Art Trees are recreations of native ones in the region, said Hanick.

Casino clients have praised NatureMaker's work.

According to Elise Norman, owner of the Crystal Bay Club Casino in Lake Tahoe, NatureMaker creates nothing but "impressive work." She said she commissioned NatureMaker last year to construct two large Steel Art Trees to simulate oak trees in the casino pit.

"Our guests love the trees and now we're looking at additional places to add more," she said. "They create an

"Our guests love the trees and now we're looking at additional places to add more. They create an entire ambiance. It's like being outside when you're inside."

—Elise Norman, owner,
Crystal Bay Club Casino
in Lake Tahoe

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Branching out

Hanick said he expects casinos to push his company to create even more elaborate designs. "We're being challenged to build nine-story high structures," he said. "We're also seeing more outdoor tree projects."

NatureMaker will produce "fewer but more monumental trees" in the future along with new hybrid designs combining Steel Art Trees with living plant life in new and unique settings, he said.

The company is also diversifying into other areas including projects at zoos, nature and shopping centers,

museums, libraries and theme parks. NatureMaker has also had several private-resident inquires.

"Referrals and word-of-mouth about our product is really getting around," Hanick said. "Our longevity and reputation is starting to breed new clients. (Steel Art Trees) is an artwork and that appeals to many types of businesses and individuals."

During the last few years, NatureMaker expanded its marketing arm using design and gaming conferences and the Internet to get the word out about the business, said Hanick. "We participated in Global Gaming Expo last fall and it really helped us get out there along with our Web site," he said.

With business growing, Hanick said he assures NatureMaker will continue to produce custom and unique trees without mass-producing a lesser product.

"We're not going to become a (mass) production house," he said. "It's important to stay an art studio and deliver a detailed passion for naturalism. Our clients want the attention to detail." 