

Living the Life off the Strip

No smoking, no casino, but guests find plenty of luxury at condo-hotels

By Liz Benston

After a day of gambling, Christian Bello found refuge.

He spent a soothing evening surrounded by hushed conversations at a rooftop lounge at the off-Strip Platinum Hotel. He was barely distracted by George Clooney pulling off a casino heist in an outdoor screening of "Ocean's 13."

Other guests, sitting around fire pits near an indoor-outdoor pool, munched on parmesan-rosemary popcorn and lobster chorizo tacos, admiring the glow of the Strip less than two blocks away. The hottest action here was the Hot Tamale, a movie theater-inspired cocktail with cinnamon schnapps and pepper sauce. Everything else was decidedly more mellow.

There were none of the Strip's usual trappings - lingerie-clad party girls, chain smokers, flair bartenders and gamblers watched by stiff-limbed casino workers.

That was just the kind of action Bello, a 32-year-old Los Angeles orthopedic implant supplier and veteran of late nights in Strip casinos, now wants to avoid. "This is where I'm staying from now on," he said. "I've been telling everyone about this place."

Applause for a hotel that cuts against the normal Vegas grain is just the kind of response Chicago developer Michael Peterson hoped for when he started construction on the slot-free, smoke-free 255-room condo-hotel in 2004.



Peterson, who has built seven condo-hotels in his 20-year career, didn't stumble across this niche by accident.

The concept of selling upscale condos that rent for much of the year had already been established in bigger markets such as Chicago and Miami. In Las Vegas, it was an unproven business strategy.

Luckily, Peterson placed his bet just before a wave of condo speculation in Las Vegas drove up construction and land costs, pricing most noncasino, off-Strip developers out of the market. Skeptics predicted the newcomer, who dared stray from the casino-based formula that had worked for so long, would fail in Las Vegas. Building a customer list from scratch for an independent, nongaming hotel with an unknown brand, they said, couldn't be done.