

Superlatives

PEOPLE, CULTURE, STYLE



POWER STRIP

ms. manager

GIGI VEGA RUNS THE SHOW AS GENERAL MANAGER OF THE BRAND-NEW NOBU HOTEL CAESARS PALACE. BY LISA ARCELLA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH OLENICK

Although Gigi Vega knows all eyes in Las Vegas will soon be pointing in her direction, she's feeling relaxed and confident. Caesars Palace is bringing the internationally acclaimed Nobu to its property this year in the form of a first-of-its-kind luxury hotel, and she is at the helm. As general manager, her job includes overseeing all day-to-day operations and catering to the distinguished tastes of the Nobu customer. "There's a lot of pressure," she says with a laugh. "But this is an incredibly exciting project."

Nobu Hotel is the first hotel branded around a celebrity chef anywhere in the world and is coming to the very heart of Caesars Palace. "It is literally right in the middle of the 3,960-room Caesars complex, in the former Centurion tower," she says. Rooms became available for reservation last month, and the hotel will soft-open by year's end.

The 181-room luxury property will be centered around a brand-new Nobu Restaurant & Lounge (the one already at the Hard Rock will remain). This time, the David Rockwell design will create the illusion that guests are sitting within a large ikebana basket, Vega says. And as a huge plus, guests can order Nobu's world-class Japanese cuisine directly to their room. Vega says that chef Nobuyuki "Nobu" Matsuhisa is even contemplating training a private chef to be available for sushi and sake tastings.

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Vega has been with Caesars for close to three years, after stints at Mandarin Oriental and Intercontinental hotels in her native Philippines and Macau. With this project, she will be setting a precedent on the worldwide stage, as Nobu Hotels already has made plans to expand to other markets internationally. Her groundbreaking property includes David Rockwell-designed suites with a media room and billiard table, and others with two stories and high ceilings. Within Caesars, a dedicated team will cater to only the VIPs staying at the five-star Nobu.

“A lot of the regular patrons of the Nobu restaurants are people who like to see and be seen,” she says. “And we expect all of the celebrities that would normally visit chef Nobu’s restaurants to come to Caesars Palace.”

In addition to the obvious high-end dining choice, there will be a retail component to the hotel as well, featuring china and teapots of Nobu’s design. She admits that the famed Japanese chef is a perfectionist, but says he also trusts her to run her own show.

“He wants to make sure that the guests have the same theatrical experience that they have in his restaurants,” Vega says. “But he trusts the expertise that his partners on the board of directors and I bring to the table. He is humble, yet focused.”

That describes Vega as well. She attended the University of the Philippines with the intention of starting a career in advertising, but instead fell in love with the hotel business after an internship and continued her studies at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, where she earned her MBA in 2011.

She realizes her status as one of the few female GMs makes her a role model to many, as she has managed it along with a marriage of 23 years and raising three children, who range from 14 to 21. “It is a man’s world in many ways still, and it takes a lot of time to balance family and be dedicated to an industry,” says Vega, who describes her husband, Phil, as her secret weapon. “I once heard that if you can be with your family for only an hour, make sure that your mind isn’t in two or three different places. It’s sometimes hard, but that is something I try to live by—focus on whatever is in front of you. There is always the assumption that a female GM would have less time for work. I am here to prove otherwise.” **V**



The Nobu brand is carried throughout the brand-new Nobu hotel.

“If you can be with your family for only an hour, make sure that your mind isn’t in two or three places.”—GIGI VEGA



The David Rockwell-designed Nobu King room is now open for reservations. ABOVE: Vega with President Barack Obama.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Gigi Vega’s inspirations and inclinations.

*in the kitchen

“Cooking is therapeutic for me. My signature dish is a vegetarian lettuce wrap with jicama, green beans, and carrots sautéed in garlic and hoisin sauce.”

*fashion plate

“I used to dress up my children, and now my children are dressing me! But I admire a lot of the well-known names—Louis Vuitton, Cartier, Christian Dior. Valentino is one of my favorites.”

*favorite book

“*The Brothers: The Hidden World of Japan’s Richest Family* by Lesley Downer. It’s about the Tsutsumi family and how Japan developed throughout the years. The premise is that if you are driven and passionate about achieving something, you will achieve it. I’ve read it three times.”

*global souvenirs

“When I am traveling, I try to bring home an item from that country, and that’s what I surround myself with in my home. It gives me a showcase for family and friends and reminds my children the different places we have been.”