

# SCULPTING LAS VEGAS

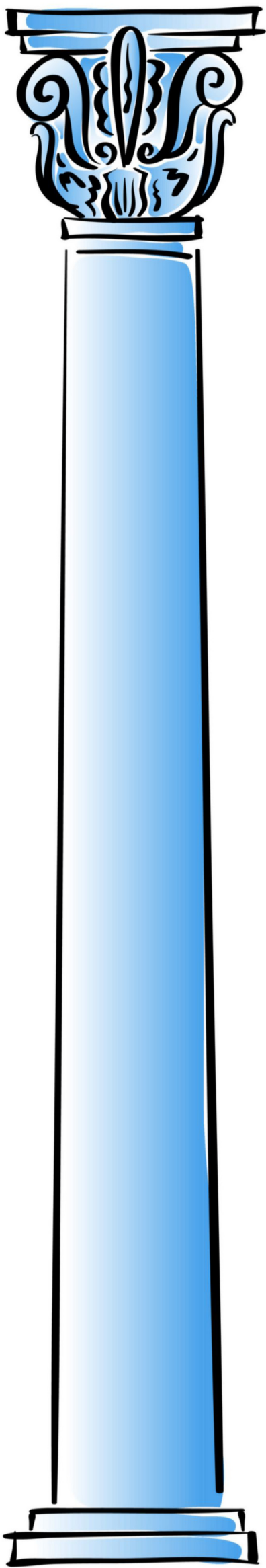
## Grab your camera and capture the statues Vegas puts on a pedestal

Las Vegas likes to pay tribute to things. The city has a replica of the Eiffel Tower in its skyline and is home to a giant Sphinx. There's a whole museum dedicated to Liberace and there are shows starring Elvis and Beatles impersonators.

Another way Vegas recognizes famous things and famous people is by creating statues in their honor. Some are re-creations of well-known works of art, some pay homage to world-famous figures and some celebrate things that are uniquely Vegas.

Here's our rundown of some of the most noteworthy, and snapshot-worthy, statues in Vegas.

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### Michelangelo's David

**Location:** Appian Way shops at Caesars Palace  
**Size:** 18 feet tall, 9 tons  
**Material:** White marble  
**Background:** The Roman-themed Caesars Palace is full of beautiful statues and one of the most impressive is a replica of Michelangelo's David. The 18-foot-tall white marble statue is an exact replica of the masterpiece. The statue, which stands in a rotunda in the hotel's Appian Way shopping area, was carved from stone mined from Carrara, Italy where it is believed Michelangelo got his stone.

### Joe Louis

**Location:** Near the Caesars Palace sports book, outside Mesa Grill  
**Size:** 7 and a half feet tall, 4,500 pounds  
**Material:** Marble  
**Background:** Joe Louis was the world heavyweight boxing champion from 1937 to 1949, participating in 27 championship fights, including 25 successful title defenses. While boxing is a popular sport in Vegas, some might wonder why there is a statue of Louis at Caesars Palace and what his Las Vegas connection is. Ash Resnick was a vice president at Caesars and an old Army buddy of Louis'. When Louis needed work, Resnick offered him a job as a casino host in the early 1970s. Louis' funeral was also held in the Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion in 1981. One night before he died, Louis sat in the building ringside at the heavyweight title fight between Larry Holmes and Trevor Berbick. The Rev. Jesse Jackson and Vegas icon Frank Sinatra delivered the eulogies.



### Elvis Presley

**Location:** Entrance of the Las Vegas Hilton  
**Size:** 7 feet tall, 400 pounds  
**Material:** Bronze  
**Background:** Elvis debuted at the Las Vegas Hilton (then called the International Hotel) on July 31, 1969, performing 837 consecutive sold-out shows and performing before 2.5 million people. It's only fitting that the city's tribute to the legendary entertainer be located outside the hotel where he performed. The Elvis statue was dedicated in 1978 by Presley's father, Vernon, and former wife, Priscilla. Sculptor Carl Romanelli created the bronze statue, which was initially on display outside the Hilton showroom in a glass case before being moved to the hotel lobby. In late 2005, it was temporarily removed and stored while the lobby was undergoing renovation. It was unveiled again in 2006 in a new location outside the hotel's front entrance and is still visited by legions of the King's fans, who often leave flowers and other tributes at the statue on the singer's birthday.



### Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

**Location:** Red Square restaurant at Mandalay Bay  
**Size:** 14 feet tall, 4,500 pounds  
**Material:** Gypsum and plaster  
**Background:** Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), who was one of the leaders of the Soviet revolution, was a controversial figure in history and the statue of him outside Red Square restaurant initially caused quite a stir when it was unveiled in 1999. Mandalay Bay received complaints about having a statue of a Soviet leader in its hotel, and after finding out that heads were being removed from many Lenin statues in Eastern Europe, the hotel decided to decapitate the Communist leader's likeness and stain the shoulders and shoes with simulated bird droppings. The head was originally hung from the ceiling above the statue, but in a strange twist, it was stolen and was missing for several weeks before finally turning up in a large pile of items donated to a local thrift store. The 250-pound head is now safely encased inside a block of ice within Red Square's walk-in freezer.



Courtesy photo

### MGM Grand Lion

**Location:** The front entrance of MGM Grand  
**Size:** 45 feet tall, 50 tons  
**Material:** Polished gold-bronze  
**Background:** Originally, the main entrance to the MGM Grand hotel featured a huge cartoon-like fiberglass version of the company's Leo the Lion mascot. Rumor has it that many Chinese gamblers avoided the entrance because of the belief that entering the mouth of the lion was bad luck. So, in 1997, workers took down the old lion and assembled a large lion statue sitting on top of a 25-foot high pedestal. The new lion, which stands 45 feet tall, is the largest statue in the United States built from polished gold-bronze.

### Benny Binion

**Location:** Outside the the equestrian center entrance at the South Point  
**Size:** 15 feet tall, 2,800 pounds  
**Material:** Bronze  
**Background:** Casino owner and poker enthusiast Benny Binion was a key figure in the development of Downtown Las Vegas and the popular World Series of Poker tournament. Binion moved to Las Vegas and opened The Horseshoe casino in 1951. In his later years, he was also instrumental in securing Las Vegas as the home of the National Finals Rodeo. In 1984, artist Deborah Copenhaver created a bronze statue of Binion on horseback and for 20 years, the statue stood at the corner of Casino Center Boulevard and Ogden Avenue in Downtown Las Vegas. In 2008, the decision was made to move it to the South Point Hotel and Casino at the southern end of the Strip. South Point owner Michael Gaughan is the son of downtown casino mogul Jackie Gaughan, a contemporary of Binion. He bought the statue from the Binion family for \$1 in exchange for providing a permanent home for it. A hole had to be cut in the wall at the South Point to fit the statue into the building.



### Crazy Girls

**Location:** Outside the front entrance of the Riviera Hotel  
**Size:** 6 feet tall, 1,700 pounds  
**Material:** Bronze  
**Background:** The Crazy Girls statue at the Riviera is something you'll find only in Vegas. The sculpture, which depicts the rear view of a group of scantily-clad showgirls, was unveiled in 1997 for the 10th anniversary celebration of the famed topless show at the hotel. The statue and its subject matter have generated some controversy over the years. In fact, it was picketed by the National Organization of Women at its unveiling. The piece was created over several months by life-casting artist Michael Conine. He had the seven dancers pose three at a time, then he created molds and cast them in plaster, using almost 400 pounds of the substance. Conine fine-tuned the plaster for a few months before taking the shell to a foundry where 2,000-degree molten bronze was poured into it. The dancers' hair was sculpted out of clay, then bronzed.