



Photos courtesy MGM Mirage and WET Design

Above left, the volcano at the Mirage explodes with new fire and smoke effects. Above right, Mickey Hart, the legendary drummer for the Grateful Dead, helped create the volcano's new soundtrack.

# The Mirage ignites the Strip's new flame

By Jeannie Borbe  
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The Volcano at The Mirage is igniting Las Vegas once again.

Since its opening in 1989, the volcano has been one of most popular attractions on the Strip. In 1996, the volcano added new water, lighting and sound effects.

Today, the volcano is looking - and sounding - better than ever thanks to a \$25 million redesign, which reopened to the public on Dec. 8, 2008.

WET, the company responsible for The Fountains of Bellagio, led the design team for the volcano. The volcano includes two volcano systems, a lagoon and fire shooters that shoot flame on demand. These massive fireballs are capable of shooting more than 12 feet into the air. It also features waterfalls with surrounding pools including fire and smoke effects.

"The Mirage Volcano is the only complimentary attraction on The Strip that combines fire with music and choreography," said Scott Sibella, president and COO of the Mirage. "The Mirage Volcano combines

the two to create an intense display, both beautiful and thrilling at the same time."

Thanks to WET's state-of-the-art computer system, visitors are able to watch the massive fireballs move to the rhythm.

"Using our software VirtualWET, I am able to visually compose the activities of the volcano," Bonnie Thompson, designer and choreographer for WET explained. "That information is then downloaded to our panels that control the fountain and plays according to schedule. Most people don't realize that we can control the movements of the fire and water to create a unique and one-of-a-kind show."

Thompson's vision for the volcano's fireball choreography comes from her fascination by the overall history of the volcano and the culture surrounding it.

"I was inspired by tribal dance and cultures surrounding volcano activity," she said. "After visiting with Mickey Hart and Zakir [Hussain] in the recording studio, I gained a true understanding of how I could manipulate the actions of the volcano in accordance with the music."

One of the most exciting highlights of

## The Volcano

**Location:** The Mirage

**Show times:** The Volcano erupts nightly every hour on the hour from 5 - 11 p.m.

**Cost:** Free.

**New Year's Eve:** The world-famous daredevil Robbie Knievel will jump his motorcycle over The Volcano. Call the Mirage at (800) 963-9634 for details.

the volcano is its hypnotic music score. Hart, the legendary Grateful Dead drummer, and Indian music composer Zakir Hussain worked together to create and perform a soundtrack exclusively for the volcano.

During the composing process, the two studied legends, myths and history about volcanoes.

As a result, they incorporated instruments from around the world. The musical masterpiece infuses chants, percussion and other tribal elements.

"Zakir and I studied the science of volcanoes," Hart explained. "We took our

time, found out what they should sound like, what they shouldn't be like, and got the spirit of the volcano."

For these composers, the importance of music stems from a deeper, sacred level.

"It's about spirituality," Hart emphasized. "Volcanoes are scary, but they also appeal to the spirit world. We tried to get that spiritual content to it."

He continued: "Music is invisible, it's mysterious and it has innate, inert energies that we have yet to explore. That's what music does, that's what it'll always do."

In addition to the intense music score, the volcano's sound recordings come from actual eruptions. The volcano's state-of-the-art sound sonic sound system allows the audience to actually feel the rumble.

"We have the greatest sound system around this beautiful lagoon," Hart said. "Without this delivery system, [it] could not have been possible."

To gain a full appreciation of the volcano's spectacular sights and sounds, patrons walking by the Mirage on the Las Vegas Strip are in luck.

"The best view of the volcano show is

right in front of The Mirage on The Strip," Sibella advised. "Nothing beats being right there - up close - where you can feel the heat of the flames and hear the pulsating soundtrack."

"You're in the middle of the volcano without actually getting hurt!" Hart exclaimed. "[It's] as real as you can be without experiencing the ash."

For those who arrive early enough to stand in front, the volcano actually gets quite toasty: "The volcano gets hot enough that you can feel the fire on your face," Thompson said.

Guests staying at The Mirage can experience a top-notch aerial view of the attraction.

"Essentially any of the rooms which face The Strip on the fourteenth floor or higher will have a fabulous birds-eye view of our new attraction," said Sibella.

Fiery choreography, water and music have never come together like this before.

"This is nature with choreography," said WET designer Jim Doyle. "It's going to make you want to dance. You'll definitely be warm."