

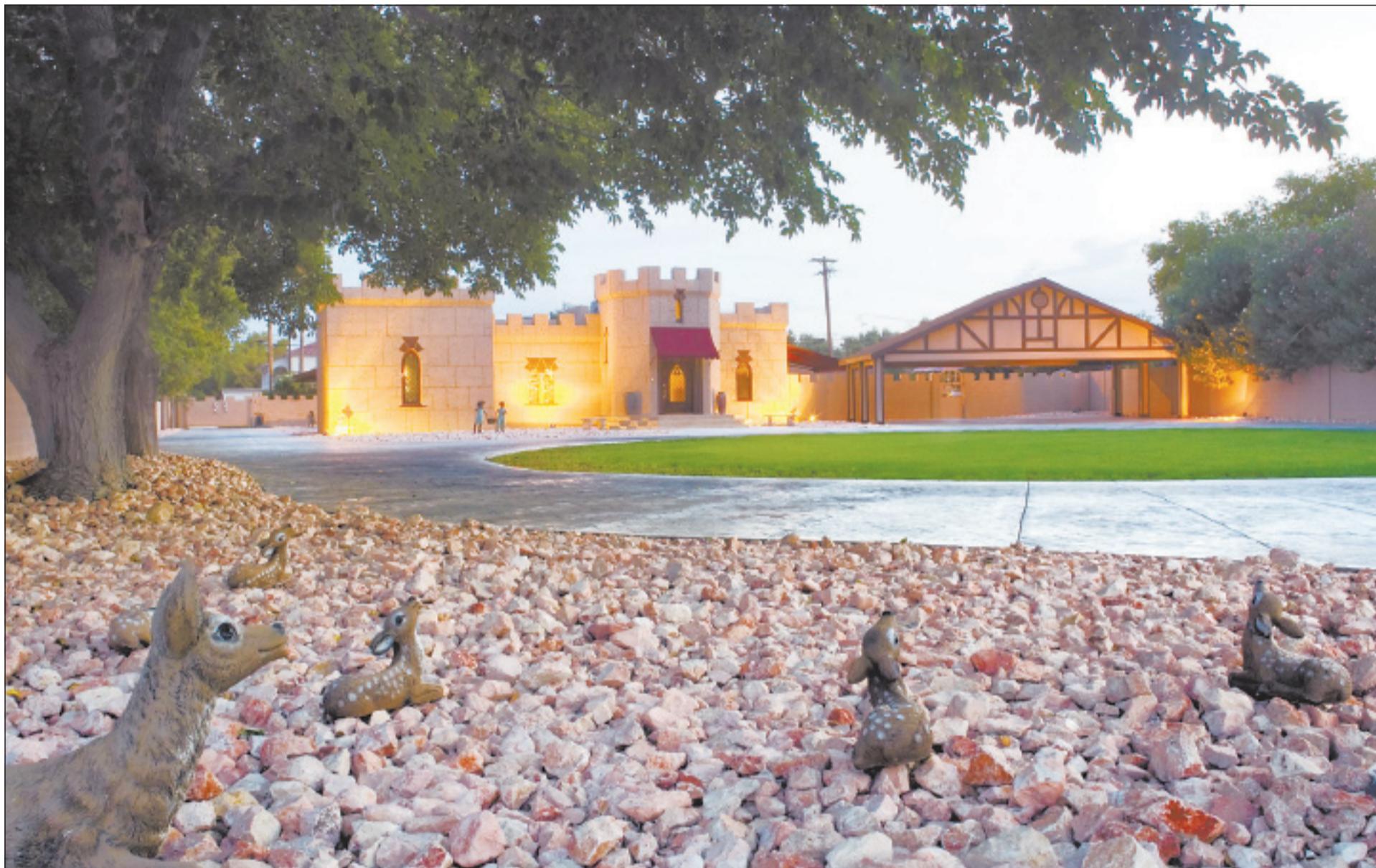


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PHOTOGRAPHY Prospective performers go to great lengths to get the approval of Cirque du Soleil. **PAGE 8**



LIVING LAS VEGAS

Real estate partners push to preserve valley's historic homes

Agent, developer team up to bring sagging giants of city's past back to life with modern renovations

By DYLAN SCOTT, *Las Vegas Sun*

When real estate agent Glenn Robertson first stepped into this once-famous home on Alta Drive in Las Vegas, it was riddled with problems.

The kitchen ceiling had collapsed, birds had taken up residence in the abandoned 6,400-square-foot home and rainwater dripped onto the floor.

It did not look like a \$5 million estate. In fact, inside, it barely looked like a home.

A wide gate opens the entryway to Castle Rancho, once owned by Las Vegas gaming legend Don Pettit. Beyond the spacious front lawn lies the house — a fortress that looks as if it was dropped into the Mojave Desert from 14th-century England.

Four years ago, Leroy Black, a real estate developer based in Nevada, bought

FAMOUS PROJECTS

The first property Glenn Robertson and Leroy Black worked on was Liberace's home on 15th Street, which sold for \$800,000. For his next renovations, Robertson has his eye on the old Binion home and Michael Jackson's vacation home.

the home at Alta and Rancho drives just west of I-15 for \$1 million. Another buyer planned to demolish the former tourist hot spot, he said.

Black then handed its renovation over to Robertson, part of their campaign to save historic homes in the valley, especially now, during a ruinous recession.

The home was built in 1947 as a one-bedroom ranch-style house. Pettit, who **[See Castle, Page 2]**



PHOTOS BY STEVE MARCUS / LAS VEGAS SUN

Top: The Castle Rancho in Rancho Circle was originally made to look like a castle by the owner of the Coin Castle but in later years fell into disrepair. It was bought four years ago for \$1 million and is listed for \$5 million after an extensive renovation. Above: A suit of armor is shown in a hallway at the home at Alta and Rancho.



PHOTOS BY STEVE MARCUS / LAS VEGAS SUN

Castle Rancho in Rancho Circle is one of the few homes that still maintains access onto Alta Drive.

CASTLE, FROM PAGE 1:

IN SEARCH OF BUYER TO CARRY ON LEGACY

had managed the Lady Luck during the '60s and established the Coin Castle in the '70s, purchased it in 1969.

He gave the structure a face-lift, molding the single-story house into a modern fortress of sorts, complete with secret rooms with no apparent purpose, intending to match the design of the Coin Castle.

Before the Rancho Circle neighborhood was gated from the public, tour buses regularly stopped to admire its innovative design.

Now, the so-called castle has had a \$2 million makeover and is for sale for \$5 million. Robertson, an independent real estate agent affiliated with Century 21, touts the improvements. From floor to ceiling to windows, every square foot has been renovated.

Castle Rancho is the seventh home to feel Robertson's touch.

"We take things that are literally falling apart and can't be sold," said Robertson, who came to Las Vegas in 2003 after 30 years of remodeling homes in California. That kind of home is a "white elephant" in the real estate business. "We're looking for every white elephant in town."

Black said he made a pact with his parents and brother to leave their family legacy by restoring historic properties in Nevada. He started in Reno, where his company financed renovations of 19th-century Victorian homes on UNR's "professors row" after seeing older resorts demolished in a redevelopment district downtown, he said.

He then moved his focus to Las Vegas, where he met Robertson.

Black hopes to maintain the memory of "gaming pioneers and entertainers of yesteryear," as well as his family, he said. He is interested in selling or renting the properties only to individuals dedicated to their historic integrity.

"We want to turn the reins over to people who will carry on the legacy," Black said. "We've got to maintain history and learn from it."

Their efforts began with Liberace's first home, on 15th Street, which Robertson said was filled with spider webs. After a similar renovation, it sold for \$800,000 in 2005, according to the Clark County assessor's office.

They have lost some battles, though, Black said. He petitioned Station Casinos to restore the former Showboat/Castaways hotel before it was demolished in 2005.

Robertson then moved to some other high-end properties on Alta Drive, where numerous casino owners and other Vegas icons reside, and has focused on Castle Rancho for three years.

For his next projects, he has his eye on the old Binion home on Bonanza Road, owned by the downtown casino's founding family, and the late Michael Jackson's vacation home on Monte Cristo Way.

Neither Black nor Robertson expects Castle Rancho to sell any time soon as the recession lingers. Before the housing bust, Robertson showed



Decorative touches such as stained-glass windows made by local artisans and pointed archways help maintain Castle Rancho's old-world theme.

the home to a few interested parties each week, but said he rarely receives calls anymore.

Mark Hall-Patton, administrator of Clark County's museums, said residences offer an opportunity for Las Vegas' past to be preserved.

"We've tended to reinvent ourselves and lose our history," he said. "It's hard to preserve a casino. With a home, if it's restored, it becomes another piece of the historical fabric."

After Pettit's death in 1998, Robertson said, Castle Rancho fell into disrepair. He and his team of local contractors stepped in after the house had been abandoned for more than a year.

Pine and fir trees from the Black Forest in Germany were brought in for the crafting of new doors. Stained-glass windows were installed. New carpet was laid, modern accessories were added and tumbled marble was laid into the fireplaces, which were in turn filled with bits of glass so the fire "dances," Robertson said.

A replica of a medieval knight's suit of armor completes the package.

Robertson employed all local laborers to renovate Castle Rancho. And now the home stands almost like a brand-new structure.

If Robertson has his way, it won't be the last comeback story.

"We stripped the house down to nothing," he said, "but we don't blow things up. We rebuild."

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