



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



BLOG POST: 2022.09.13
Through the Nevada Void to Vegas



Mono Lake, from CA-120 East near Lee Vining

The route between Yosemite and Las Vegas involved some of the most desolate “highways” I think I have ever been on. Seven hours, close to 400 miles of not-a-damn-thing. I *loved* it!

The USA is large – only Russia, Canada, and China are bigger – and not all of that space is deemed “usable.” This country has some **big** voids, the most notable of which are in the western half. Some have surprised me, while others were pretty much what I expected.

During my first cross-country road trip, with Richie in 1984, from Boston to L.A., as we drove the width of Kansas on I-70, the hours and hours of wide-open prairie just blew me away. I could not stop gawking and blurting out, “Look how far you can see!!”

Well, today’s drive was about to rival any and all voids that I have traversed.

Common sense would have had me coming out of Yosemite and turning right onto CA-395 – it’s a great road that I’ve enjoyed before – and, an hour-plus later,

hanging the left that would take me to and through Death Valley NP. From there, up through Jubilee Pass to CA-127, then to NV-177 to Pahrump, and down into Sin City.

True, Death Valley is desolate, but it's a National Park, which is *treasured* land. So, I would not count that as a true void. A void is, essentially, valueless.

Anyway, 395 and DVNP were off the menu today. GooGirl decreed that that route, as well as the primary alternate route, contained too much peril due to flash flooding. There had been morning storms, and clouds still prevailed across the sky, so I took her at her word and consented to follow her prescribed course.

First, I had to get out of Yosemite. That took 100 minutes, covering 67 miles to go from Yoyo Valley, westward on Oak Flat Road, then back eastward on Tioga Road – the only access road on the east side of the park – to CA-395.



Olmsted Point, July 2006

Tioga Road is a gorgeous ride, though, especially up by Olmsted Point (photo above) and Tenaya Lake (photo, top of next page). It was 52° up here in the high country. Last time I was up here, parked by Tuolumne Meadows, I had frost on the windshield when I awoke in the morning, and that was in July.



Tenaya Lake, July 2006

This great road takes you through the YNP gate at 9,965' of elevation – the highest point of roadway in the park. It was also the highest elevation that Blue Maxx and I had yet achieved as a team. Proud moment, I'll tell ya.

Take one look at where this road was carved (photo, next page) – gradually ascending along the middle of the towering, rocky slope – and it's easy to see why it is closed for about eight months a year. When I tried to come here in mid-May of 2005, this route was *still* closed due to about 12 **feet** of snow that remained on it. It was quite a lengthy detour to go around the north side of the park; it added more than 200 miles!

It's not just the snow, either; the rockslides buried under/within the snow cause even more problems and delays, both with removal and road repair.

But just because you leave The Yo, that does not mean that there are no more scenic delights to be had.

The view of Gaylor Peak reflected in Ellery Lake is a highlight, for sure.



Gaylor Peak reflected in Ellery Lake, viewed from Tioga Road (July 2006)



Tioga Road, after leaving Yosemite, looking east (July 2006)

I had eschewed the sole gas station within YNP, at Crane Flat (though it had saved my ass before), hoping for less pricey fuel at the Mobil station down near CA-395. I was probably right, but their \$6.40 price still stung. I didn't even fill up. I took a modest eight gallons, and it cost \$50. Ugh. I was banking on Nevada being less gougy.

Just five miles down 395, GooGirl directed me left onto a thread of a road known as CA-120. The line barely appeared on the map, and you really have to zoom in on Google Earth to see it at all. At least it wasn't dirt. She's done that to me before.

120 curled along the south side of Mono Lake (see page 1). I wish I had known at the time, but I was just a mile or less away from the movie set of the town of Lago in Clint Eastwood's "High Plains Drifter". I'm a fan of that flick. I would've checked it out for sure. Next time, I reckon. I wonder if it's still painted all red.

But once 120 snaked away from the lake, all signs of human existence -- apart from the fairly new, brightly painted pavement I was on -- vanished.

There was a nice stretch of evergreens for a few miles. It was not a dense forest, but there were plenty of trees. I wasn't in the desert yet.

Then the trees stopped, and the world got really *wide*.



Mannnn, I so love views like that. The ribbon of road curving away, getting thinner and thinner till it's out of sight. To me, it says: No-Stress Roadway Ahead. I set cruise control, load up a favorite playlist, make a proper offering, sit back, and *enjoy* it. My next turn – at US-6 – was more than 40 miles away.



There were dark clouds over the distant mountains in the east, and I could see rain sheets in some areas to the north. A bolt of lightning flashed in the direction I was headed. And this, remember, was the route that would *avoid* flash flood warnings, so, hopefully, GooGirl had some inside info.



All right, we got to the end of 120, and, to my surprise, we turned **left**. Facing due east, with Vegas sitting 225 crow-flight miles to the southeast (i.e., to the right), GooGirl said to go **north**.

But I figured it was because of these big-ass mountains to the right. Maybe there was no easy way to get a big van like Maxx up and over them. We were gonna drive north for a bit, go east till we were past those tall hills. and *then* head down south.



The red pin on the Google Earth shot, above, is the settlement of Benton. There were a couple of farms at the T-intersection, but not much else. Oh, a Mono County Library too. Seriously. WTF? The squiggly yellow line to the left of it is 120, with Mono Lake (looking kinda like Crater Lake) on the far left.

My next route change would be way over on the right side of the image, just past that little white shield for US-95. That would be about another 50 miles. I was beginning to empathize with Spirit Rover on Mars. At least I had paved roads, though.

Maxx and I dutifully took our designated left at Benton and rolled on up into that flat, desolate plain between those ridges.



And here we were on US-6 again! One of the recurring themes of our journey. US-6 is one of the longest roads in America, starting in Provincetown MA and ending 3,652 miles later in Long Beach CA. Clearly, it is not a straight-line route.

It was 2:20 PM when I left the bustle of Benton behind. I knew I was getting close to the State Line because I had to go through one of those bullshit California Agricultural Inspection Stations, where they stop each vehicle to ask if there are any plants or vegetables inside. No? OK, have a nice day.

What an awful job that must be. What if I said, oh, I have one rutabaga. Or a rose. Or a cherry. Would all hell break loose or what?



And just four minutes later, at 2:24, we entered the Silver State. I had been in the Pacific Coast states (WA, OR, CA) since July 22nd: 52 days.

When you think of Nevada you think of snow, right? You should, since *nevada* is the Spanish word for *snowfall*. Yup, that's the first thing that crosses my mind when I see the vivid red swath and triple-digit numbers on the weather map. But the first non-natives to explore this area came up from Mexico, and the snow atop the mountains

(*sierra* = *mountains* in Spanish) probably freaked them out pretty good, so they gave them the name and it ended up applying to the whole territory.

Anyway, to me, Nevada means *desert*, I don't care what the translation is. And, man oh man, there was plenty of that all around. After about 30 miles, US-6 went up and over a mountain pass, then settled back into flat desolation again.

Twenty or so miles later, we turned right, onto NV-264 south. We'd be staying on this road for 86 miles. Gas was starting to get low. I hoped I'd see a station soon. But where?? God, would it **suck** to run out of gas out here! I was wishing I had bitten the bullet and topped off with that \$6.40 fuel a few hours ago.

After 58 minutes of Nevada driving, I found myself re-entering California.

And then, 12 minutes after that, Welcome to Nevada again! On SR-266 this time, and staying on it for another 40 miles.



*****GAS, Dyer, NV

67167 / 379.1 miles / 15.7 mpg / 18.2 gals / \$6.32 per / \$115.00

Ha! \$6.32 per gallon. See what a savvy shopper I am? I saved more than a *dollar* by waiting. I think I'll buy some bitcoin with it.

Dyer was not exactly a town. It was, well, ummm, a gas station. And a couple of ramshackle structures that were probably residences. Any "towns" that I did pass through on this route were like this: smaller than tiny. What is it like to *grow up there??* How imprisoned would you feel?? What do you **do** with your time???

The most interesting part, aside from just how fascinating the endless open space was, was the flash flood that I saw somewhere near nothing. I'm not even sure



how it transpired, given the 7000' elevation, with almost no higher ground nearby. But there it was, a gushing stream of red-stained water, overflowing the swale on the right -- dragging soil and small stones with it -- and pouring with some force across the pavement and into the swale on the left.

But NV DOT was on the job, setting up signs, deploying "traffic" control, and scraping the rocks and red dirt off the pavement with a large front-end loader. Given the remoteness of the location, that was an *impressively* snappy response. The heavy equipment was overkill – a shovel would have been enough – but better to have and not need than need and not have, right?

266 started to pitch downhill and I could see the roadside trench beside me gurgling with churning water. Maxx and I were racing it to the bottom. I could see the base of the hill and the start of another rise up ahead, and the water that had reached its low point down there, was starting to swell up onto the roadway. There was enough water in this roadside trench to become a problem.

I gunned Maxx. I could see that we were getting ahead of the main gush. We roared through the depression with a half-decent splash. I had to wonder if the next vehicles to come through – whenever that might be – would have to wait. Good bet that the front-end loader would be needed down here later.

The irony is that GooGirl sent me this way to *avoid* two other routes that had active Flash Flood Warnings. Go figure, huh? Maybe those routes had it worse.

It was still light when we reached Las Vegas. The dark clouds and lightning to the southeast never really imposed on my route, other than just a light shower.

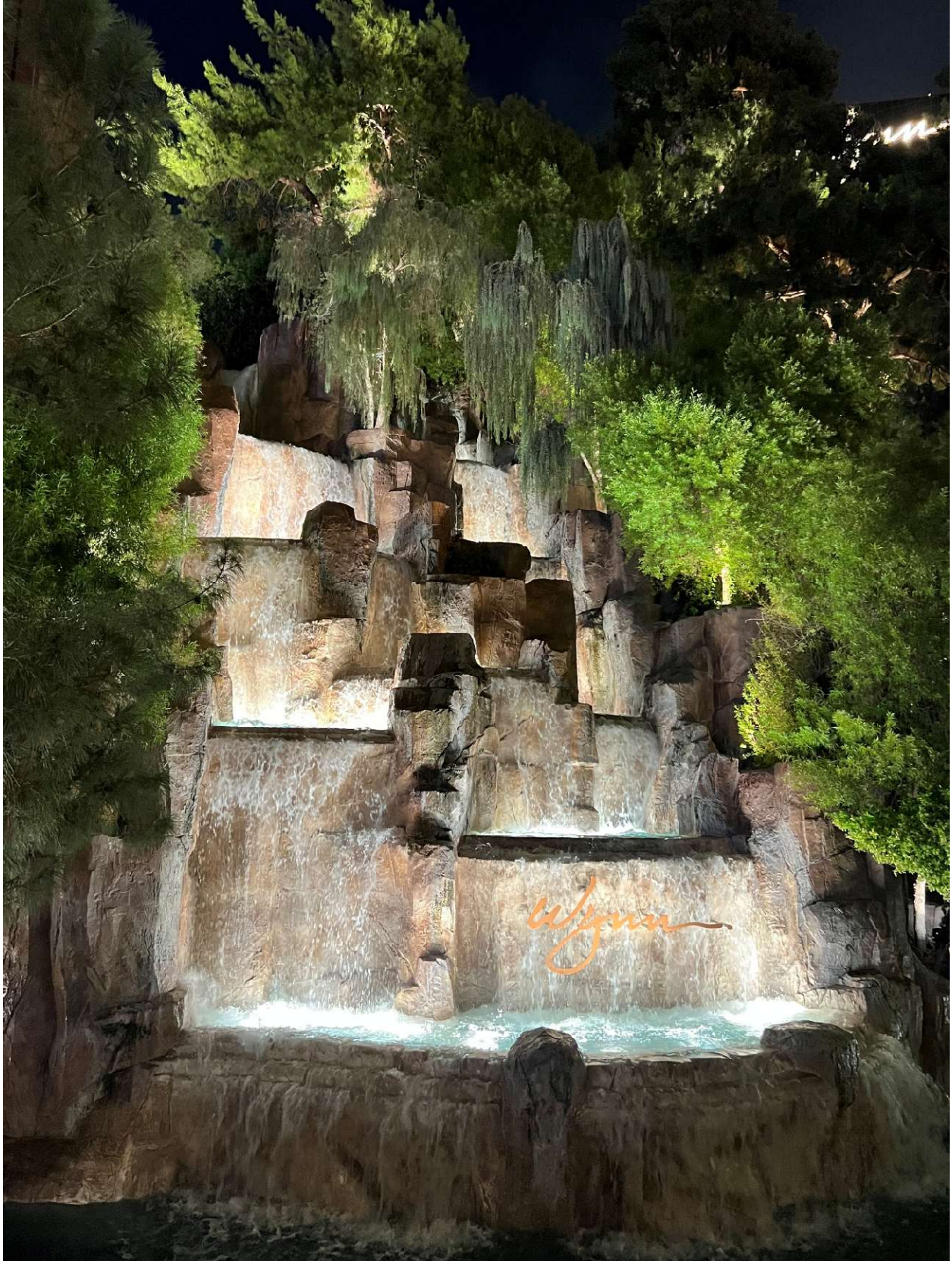
Parking a 9'6"-tall vehicle in LV proved to be an inconvenience, though not a major one, as it turned out. GooGirl kept directing me to Caesar's for parking, even though my drive-through of it revealed no viable options.

I found the Oversized Vehicle Lot at the Mirage totally by accident. I turned into a narrow alley just to negotiate a three-point turn, and saw a sign that told me that what I was after was straight ahead. In retrospect, I bet Caesar's did have such a lot as well, but the Mirage lot was fine. Cost me \$30, and I could stay for up to 24 hours.



The "mission" (if you'd call it that) of the night was to walk up and down The Strip and take photos of the hotels and casinos, etc. Sometimes, I'd go inside and snip-snap some pickiwicks in the lobby, but most of the time, the exterior was enough.

The Strip is long, though, and even though I felt I covered good ground, there was plenty that I did not get to. But I strolled from dusk till well past midnight. Here are some of my best photos.... good niight....



Fountain, The Wynn Hotel and Casino



Bar and Lobby of The Wynn Hotel and Casino



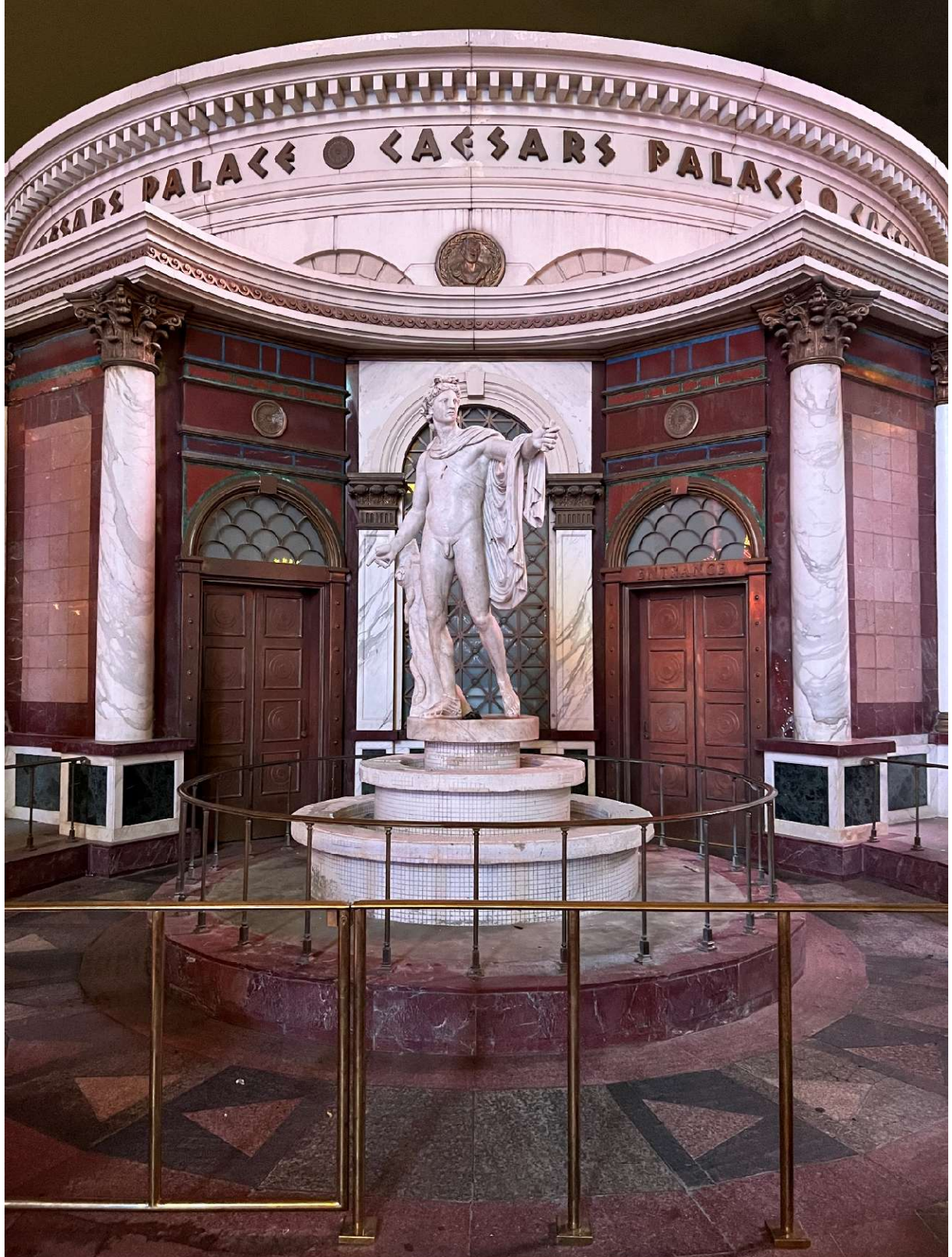
The Palazzo Hotel and Casino



The Venetian Hotel & Casino



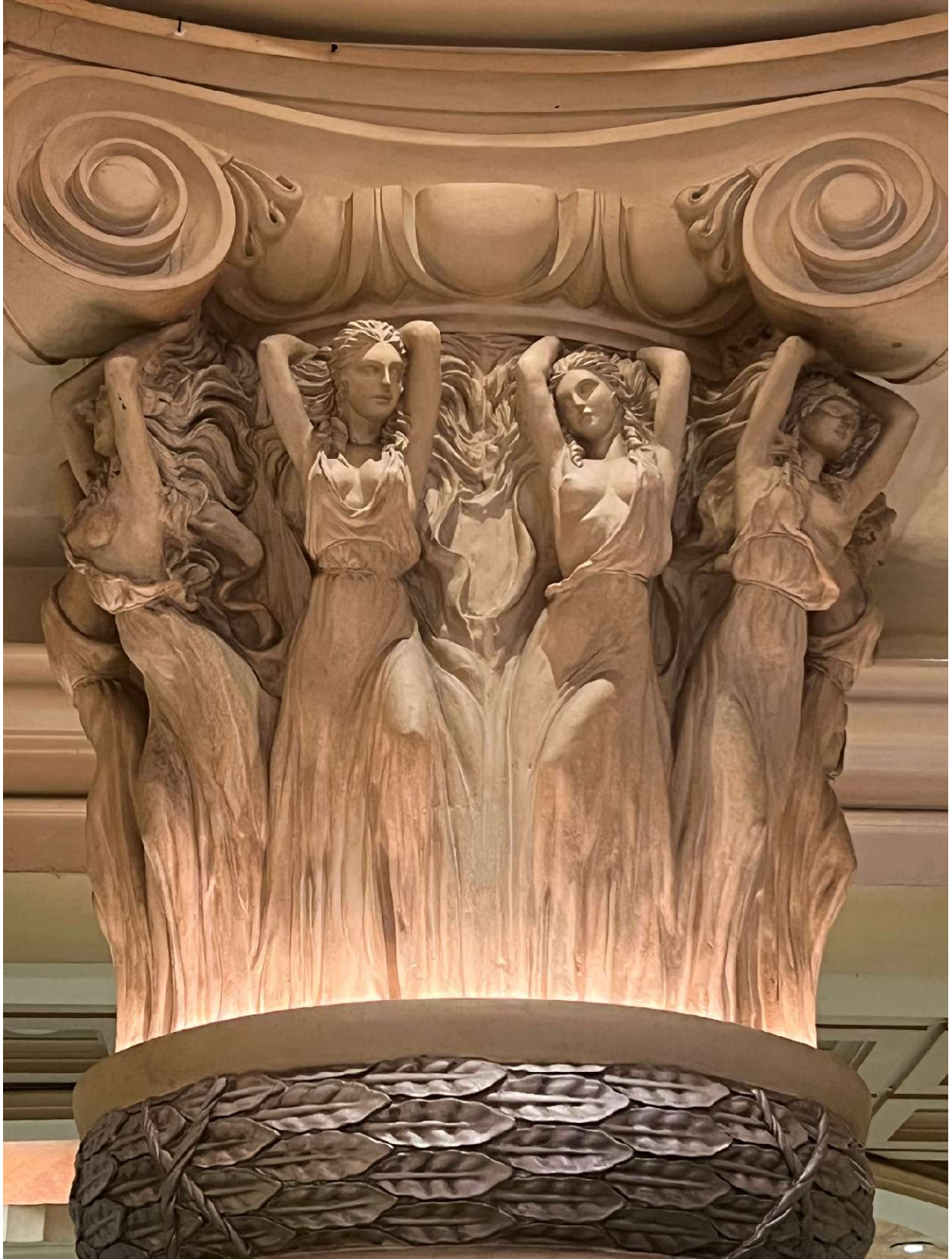
Ceiling, The Venetian



Caesar's Penis, I mean, Palace



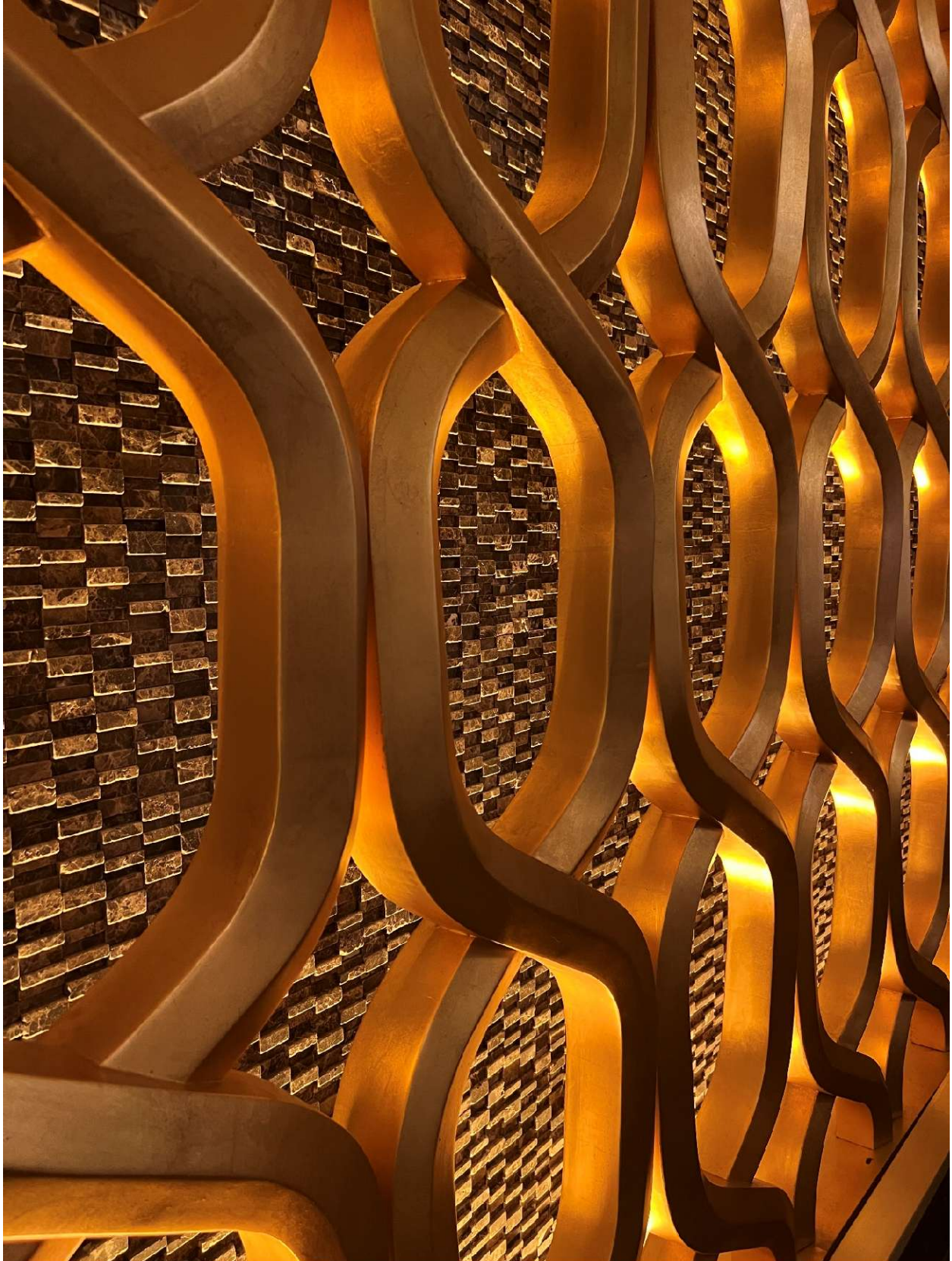
Replica of "Fontana di Trevi" (Rome) at Caesar's Palace



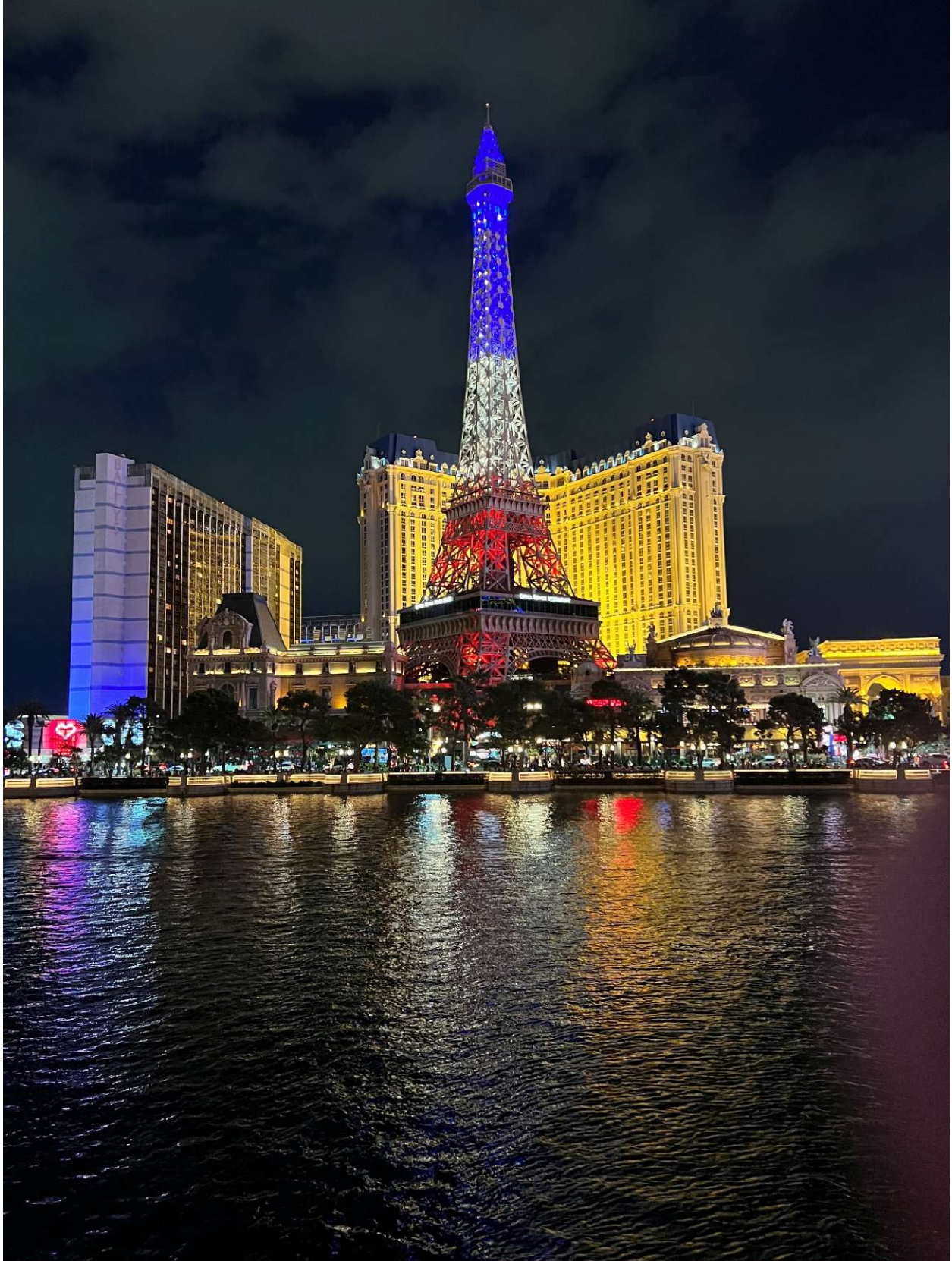
Ornate Column, Lobby, Caesar's Palace



FedEx Office, Caesar's Palace



Wall Décor, Lobby Lounge, Caesar's Palace



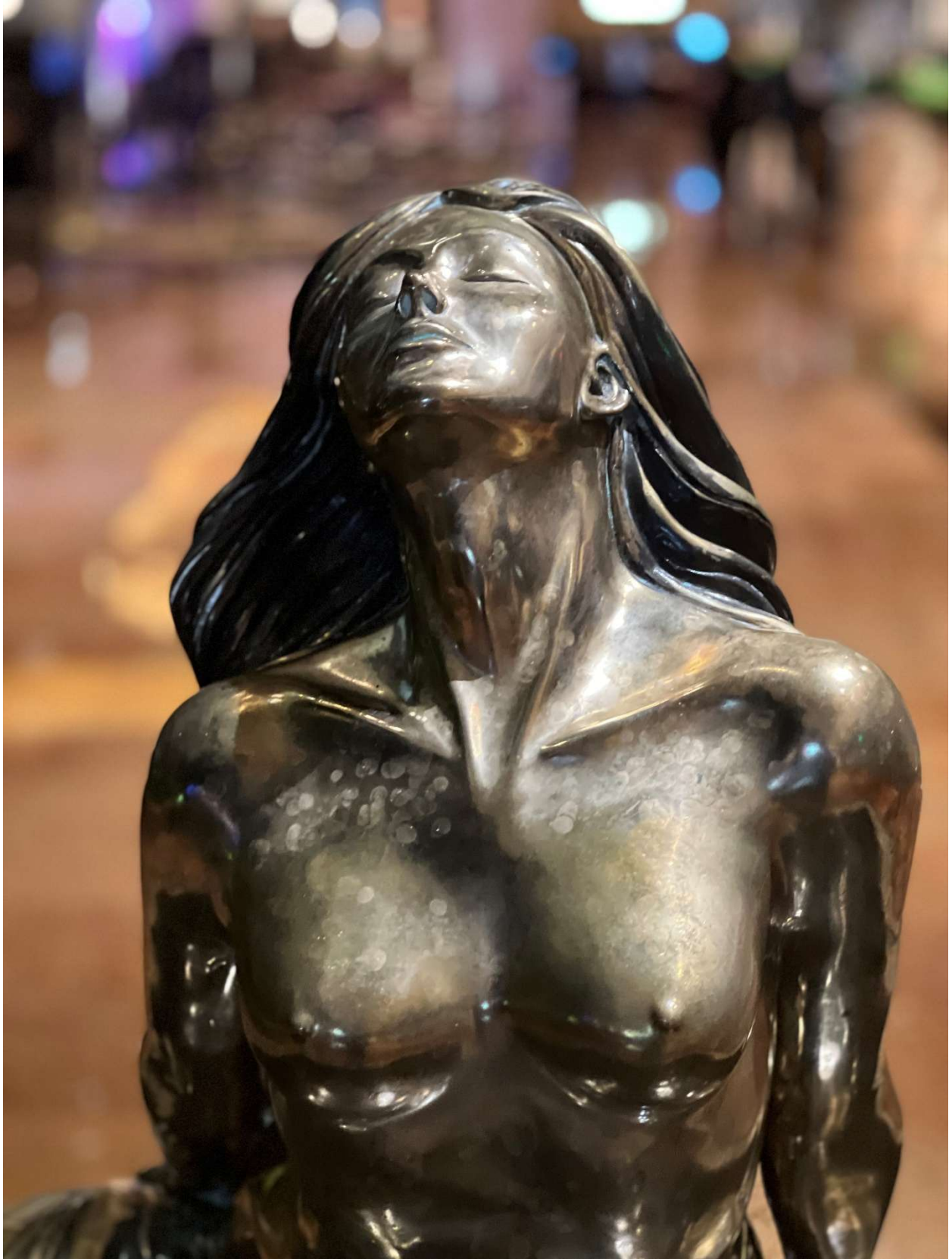
Paris Las Vegas Resort & Casino



Lobby, The Bellagio



Fountains, The Bellagio



Bronze Sculpture. Lobby, Flamingo Hotel



Bar is closed, Flamingo Hotel