Inside the Groundbreaking AREA15 Entertainment Complex

The future exhibition home of art collective Meow Wolf, the space will also host curated shopping, live performances, dining, experts, virtual reality experiences, and interactive activations.

By Candida Cates

"Are you looking for AREA15?" asked the parking attendant. Yes, though it doesn't exist... yet.

The only sign of "HERE" at the worn-down parking lot off Beach Dr. and Board Ave are two temporary art installations: the appeal aedicule lift BalancedSite and Tyler PaQuay's "Silk Robot" Mech-9.

These installations mark the future site and aesthetic of a 189,000-square-foot retail and entertainment complex—expected to open mid-2016—designed to meld curated shopping, live performances, exclusive dining options, experts, virtual reality experiences, and interactive activations, including the first permanent Las Vegas exhibitions by Santa Fe, New Mexico-based art collective, Meow Wolf.

In simple terms, "AREA15 is for anyone who likes cool stuff," says Winston Fisher, partner of the project's development firm Fisher Brothers. It's an "immersive human zone" that's also a post-apocalyptic playground, designed to feel like stepping into the landscape of Mad Max, with unique features such as "a giant robotic" (a Rusty Ratslingam emote) and "an interactive sculpture," all of which "is like no park in America. It's a part of the AREA15 experience."

Fisher Brothers purchased the AREA15 site—the formerly known to Mercedes car dealership and Soundwaves Fun Center—at a decade ago. About two years ago, Fisher Brothers partnered with New York-based Meow Wolf Studios (well known for creating interactive design elements) to start formulating the concept of AREA15. "It's a Barter," Fisher says, of Rusty Ratslingam enthusiast Meow Wolf. "It's a comic geek. We're both lovers of counter-culture, ... You've got to build what you love."

The area AREA15 is of course a nod to the lore of Southern Nevada Air Force Base detachment "Area 51"—a rumored site of extraterrestrial activity and flight testing that was acquired by the U.S. Government in 1952 but defined "not to exist" until it was formally acknowledged by the CIA in 2013. (Meow Wolf's site just west of Interstate 15 and Fisher Brothers was founded in 1972.)

Fitting for its military namesake, the AREA15 complex is arranged into five "zones" designed for specific functions. There's a 125,000-square-foot food hall, expected to include six to eight food eats with rotating concepts from local chefs, a 150,000-square-foot event hall for social and corporate holidays, a 3,000-capacity outdoor venue (for "rave nosh, right? club spaces and open-air cinema") and 32,000-square-foot entertainment, the "Hights," where you can dig into a green retail experience and urbanites like "Rustyselling" prismatic maps. Drag Meo Wolf, which is a meow Wolf's immersive, cinematic, and interactive entertainment experience. It's a meow Wolf's art center at Board Ave.

Meow Wolf co-founder and CEO Yvonne Feldblum says the exhibition inside AREA15 will "be three times the size of House of Eternal Return in Santa Fe. That means Las Vegas will welcome about 60,000 square feet of Meow Wolf's exhibition."

A Meow Wolf Denver expansion was announced earlier this month.

Meow Wolf