The new drama series “Vegas” needed a vintage location for its setting in the wild, early days of 1960s Las Vegas, Nev. According to Greg Walker, the show’s co-creator, executive producer and showrunner, this presented a challenge for the **CBS Television Studios** production. “Everyone knows those iconic images of downtown Fremont Street looked like with the Golden Nugget and the other original casinos,” he explains.
The series also has a Western feel to it as it tells the true story of local rancher Ralph Lamb (played by Dennis Quaid), who became the sheriff of Clark County. Lamb kept law and order in Vegas when the Chicago mob sent men like Vincent Savino (Michael Chiklis) to run the town’s gambling operations.

Directed by James Mangold, the “Vegas” pilot was filmed in New Mexico in a town coincidentally named Las Vegas, and that worked out fine to get the network interested in the project. For the shoot, Fremont Street was a blend of both actual buildings and set extensions that used visual effects to fill in the second and third stories. The show’s audience will see beautiful renderings of the first floors, but many layers were added in post with visual effects.

While New Mexico’s tax credits made it appealing to shoot the pilot in the state, Walker wanted an authentic feel to the show, as well as the convenience of shooting closer to home in California. The production checked into filming in Nevada, but today’s Fremont Street looks nothing like it did in the ’60s. “We obviously look at any state that offers tax credits when we make films or television, and I think that it would have been great to shoot [in Nevada],” says Cathy Konrad, one of the show’s executive producers. “We knew we would have to re-create our Strip anywhere we went. That was our biggest challenge. We [also] had to find a Big Sky desert [and] arid place, and New Mexico is quite a good place and has a great crew base, which is another way that you choose things. You don’t want to go someplace that doesn’t have experienced technicians because then you end up flying in everybody and it costs more

anyway.”

In the end, California was the best choice. Walker says that Santa Clarita was the only place in the Los Angeles metro area where they could find enough

physical space to build Fremont Street. The production team also checked out existing soundstages at Paramount, Warner Bros., Disney and other studios. The backlot of **Santa Clarita Studios**
was transformed into a stunning set that impressively passed for Las Vegas in the 60’s with flying colors. The studio is equipped with multiple stages, lighting, grip, full postproduction, and enough room to host any size production. “There was not enough space anywhere to build on the scale we needed, so we went to Santa Clarita, where the first season of ‘CSI’ was shot, and saw that as a good omen,” says Walker. “We were tasked with the challenge of re-creating Fremont Street circa 1960 up in Santa Clarita in seven weeks. We started with nothing there but hot asphalt, and our crew did an incredible job building it. Now we have an authentic replica of 1960 Fremont Street. You can see the Golden Nugget and the Strip, and, as you drive all the way down, you’ll come up to the entrance of the Savoy Hotel, one of our key sets.”

The production is now headquartered in Santa Clarita, helmed by Executive Producers Walker, Konrad, Mangold, Arthur Sarkissian and Co-Creator Nicholas Pileggi, and the “Vegas” set is fully occupied, lit and dressed, with the inside of the Savoy Hotel (which is the headquarters for Savino) painstakingly re-creating the era. “It’s pretty fantastic,” Walker enthuses. “You see all kinds of ’60s icons in there, the furniture, fixtures, lights and the colors. Extraordinary craftsmanship gave us the look we wanted to make this authentic.” And if you stand at the entrance to the Savoy and look back at the Golden Nugget and the Strip, Walker says “it takes you back 40 years in Vegas time.”