

# Reinventing the Roulette Wheel

Italian casino/gaming entrepreneur Fabrizio Boccardi energizes Sin City.

By Christopher G. Evans

**S**in City could be getting that European touch again. Italian resort investor Fabrizio Boccardi is the latest, and one of the most ambitious entrepreneurs to invade Las Vegas. In a city that has a history of unique and flamboyant characters, Boccardi fits right in the mix. He is young (31 years old), aggressive and seemingly wealthy. With his stable of interesting friends — such as Prince Albert of Monaco — to draw support from and help open doors, he has a dream for Vegas that, according to him, will be “so different and revolutionary that it defies the imagination.”

Boccardi specifically targets the city as an environment that he believes is in desperate need of a change. “Right now, there is no new blood, no new energy,” he says. “I don’t think the true essence of the Las Vegas kind of customer is about luxury. I think people want to experience something completely different, extremely dramatic and cutting edge. And, that’s what I will do.”

With a different pedigree than most casino/gaming entrepreneurs, he was born in Milan, Italy, and due to a series of family financial setbacks, was forced to drop out of high school and fend for himself. At the age of 18, with no money, skills or connections, he made his way to Monte Carlo in the south of France to pursue his dreams of wealth and power. His plan was simple: Make friends with as many rich people as possible. “I’ve always been around people with money,” he says. “It’s one of my talents. In fact, I know a lot. That’s key. You’ve got to choose the right friends.”

So, even though Boccardi never finished high school, he has seemingly earned a Ph.D in Self-Promotion and Schmooze. For example, one of his most important friendships was with the late Greek billionaire-shiping magnate (and former competitor of Aristotle Onassis) Stavros Niarchos. “We used to play chess every Friday and Saturday night on his yacht in the Monte Carlo harbor,” says Boccardi. “He used to say that I reminded him of himself when he was an up-and-coming young businessman.”

At a time when the market in real estate in the south of France was booming, Boccardi made enough “friends” to help him finance and cash in big-time on the condominium development business. In a short time, he became wealthy enough to expand his interests to other areas of southern France such as Nice and Cannes. It was there he started his career in the casino development industry.

By the mid ’90s, Boccardi shifted his attention to America, after a socialist administration came to power in France resulting in a less favorable environment for casino/gaming development.

After several attempts to purchase Las Vegas Strip properties like the Desert Inn and Frontier Hotel failed (he was outbid both times) he continued to actively network with the powers that be in the gaming community and sought other properties.

In 1996, he created Boccardi Capital Systems (BCS) to pull

Fabrizio Boccardi dares to dream and win big.



together other investors to manage his project. BCS has since partnered with the impressive French gaming concern, Groupe Partouche (they operate 20 casinos worldwide); Perini Building Co. of Phoenix, Arizona, which has built some of the top hotel/casinos (most recently the Paris Casino in Vegas); and HNTB Corp., a leading architectural and engineering firm.

“By aligning ourselves with Partouche and other investors, our company is leveraging some of the best talent in the country,” claims Boccardi. “We do not intend to simply build another casino or entertainment complex, but to develop a product and brand that will set a new industry standard and take Las Vegas to a new level.” Unfortunately, the intricacies of his mega plan are hush, hush. “I don’t want to disclose our entire marketing concept until I have a property on the Strip to develop.”

He is, however, willing to divulge a few tidbits, such as a hotel with up to 3,000 rooms, a 100,000-square-foot casino, five to six restaurants, top-rated entertainment, a *Penthouse* men’s club (with some of the world’s most beautiful women), telecommunications hookups and lottos. And he says that’s only the tip of this casino resort iceberg.

In a town that has heard it all and seen everything else, nothing is cheaper than talk, and money talks loudest of all. To gaming/casino insiders, Boccardi represents youthful exuberance with a fat wallet and rich associates.

Will his casino be *BOLD* enough for Vegas? The odds seem to be in Boccardi’s favor.

CHRISTOPHER G. EVANS is a freelance writer who lives in the mountains of Colorado. He specializes in business/economic topics.