



Grandissimo: The First Emperor of Las Vegas

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Jay Sarno built two path-breaking Las Vegas casinos, Caesars Palace (1966) and Circus Circus (1968), and planned but did not build a third, the Grandissimo, which would have started the mega-resort era a decade before Steve Wynn built The Mirage. As mobsters and accountants battled for the soul of the last American frontier town, Las Vegas had endless possibilities—if you didn't mind high stakes and stiff odds. Sarno invented the modern Las Vegas casino, but he was part of a dying breed—a back-pocket entrepreneur who'd parlayed a jones for action and a few Teamster loans into a life as a Vegas casino owner.

For all of his accomplishments, his empire didn't last. Sarno sold out of Caesars Palace shortly after it opened—partially to get away from the bookies and gangsters who'd taken over the casino—and he was forced to relinquish control of Circus Circus when the federal government indicted him on charges of offering the largest bribe in IRS history—a bribe he freely admitted paying, on the advice of his attorney, Oscar Goodman. Though he ultimately walked out of court a free man, he never got Circus back. And though he guessed the formula that would open up Las Vegas to millions in the 1990s with the design of the Grandissimo, but he wasn't able to secure the financing for the casino, and when he died in 1984, it remained only a frustrating dream.

Sarno's casinos--and his ideas about how to build casinos--created the template for Las Vegas today. Before him, Las Vegas meant dealers in string ties and bland, functional architecture. He taught the city how to dress up its hotels in fantasy, putting toga dresses on cocktail waitresses and making sure that even the stationery carried through with the theme. He saw Las Vegas as a place where ordinary people could leave their ordinary lives and have extraordinary adventures. And that remains the template for Las Vegas today.

Grandissimo is the story of how Jay Sarno won and lost his casino empire, inventing modern Las Vegas along the way.

In Grandissimo, you'll learn Jay's fascinating story, and also plenty of things you never knew about Las Vegas, including:

- the true story about how Jimmy Hoffa's Teamsters Union first started funding Sarno projects
- how Steve Wynn ended up answering the telephone in Hoffa's suite on the second day Caesars Palace was open
- how Sarno, represented by Oscar Goodman, beat a seemingly-airtight case against him when he was accused of offering the largest bribe in IRS history to an undercover agent
- how Sarno's unbuilt Grandissimo became the template for the 1990s "mega-resort" era in Las Vegas

From start to finish, it's the story of the man who inspired modern Las Vegas.

Grandissimo: The First Emperor of Las Vegas Details

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From Reader Review Grandissimo: The First Emperor of Las Vegas for online ebook

Dan says

Although I've got property in Vegas, I didn't know this very interesting, and somewhat sad, story of Jay Sarno. I found it to be very interesting, even if it may have been glamorised a bit (I don't know this for fact, but am guessing) as it read extremely well and the dialogues and flow were spot on. The background and character descriptions were great and I was almost disappointed when it was coming to a close; in both senses.

Definitely an interesting read for anyone with a love of Sin City or a rags to (almost) riches story.

Marti Rosenberg says

I read this book to try to understand my friend Jay's childhood better. Wow! How did he turn out so wonderful with a dad like that! He has told me some of this book has misinformation, now that I have read it I can ask what's wrong.

Matt Skains says

An interesting look at a man who shaped an industry and a city. Ultimately, I found the book to be quite sad. It's a long and drawn out story of a man with deep seated addictions, unable to save either his marriage or his failing health. There is a line near the end of the book that basically says (paraphrasing) "he spent his last months eating, gambling and golfing with empty motions because it's all he knows how to do". It was this lasting impression that left me feeling sorry for Sarno. He always seemed to be one step ahead of huge disaster, but certainly faced his share of challenges and demons.

Good writing and storytelling make it a quick read that's interesting and pretty light for a biography. Overall, I liked the book.

Mat Montgomery says

Grandissimo fills a blank spot in a fascinating point of the Vegas chronology, sitting neatly alongside Pileggi's Casino and Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. While Grandissimo's account of Jay Sarno is non fictional on it's own, the book does its best work as a companion piece to the larger Vegas mythos as a whole. For Vegas nerds like myself, it's a must read.

Travis says

I ended up with this book purely from an impulse buy in a sale. I never had pondered on the history of Vegas or given hardly a stray thought to it. This was quite an interesting biography which will probably lead me to looking for more titles about Sin City.

Tom Grover says

Jay Sarno developed the concept of giving a casino a theme, which dominated the Strip from the mid 60's to the mid 2000's. The casinos that have been built since that time, however, don't necessarily have a specific theme (Wynn, Encore, Cosmopolitan, Aria, etc.). All that said, Sarno is probably one of the underappreciated figures in Las Vegas history. This book has some interesting history about the founding of Caesars Palace and Circus Circus. If you think Circus Circus is weird now, you'll be blown away by what Sarno was doing with it when it first opened.

Sarno himself wasn't a very likeable figure. He was a hedonist, chauvinist and not a very good businessman. He wasn't faithful to his wife, nor was he a committed father. He was a big, creative personality in the right place at the right time. It's difficult to think that he would be anyone in Las Vegas 2018. Time eventually passed him by, and, in the 1980's his years of indulgent, hard living caught up with him and he died of a heart attack.

Erwin says

Fascinating! Exciting, energizing, informative account of the man who created a new sort of business model - packaging up escapist fantasy and making it accessible to the average person. Las Vegas, Macau, and dozens of smaller locations around the world pay homage to what Jay Sarno, creator of Caesar's Palace was able to create.

Like many of the business success stories from any generation (Malcolm McLean and SeaLand comes to mind), Scarno's story is part inspiration, part warning. Many visionaries are able to climb to fabulous heights, but often times they keep doubling down until their reach exceeds their grasp...

Great read!

Courtney Umlauf says

I can't decide if my overall reaction to this book was "meh" because of the way it was written or if my opinion of the work as a whole was overwhelmed by my extreme dislike for Jay Sarno. There is absolutely nothing about this man that I find admirable or compelling, which made it frustrating to read about his success in the hotel/casino business. I haven't read anything else about the history of Vegas, and this probably wasn't the best one to start with. I only knew about this book because it was a Daily Deal on Audible. And luckily for me, since I wasn't that enthralled with it, the narrator read so incredibly slow that I was able to listen at 2.5x speed and get through it quickly.

Fritzov says

I've always credited Steve Wynn as the guy that change Las Vegas into the town that i love so much but it turns out all credit shall go to Mr Sarno, Steve just had a way to get the money to do what Jay Sarno visioned. Loved every minute of this book.

Hakan Jackson says

If you watched the movie Casino and found yourself wanting to know more of what went into creating the Las Vegas that we all love and loath--this is the book for you. This book has a good matter of fact flow to it. You feel like a fly on the wall in the smoke filled rooms were the big deals are going down.

Geoff Hyatt says

“There are no bad ideas; they’re just bad after you try them.”

--Jay Sarno

Jay Sarno ate too much, drank too much, talked too much, and was an unapologetic womanizing gambling addict who somehow, despite his fear of the government, terror of the mob, and astounding ability to say the wrong things to the wrong people, clawed his way up from a seller of cut-rate tile to the builder of two of Vegas's most iconic hotels. Unappealing but fascinating, Sarno was the kind of self-centered hustler and dreamer who made modern Las Vegas in his own image. Well worth it for the anecdotes, if nothing else, but a great way to learn how the city became what it is today.

Lori says

Audio version: I'm not quite sure why I chose this book, as I've been to Vegas only twice and gambled all of \$5.00, so I'm not particularly interested in casinos. It did interest me, though, to hear how Jay Sarno went from humble beginnings to being a major player in the Las Vegas casino scene (both as a gambler and owner of casinos). His perseverance in getting what he wanted and getting it his way was pretty inspiring, but at the same time, it got old, as basically it was, Sarno wanted something, he had to fight to get the money, nobody wanted to give him money because he wasn't very well-liked, somebody always came through, there were obstacles, he ate his way through them, and repeat. But I kept listening, and if a book isn't holding me, I'll pitch it. Just the history of it was enough to hold me, I guess.

Charles Reimler says

You will love Sarno, despise him, pity him, and admire him. But you won't forget him!

*****Variety Detail "Popcorn" Packed Into !Furniture! Caesars Palace Opening & Circus Circus Charging \$2 Admission Plus No Roof!

Steve Wynn Viewed Current As "King" Or "Pope" Of Las Vegas Was A Mentor Friends with Jay Sarno

With as A Form Of "Student Relationship With Steve Wynn Learned His Perceptions! The "Early Aspects Of Jimmy Hoffa With Union Money Very Interesting Which Later Steve Wynn Went To Wall Street Folks To Develop Mega Resorts! Solid Book Pertaining HISTORY Per Overlooked Earlier Than Steve Wynn Mega Minded Casino Development By A Foresighted Person With "Practical" Insights! History Book Of A Tad Overlooked Biography Of An Interesting Man
Jay Sarno!

This *****

is a perfectly written biography

of the flawed visionary Jay Sarno. David G. Schwartz, Vegas historian extraordinare, hits the perfect balance between detail and fast pacing in his essential biography of the builder of the iconic Caesars Palace and Circus Circus. Sarno's influence on Las Vegas transcends those two hotels; he single-handedly had the vision that has impacted every single property built since then. Without Sarno, there is no Steve Wynn. There is no Mirage, Bellagio, Excalibur, etc.

The pacing of the book is perfect. Schwartz's tale unfolds like a movie as we get to see every aspect of Jay Sarno, a larger than life man of incredible appetites. If you are interested in Las Vegas history, read this book before any others. I have read almost every book on the history of Nevada and it's many colorful characters and this is my favorite. Schwartz did an untold amount of research to get this story right and I thank the Sarno family for cooperating with him. This man's story had to be told, and Schwartz did it perfectly.

You will love Sarno, despise him, pity him, and admire him. But you won't Forget!

db says

An interesting story and solid source material brought down by the author taking too many liberties with the facts, particularly by using first person narrative.

Roxanne says

This is about Mr Sarno who built Circus Circus and Cesaers Palace in Las Vegas. He sold the Palace after a run in with the mobsters but he became the template for the future themed hotels that were built.
