

BETTING  THE HOUSE

NEW ORLEANS MEETS LAS VEGAS

Nearly \$400 million was needed to transform the site of the old Rivergate into one of the world's most ornate casinos. It's New Orleans style crossed with Las Vegas glitz. Casinos have learned that gamblers every so often want to try something new. So Harrah's New Orleans Casino has created five themed areas to give gamblers a feel that they're moving from one kind of casino to another without leaving the main house. For entertainment, the casino offers 16 hours of live music per day and two indoor Carnival parades six nights per week. The vast, unfinished second floor is vacant and off-limits to customers, but plans call for a cabaret and small arena for boxing matches and other events.

COURT OF THE MANSION

Full house. Encompassing a ballroom, a 250-seat buffet, coffee bar, concierge desk and grand poker room with about two dozen tables, this court offers a variety of amenities, but is the most sedately decorated gambling area. It has a well-scrubbed "plantation" look and a nominal number of slots, but no table games outside the poker parlor. The poker room features Rodrigue Blue Dog paintings. The ballroom, which can be subdivided and rented for private parties, is decorated with murals depicting masquerade balls.

Slots: 218
Tables: 20 in poker parlor



State law limits the casino's food service to avoid competing with restaurants. The buffet, left, offers the only sit-down dining. The ballroom interior, above, is sedate by casino standards.



A jester greets gamblers at the entrance to the Mardi Gras Court, above, where a bank of slot machines is topped by a parade float, left.

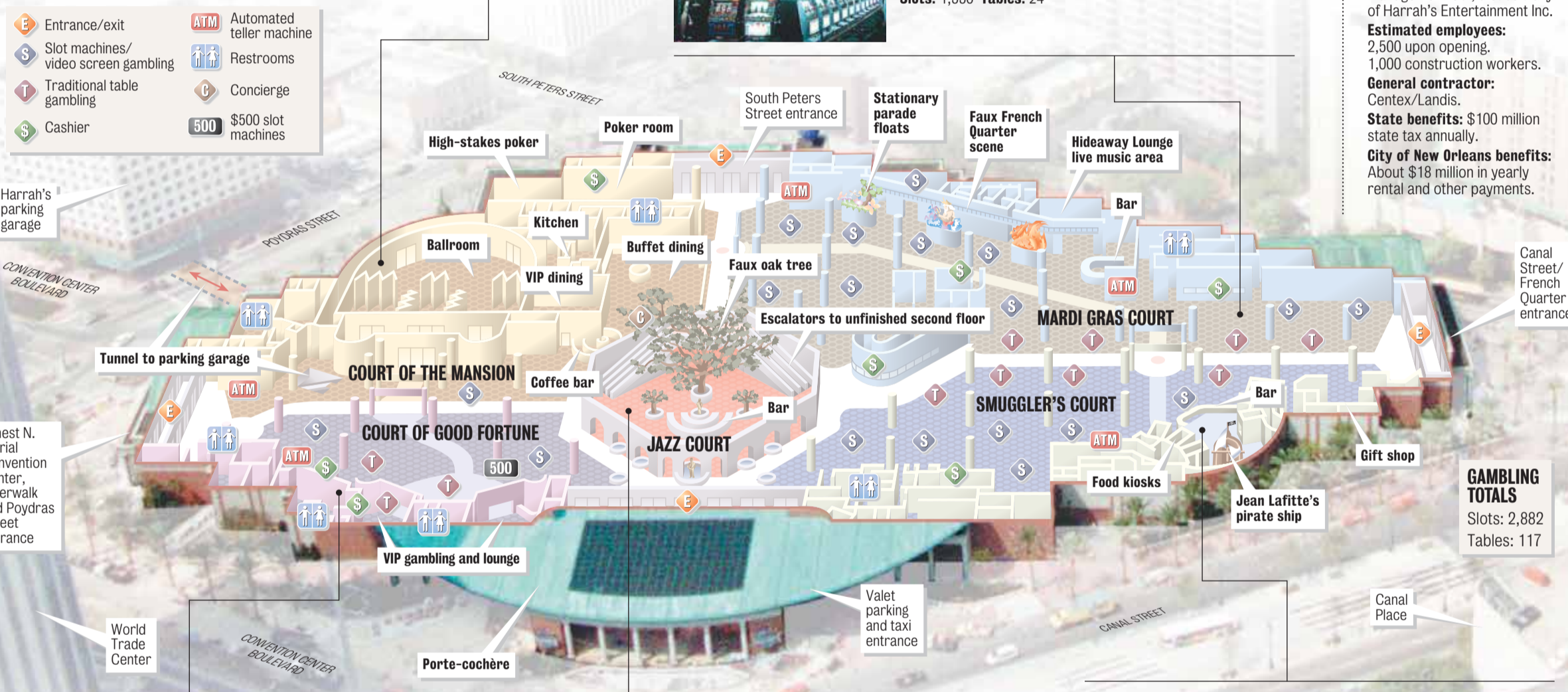
MARDI GRAS COURT

Imagine the French Quarter with air conditioning. This court creates a nearly hallucinogenic impression of New Orleans with swirling, lurid ceiling colors, an ersatz Vieux Carre street scene and three stationary floats made by famous local designers. The float themes are earth, water and fire. Here, the cheaper slots abound, with nearly half the casino's machines residing in this area. The Hideaway Lounge lives up to its name.

Slots: 1,330 **Tables:** 24

CASINO FACTS

Opening date: Oct. 28.
Hours of operation: 24 hours a day.
Gambling: 100,000 square feet of gaming area on the first level, featuring 2,882 slots and 117 table games.
Dining: 250-seat buffet; five kiosks featuring local restaurants.
Meeting space: 10,000 square feet, can accommodate groups of 30 to 1,000.
Parking: 1,500 spaces in casino and parking garages; 450 valet spaces.
Location: 14,000 hotel rooms and almost 400 restaurants within walking distance. Between Canal and Poydras streets at the Mississippi River.
Construction cost: \$345 million.
Furnishings and equipment cost: \$36 million.
Owner: Jazz Casino Co., a wholly owned subsidiary of JCC Holding Co.
Manager: Harrah's New Orleans Management Co., a subsidiary of Harrah's Entertainment Inc.
Estimated employees: 2,500 upon opening, 1,000 construction workers.
General contractor: Centex/Landis.
State benefits: \$100 million state tax annually.
City of New Orleans benefits: About \$18 million in yearly rental and other payments.



Golden palm trees tell gamblers they are in the high-stakes area.

COURT OF GOOD FORTUNE

If you have to ask, then you don't belong here. The high-stakes altar for high-rollers, this court has scores of large-denomination slot machines, including two with \$500 minimum bets. Several \$100 slots are available for the merely bold. A large oval-shaped area three steps up from the main floor creates the atmosphere of an antique European salon with stained wood floors, ornate chandeliers and recessed frescoes in the ceiling. This stage is set with table games requiring premium opening bets. Tucked behind the French doors are intimate VIP rooms that most people will never see.

Slots: 409 **Tables:** 28



Statues second-line above the Jazz Court to honor 13 styles of music.

JAZZ COURT

Midnight in the garden of good and evil. This large octagonal room dressed as a nocturnal fantasy garden serves as the aesthetic focus of the casino. Patrons can sit in a lounge offering live music beneath a sprawling fake oak under a starlit sky graced with an occasional special-effects meteor. Ringing the walls above, sculpted musical groups represent Dixieland, bebop and other styles of jazz. Behind the tree are escalators leading to nowhere, at least until the casino finds a use for the second floor.

Slots: 152 **Tables:** 0



Jean Lafitte the pirate menaces patrons of the food kiosks.

SMUGGLER'S COURT

Rolling the bones. Evoking Louisiana's romantic mythology as a haven for outlaw mariners, this area is decorated like an open treasure chest. Five fast-food kiosks for stand-up dining share a small cove with a wrecked pirate ship that rocks and booms with intermittent thunderstorms. A skeletal buccaneer brandishes a menacing sword. Craps, blackjack, roulette and other table games, the most of any area in the casino, line the corridor leading from the Canal Street entrance. Most of the slots and video games range from 5-cent to \$1 machines.

Slots: 773 **Tables:** 45



It wasn't just bankruptcy that Harrah's had to overcome. Building on the site of the old Rivergate posed some difficult engineering dilemmas. And the over-the-top gaudiness of casino architecture had to be tempered for a downtown location.

Source: Harrah's New Orleans Casino, staff research by Robert Scott and Douglas MacCash

ARCHITECTURAL WONDERS OF THE NEW CASINO



CAMOUFLAGE

Unlike the Rivergate roof, above, the casino roof was designed to be attractive, even from the high-rise buildings around it. The plumbing vents and boiler flues are hidden in the casino's four decorative towers, and the air conditioning cooling towers and fire pumps

are hidden in the parking garage. Cold air is pumped through a tunnel under Poydras Street.

SMOOTH ACCESS

The former Rivergate had loading docks along the South Peters side. Casino architects Perez, Ernst and Farnet cut away the unsightly bays and built a single truck port for 18-wheelers off Poydras Street. Trucks take a ramp to the basement truck bays and exit a garage door on South Peters, never needing to turn around. Floor doors prevent water from flowing down the ramps during downpours.



TUNNEL VISION

In 1959, there were plans to place the interstate along the riverfront that got as far as the digging of a huge tunnel beneath Canal and Poydras streets. The tunnel was unsealed and renovated as the valet-parking area of the casino.

FIRM FOUNDATION

The pressure of the nearby Mississippi River on the sub-basements under the Rivergate made it impossible to drill new pilings for the casino because the river could have burst through. So engineer Subhash Kulkarni placed the building atop the structural footprint of the Rivergate. He designed a maze of huge cement tinker-toy-shaped blocks that spread the new load onto the old foundation. It took 75 men grouting 24 hours a day for three weeks to seal the surface cracks in the old foundation.



NO CHEAP DATES

Fifty-nine arrow-straight, 26-foot Medjool date palms march beside the casino in two echelons. At \$6,000 each, the value of the palms, shipped from Bard, Calif., was more than \$350,000.

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