



THEATRE OF DREAMS

London braces itself for the opening of a new gaming icon as the Hippodrome Casino promises to upstage the competition

Following briskly on the heels of two spectacular casino openings in London, England's capital is set for a third in less than a year with the eagerly awaited opening of the Hippodrome Casino, scheduled for May.

Located in an enviable spot in Leicester Square, the Hippodrome promises to be a truly 'international' style casino when it opens its doors to an expectant public.

Following the boutique, exclusive feel of Playboy London and the vast expanses of slots seen at Aspers Westfield, the Hippodrome is pitching itself slightly differently. It will comprise a top class restaurant and lounge bar, a cocktail bar, private dining rooms and events spaces and a dedicated live entertainment venue together with traditional and state-of-the-art electronic gaming, all in one of London's truly iconic venues.

The Heliot Restaurant, Lounge and Bar will revive the bygone West End glamour reminiscent of the halcyon days of the Atlantic bar and Grill whilst the Matcham Room will provide an intimate performance space, presenting established

stars from the West End and Broadway as well as world-class music legends, emerging talent, classic entertainers, comics and musicians.

The main arena gaming floor, with its central bar and full-height ceiling stretching up to the minstrel's gallery of the original theatre, will offer a particularly spectacular gaming experience. Up in 'The Gods' meanwhile, the Poker Deck will offer tournaments and cash games whilst on The Top Floor the VIP rooms will offer high minimums for those invited. Four private rooms will offer the opportunity for dining and/or gaming in a more private environment. As a nice finishing touch, the Top Floor Bar and VIP rooms will lead out onto two open air gaming and smoking terraces providing a unique outdoor environment within the casino walls.

With a capacity of 1,900, the casino will be the result of a £40m investment to turn the iconic Grade 2 former Hippodrome Theatre building into a must-visit destination. The vision has been to return the building, designed by theatre land's greatest architect Frank Matcham,

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to its original 1900s glory, recreating many of the venue's original features in painstaking detail. In all of its many guises as a circus, a theatre, a cabaret and a nightclub, the Hippodrome has thrilled audiences from far and wide. Now with the final call about to be aired for its reincarnation as a casino, owner Hippodrome Casino Ltd is hoping it will attract both traditional and new audiences to its gaming floors. G3 posed the questions to Simon Thomas, CEO of The Hippodrome, to find out what to expect when the curtains fall.

G3: How pleased are you to be opening in such a famous, landmark venue?

Simon Thomas: We're absolutely delighted! Our front door is on the busiest street corner in Europe and our second entrance leads directly in London's Chinatown. For our kind of operation it's all about location, location, location. And in the words of an American I took around the site this week: "There is nothing like this on this island." I agree. The building itself is also one of those iconic places where practically everyone you talk to has visited on one occasion or another in the past; 60 per cent of Londoners know where it is already and will be interested in its next incarnation. We couldn't have found anywhere better.

G3: What does the footfall/passing traffic on the streets outside promise to bring?

ST: The sheer number of passers-by brings both challenges and opportunities. We have 250,000 people pass our front doors every day, 40 million using Leicester Square tube station underneath annually. Tens of thousands of Chinese passing our rear door, and so we certainly have no shortage of good potential customers. Our challenge is to turn that into attracting the right customers and in optimising our position in this part of central London.

G3: Located close to China Town in a hugely popular tourist area of London, what will your target audience be?

ST: Naturally, we intend to be the casino of choice for the existing casino players, and clearly there is an enormous benefit to being in the location we are, but there's an even wider audience than first appears. We will be London's first truly international-style casino, which means we will appeal to those visitors who don't normally consider visiting a casino in London, because the traditional UK casinos simply don't appeal to them. We are far more like the international style casinos they are used to, an open access casino with restaurant, bars, an entertainment stage, smoking areas,

lounges and more. And it's not just overseas visitors. Consider the statistics of the vast number of UK travellers who will gladly go to casinos abroad because of what they offer, but not go at home. We will offer that breadth of gaming facilities plus entertainment in this country for the first time, so we will also attract UK casino players who don't play in the UK.

G3: How will your pre-opening marketing reflect this?

ST: Our biggest marketing asset is the building itself. And a great deal of effort has gone into making the outside look spectacular, to truly reflect what will be going on inside. I won't say any more at the stage before the reveal, but we will also be supplementing this with plenty of online and offline advertising and promotion, so London should know the Hippodrome is back at the appropriate time.

G3: How will the different levels of the gaming floor cater for different tastes and styles of gambling?

ST: Thanks to the more than 400km of cabling – we have given an old building a formidable digital core – we will be able to operate on a modular basis, changing the uses of areas and spaces to what we require, even throughout the day. But on a normal day the casino will have a basement that targets the more transactional customers with table games such as baccarat, cards and roulette plus a 'sexy' rig of Organic G4 terminals, playing roulette, baccarat, craps and sic bo in a dedicated space with large plasma screens to inject an element of showmanship that is often lacking in electronic gaming areas. The ground floor will be more international with a large number of tables in the main theatre atrium in an impressive setting; while under the stage area it will be further gaming tables in an area that is a touch more discreet. And to the side we will have a second rig of electronic terminals, this time Novomatic Novo Unity IIs again in a dedicated area with large screens. Above, on the level of the smoking terraces, we will have gaming rooms catering to those looking for a higher minimum stake. And of course there will be gaming on the two-tier smoking terrace itself. Every level has its own bars and hospitality areas. So lots of choice and we expect people to be able to find somewhere to their taste and also be able to move internally for a change of scene.

G3: How important will the VIP sector be?

ST: Very useful, we consider all our customers to be VIPs. However we are



not targeting the Mayfair end of the market; there are already lots of casinos that cater to this sector very well indeed. What we will have though is a casino with magnificent facilities in a stunning building and a focus on the very best levels of service, which will appeal to the higher end of the West End market and maybe tempt some of the Mayfair customers anyway.

G3: How different do you think the Hippodrome will be to other recently opened casino premises in London such as The Playboy Club and Aspers?

ST: I am delighted with the recent openings of other casinos in London. Every new venture builds a higher

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awareness of what a modern casino can be and spirits away the image of how casinos used to be perceived in this country. Playboy offers something at the higher end, with a unique American twist; Aspers shows what you can do when you are allowed a wider range of product and slot machines, albeit in East London. Both have increased the amount of positive press for the sector which should only be applauded. The Hippodrome will be different again but continue the positive story of casino development in the UK. We have taken two Grade 2 listed buildings, injected £40m in a massive renovation project and created a stunning and unique international style world class casino facility in London.



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G3: Is it fair that one casino should have the added advantage of 150 slots?

ST: Fair or unfair it is the law, and of course we will add more slots when allowed. But as to how reasonable the law is just look at the facts. English casinos are subject to the highest levels of regulatory control, player protection, effective door control, licensed staff, money laundering control...the list goes on. Casinos are recognised as the safest places for people to gamble and already have unlimited numbers of table games with unlimited stakes and prizes. And given all this to be allowed only 20 machines with a £2 stake regardless of our size is...well, let’s say something between odd and terribly unfair.

Especially when our closest neighbour, an arcade at the front of our building, has more than 20 machines with a £2 stake, and bookies all around us have £100 stake machines. The regulations clearly need to be corrected. The principles of the Gaming Act include protecting the vulnerable and casinos are recognised to be the safest place for people to gamble, but the lack of slots in casinos is pushing people to play in less protected and regulated high street venues or online which besides offering less protection, pay less tax, so hopefully the regulators and the Chancellor will sort this soon.

G3: The physical restoration of this Grade II listed building has taken some time, what has been the driving force in seeing this project through?

ST: The end game has been the driving force. The knowledge that once it is opened it will be incredible and all the work will have been worthwhile. To be honest to be allowed to work on such a beautiful London icon is a dream project. Obviously, a development of this nature has a great many challenges, both regulatory and physical, and whilst it has been relentless hard work I know it will be worth it. At times, particularly in the early heavy construction period, I confess I occasionally walked out thinking ‘what the hell am I doing?’ Then when I saw the thousands of people walking past along Cranbourn Street and looked up at a huge, magnificent building

IN THE WORDS OF AN AMERICAN I TOOK AROUND THE SITE: THERE IS NOTHING LIKE THIS ON THIS ISLAND.

that will soon be a world class casino, I knew what I was doing was right..

G3: What has the level of media interest been like throughout the development of the project and what will you be putting on in terms of opening nights

ST: We have had enormous interest. Being so well known the building attracts interest and the media support has been heartening because I think so many have realised what we are trying to achieve and have enjoyed following it. In terms of launch, I just have to say at this stage watch this space. A venture of this size cannot be launched with just the one event, so there will be several to showcase every element of the casino.

STATE-OF-THE-ARTS

London-born TCSJohnHuxley has been at the heart of this prestigious London development supplying 44 gaming tables spread over the four floors, along with 15 Saturn roulette wheels, 12 Chipper Champ 2 machines, 15 e-FX Elite 29” double sided displays incorporating the new wheel check displays, only launched in January and 360 gaming chairs.

TCSJohnHuxley also over saw the install of 67 Unity II Touch Bet terminals from Novomatic. Almost half of these are in an arena style layout with a dedicated dealer podium. There are also two custom designed loveseat configurations, seating for two with bar top style units, situated on the balcony overlooking the gaming floor.

John Galajza, Business Development Director, said: “We’ve been lucky enough to be involved with this project since 2008. As a result we’ve witnessed the transformation of this incredible building and the painstaking research and attention to detail that Simon Thomas has devoted to the project. We feel very privileged to have been chosen as a key supplier and are very excited to see the undoubtedly spectacular end result and feel confident our products will do the venue justice – we see this almost like our central London showroom.”

Matsui Europe supplied all the cash chips, plaques, wheelchecks and opening chip key chains. Matsui Europe’s Managing Director Dave Holt said: “Matsui Europe was very pleased and proud to receive the order for The Hippodrome Casino’s cash chips, plaques and wheelchecks. Given the prestigious and historic nature of the Hippodrome Casino it has been great to be a small part of what is sure to be an impressive venue. We look forward to seeing Matsui products being used when the casino opens and feel confident that both customers and casino staff will be impressed with the quality and design.”

Although ornate and traditional in its appearance, the Hippodrome has also invested in the latest and greatest in machine gaming available to the UK. As such, Novomatic’s iconic Super V + Gaminator slots will account for 40 per cent of the slot floor. Eight of the state-of-the-art machines, fitted with the latest game mixes, will be installed through Novomatic’s wholly owned UK subsidiary Astra Games Limited; together with an Asian-themed FlexiLink jackpot system.

Zane Mersich, Managing Director of Astra Games commented: “We are delighted that such a prestigious project as the Hippodrome Casino has chosen Novomatic for such a significant



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proportion of it slot floor. This, together with the TouchBet multiplayer equipment supplied by TCS John Huxley, ensures that Novomatic will have a strong presence in this exciting new attraction in London."

IGT was awarded 30 per cent of the floor share with UK players being able to enjoy all-time favourite games such as Cleopatra and the world famous Fort Knox suite of games all featured on the powerful AVP platform GL20 cabinet.

Sabby Gill, IGT Regional Vice President of Europe, the Middle East and Africa "We are honoured to have a significant percent of the floor at the new Hippodrome Casino. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Hippodrome Casino to successively introduce innovative and entertaining content to the UK market for all players to enjoy."

SPIELO International has supplied the remaining six machines; all of them are equipped with Spielo's diversity Master Collection Vol. 1, multigame solution exclusively for the British market. The game suite includes classic slots on low-line games such as Mighty Miner,

THE HIPPODROME IS THE FIRST CASINO IN EUROPE TO INSTALL MEI'S EASITRAX SOFT COUNT SYSTEM.

Treasures of the Pyramid, Sphinx and Brilliant Fruits as well as standalone progressive jackpots such as Cash Fever.

James Illingworth, Sales Development Director EMEA, for SPIELO said: "We feel it is the right time for Spielo International to enter the UK B1 market right now and we're confident that our diversity Master Collection is the right product for this market. Our multigame solution brings more choice and fun to the player whilst being a competitive and productive choice for the operator. Hippodrome is the first UK B1 location in which we will install machines and we are proud that our market entry takes place in such a prestigious UK location."

Multi-player specialist Interblock has



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This significant reduction in labour is possible because cashboxes are no longer tied to specific slot machines and data can be transferred without writing or wandling."

ANDY REICHLIN,
MEI Marketing Director.

supplied a huge G4 Organic Island in the basement of the property, where it has installed its G4 Organic Live Card 06 along with two Stand Alone units of Dice and Roulette and four Single wall PIDs, connecting 35 play stations in a spectacular theatre layout.

Miha Miklavcic, Regional Sales Manager, said: "The basement floor will allow visitors to enter from China town, where we believe our knowledge of Asian customers in markets such as Macau will really help us provide the best multi-player gaming possible. The Hippodrome has also placed our products in a VIP gaming area on the top floor, where visitors will be able to play on additional eight G4 Organic Stand Alone Roulette terminals. The beauty of all this is of course that due to the inter-connection of all Interblock products, the casino can really maximize the potential of the floor space. We believe this will be one of the best casinos in Europe, which setting new standards in the gaming industry. The inspiration and vision of the management team will really leave its mark on this famous, historical building."

MEI will ensure play on the machines is smooth when it comes to cash handling with a 100 per cent fit across all of the casino's gaming machines. "MEI is thrilled the Hippodrome Casino has specified the MEI Cashflow SC for all of its games," stated MEI VP - EMEA, James Boje. "It is both an honour and a responsibility that we enthusiastically embrace, striving to provide both products and service that maximise expectations. The Hippodrome Casino has not only specified Cashflow SC, but also Easitrax Soft Count. This will be the first installation of Easitrax in Europe."

The addition of Easitrax to Cashflow SC creates a comprehensive cash management system. "Implementing Easitrax at the opening allows the Hippodrome Casino to build an efficient cash management process from day one - ensuring the labour, processes and equipment work in harmony," explained Andy Reichlin, Marketing Director at MEI.

"Easitrax customers benefit from both improved efficiencies in the cash management process and access to performance data that can be used to support maintenance programs and asset maximisation. The integrated software/hardware solution has proven to save, on average, 20 to 30 seconds every time a cashbox is emptied. This significant reduction in labour is possible because cashboxes are no longer tied to specific slot machines and data can be transferred without writing or wandling. Additionally, the eight pre-programmed reports help manage assets by providing easy access to critical performance data."

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Congratulations to
The Hippodrome Casino
on the opening and
our very best wishes
for your success!

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