

# Gambling on Garber



Mitch Garber is vice-chairman of Caesars Entertainment, which includes the famed Caesars Palace on the Las Vegas strip.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE GIRON



VINCENZO D'ALTO/URBAN EXPRESSIONS

Mitch Garber, who divides his time between Las Vegas and Montreal, is shown with his wife, Anne-Marie Boucher, in their bright Westmount home.

## Montreal tycoon Mitch Garber has hit the jackpot as a go-to guy for major-league entertainment

By Rochelle Lash

By the time we've taken the first sip of our café au laits during a one-hour chat, millions of dollars has surged through Mitch Garber's vast and varied empire in Las Vegas. Thousands of kilometres north of the Nevada desert, Garber, sits with his wife, Anne-Marie Boucher, in their bright hill-top manor in Westmount, where they live with their two teenaged sons.

As we gaze at Montreal's striking panorama with views of the St. Lawrence River, our conversation covers a range of topics, including the Expos and the couple's collection of contemporary art, which includes a Matisse drawing and sculptures by Sir Anish Kapoor and Fernando Botero.

Garber commutes to Vegas every few weeks or so and is vice-chairman of Caesars Entertainment, an approximately \$8-billion conglomerate of more than 50 resorts and casinos, including Caesars Palace, Planet Hollywood and Harrah's, as well as nightclubs, entertainment, online gambling and the televised World Series of Poker. His Wikipedia page pegs his net worth at

\$200 million, which he won't comment on.

The Montreal-born tycoon is unpretentious and has a boyish enthusiasm for sports and life. Recently named one of the Dragons on the French-language version of Dragons' Den, he is rumoured to be taking part in a bid to acquire Cirque du Soleil and possibly bring back major-league baseball to Montreal with businessmen Stephen Bronfman and Neil Rossy.

"If you ignore the politics and the perception of Franco-Anglo tension, Montreal is the most wonderful, cultured, safe city in the world."

The 50-year-old plays and works in the big leagues and is a good listener and articulate speaker. He has dined with former Israeli president Shimon Peres, discussed micro-economics with Nobel Peace Prize-winner Muhammad Yunus and, in 2007, addressed the British House of Lords on the gaming industry. He is also pals with some of the world's most famous entertainment figures, including Céline Dion, celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay and Elton John. His 50th birthday bash in Montreal was a cool soirée of Dom Pérignon and lobster, rocked with music by Eddie Money.

But life wasn't always a glittering galaxy of \$100

Kobe steaks and private jets. Garber has a modest background — his mother was a schoolteacher and his father a restaurateur and art dealer. He started with a paper route at age 12 and held down jobs while at McGill University and the University of Ottawa's law school.

Garber worked as a lawyer and radio sportscaster in Montreal before turning to a career in the gaming industry, where he credits his success to being in the right place at the right time.

"I started a gaming law practice in Montreal with Cookie Lazarus exactly when gaming exploded beyond Las Vegas and Atlantic City, and a few years before the boom in e-commerce and online gaming."

The so-called Montreal Rat Pack in Vegas includes compatriots like Céline Dion, René Angélil, Sean O'Donnell of Light Night Club and the Cirque du Soleil's Daniel Lamarre and Guy Laliberté. They are a fiercely loyal bunch, even if they are competing at a business level.

The Garbers are dedicated to several causes, including the One Drop Foundation, cystic fibrosis research, St. Mary's Hospital, McGill University and hospitals in Israel.

"I did not grow up affluent and that inspired me to outwork a lot of people who lacked the hunger. Plus, I chose the right wife, the right business domain and the right colleagues."