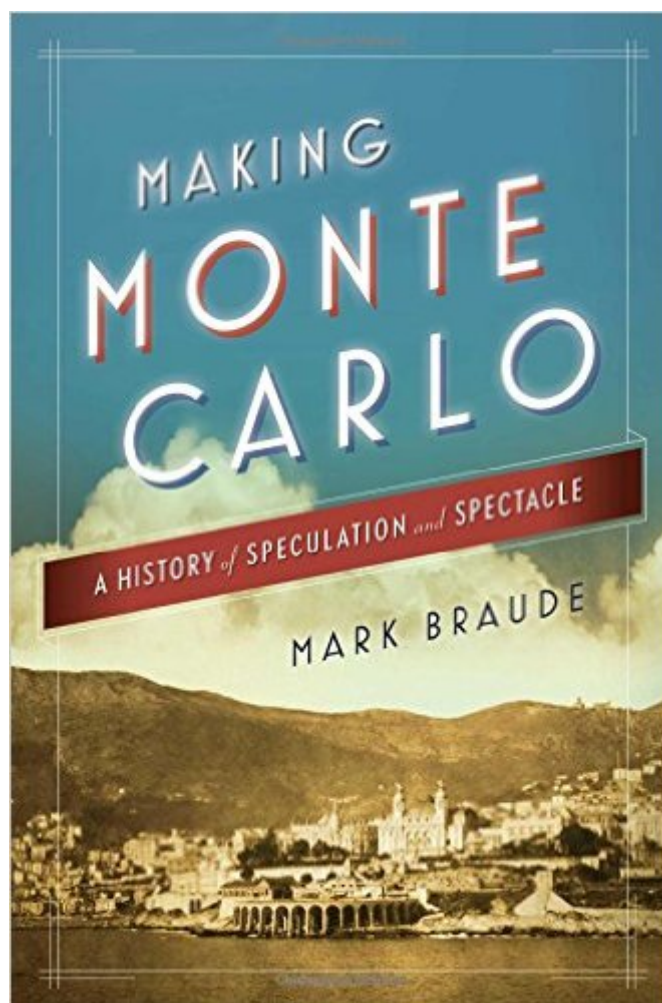


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Making Monte Carlo: A History Of Speculation And Spectacle



Synopsis

A rollicking narrative history of Monte Carlo, capturing its nineteenth-century rise as the world's first modern casino-resort and its Jazz Age heyday as infamous playground of the rich. Monte Carlo has long been known as a dazzling playground for the rich and famous. Less well known are the shrewd and often ruthless strategies that went into creating such a potent symbol of luxury and cosmopolitan glamour. As historian Mark Braude reveals in his entertaining and informative *Making Monte Carlo*, the world's first modern casino-resort started as an unlikely prospect "with the legalization of gambling in tiny Monaco in 1856" and eventually emerged as the most glamorous gambling destination of the Victorian era. The resort declined in the wake of WWI, and was reinvented, again, to suit the styles and desires of the new Jazz Age tastemakers, such as F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Gerald and Sarah Murphy, and Coco Chanel. Along the way, we encounter a colorful cast of characters, including the fast-talking Francois Blanc (a professional gambler, stock market manipulator, and founder of Monte Carlo); Basil Zaharoff (notorious munitions dealer and possible secret owner of the casino in the 1920s); Elsa Maxwell (a brash society figure and Hollywood maven, hired as the casino's publicist); Leon (a visionary Jewish businessman, who revitalized the resort after WWI); Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, and other satellite members of Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russes dance company; as well as Cole Porter, Ernest Hemingway and other American expats who "colonized" the Riviera in the 1920s. A rollercoaster history of how a small, rural town grew into the prosperous resort epicenter of the late nineteenth century and rose again to greatness out of the ashes of WWI, *Making Monte Carlo* is a classic rags-to-riches tale set in the most scenic of European settings.

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Customer Reviews

I was a bit disappointed when I finished Mark Braude's book, "Making Monte Carlo: A History of Speculation and Spectacle". The book I had enjoyed reading ended in the 1930's. Then I looked at the title again, and realised why the book ended when it did. Monte Carlo, part of Monaco, really had been the product of speculation, wild ideas, and sometimes shady operators. Was the time period Braude wrote about the end of the speculative era? Did things calm down after the 1930's? Mark Braude has written a snappy, fun book about the creation of Monte Carlo. He begins by examining the German spas which were set up in the early 1800's to provide a place to both "take the waters"...and have a little fun on dry land. That fun often included gambling and the spa towns attracted plenty of high rollers - both royal and just wealthy. The spa and casino of Bad Homburg, located in Hesse, had been started up by twin brothers, Louis and Francois Blanc. Francois was lured away to Monaco in the early 1860's to revive a not-so-thriving casino. Francois Blanc worked his magic, turning around the poky casino and livening the place up with a flashy hotel and other entertainment. But the money-making casino was still the major draw to those seeking fun in the south of France. Monte Carlo and its allure was made even more reachable by increased train service to the rocky area just east of Nice. The train service and other attractions were made known by a directed publicity campaign. Some smart minds were behind the advertising, and Monte Carlo became "the" place to see and be seen. Braude ends his book with the "Circuit de Monaco" road race, run through the streets of Monaco.

Monaco is a roller coaster of a place. Built into a mountainside, its annual car race is famous for the hills and curves drivers must navigate. Its history is similar. With the principality too tiny to be wealthy, its prince sought out a casino operator to solve his financial problems. The roster of characters that passed through, leaving their mark or their money or both, makes fascinating reading. The Blancs who built and ran the casino were way ahead of their time. The only advantage Las Vegas has over them is technology. In the mid 1800s they were already collecting demographic data on everyone who entered, implemented strict security, and comped high rollers to rooms, money and amenities, to the point of giving them return train fare home when they went broke. Roulette was illegal in France, giving Monaco a huge advantage it kept for decades. Most impressively, they knew sin would not sell in their era, but that once in town, everyone would end up at the casino. So they built up the whole town from its dusty, impoverished hovels, encouraging

restaurants, hotels and other businesses. They also provided public amenities like a newfangled elevator from the new train station to the casino - for free. There were free pigeon shoots for patrons wanting fresh squab for dinner. Free concerts. Free events. They built the roads and rails for access to Monaco from the Riviera and Paris. Monaco became an adventure destination for the crowned heads of Europe, celebrities and the wealthy tourist. It was neutral, exotic, peaceful and unique. To really cover the sin, the Blancs promoted the spa instead: the curative waters and the relaxation. That kept the destination open to a far greater audience, one that would gamble given the chance.

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