

Opening of the biggest French casino in Toulouse

Last week, Groupe Lucien Barriere officially opened its new establishment in Toulouse, the biggest casino in France. Located on Ile du Ramier, by the Garonne, this 14.300 m2 building spread over three levels, was designed by Jean-Michel Wilmotte, architect for Cardète & Huet, a firm in Toulouse.

This casino replaced the temporary one which opened last year on the Cepiere racecourse. The Toulouse casino offers 14 standard table games, including Texas Hold'em Poker, and 250 slot machines distributed over two levels linked together by escalators. The gaming area is enhanced by a magnificent 1200-seat modular theatre.

At least 150 events will be scheduled every year in the area's new entertainment venue, ranging from operettas, so cherished in this region, to musical comedies. Groupe Barriere also took great care of their leisure cluster by introducing three restaurants, including a Fouquet's, the third of its name after the famous one located at Champs-Elysees and the other at Cannes-Croisette.

The new Fouquet's offers a particularly inventive menu prepared by the chef Eric Cocollos, for 170 indoor seats, 60 seats on the terrace and 19 in the special lounge named "Du côté de chez Diane" in memory of Diane Barriere and decorated with several pictures of her.

Pascal Desprez, the decorator, particularly looked after and succeeded in laying out the third Fouquet's, as much as Le Samouraï, one of the three bars, which is strongly suggestive of Asian influences and reminiscent of the Tao bar at the Venetian Hotel, Las Vegas.

Groupe Barriere spent a total of 73 million euros on this

Toulouse project. This important investment could be made profitable in 5 to 10 years, depending on whether or not the number of slot machines can be increased by about one hundred. The managers of Groupe Barriere are confident, particularly since the first operating results seem auspicious, even if things must be looked into perspective because of the "novelty" effect.

In the first month, according to director David Parré, the Barriere theatre-casino welcomed 100.000 visitors, two-thirds of them coming for the leisure area and one-third to gamble, and the restaurant served 37000 guests. In the week-ends, the casino welcomed 5000 persons daily, causing traffic congestions as the access from the town centre towards the island is reduced to a single-lane in each direction with several roundabouts.

Dominique Desseigne, chairman of the Supervisory Board of Groupe Barriere, said he was "proud to see a modern 21st century casino on Ile du Ramier" and that this casino should quickly be ranked amongst the first 10 casinos in France and, in due course, become the 3rd or 4th French gambling establishment.

To begin with, if the expected GGR is 50 million euros, Sven Boinet, chairman of the board of directors, is then counting on 100 million euros in 3 or 4 years. As from next year, the Group is expecting one million visitors and 200.000 spectators for the theatre.

Jean-Luc Moudenc (UMP), mayor of Toulouse, emphasized on his part that this casino was "important for the economy of Toulouse". De facto, if the communal levies amount to 15% on the GGR, 8.5% being also deducted on the turnover, the national royalty of 60.000 euros and artistic contribution of 1.44 million will allow the town to receive 10 million euros next year, that is, 20% of the expected GGR. As far as employment is concerned, the theatre-casino already has 270

employees, 85% of them coming from the region. In the long run, the casino intends to recruit 360 employees.

This 38th establishment owned by Groupe Barriere (the 39th being the temporary casino of Lille which opened last month) is the very example of a quality product. It remains to be seen if there is still room for such a venture with, on one hand, the investments it required as well as operating losses amounting to 10 million for the temporary casino and, on the other hand, extremely high levies. Lille should cost about 100 million euros. At least 350 slot machines will be needed for it to be cost-effective.