

## Q&amp;A

Profile of

BRAD  
FRIEDMUTTERFounder and CEO,  
Friedmutter Group

By Jennifer Prosser

Active in the gaming and hospitality industry for more than 30 years, Brad Friedmutter worked as vice president of design and construction for Steve Wynn on the Golden Nugget before incorporating his design, architecture and master planning firm in 1992. The Friedmutter Group now employs more than 190 design professionals in Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Newport Beach, Biloxi, Hong Kong and Dubai. Friedmutter is active in the Urban Land Institute, American Institute of Architects and the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. Some of his current clients include Station Casinos, Harrah's Entertainment, The Cosmopolitan, MGM MIRAGE and a variety of international clients.

**What first got you interested in architecture?**

I grew up in New York City. Both my mother and father were involved in the arts. My father liked to collect turn-of-the-century antiques and restore them. My mother was a schoolteacher and eventually became the Director of Cultural Arts for the Board of Education in New York.

Art was always in and around the house. I was always one of the best artists in high school. But then when I started to hang around "real" artists, I realized I wasn't as good—unless you were famous, you couldn't make a go of it. So, in planning what career I could head toward, my family and I tossed around a number of professions and came up with architecture. It seemed like a perfect blend of art, science and business.

**What brought you to Las Vegas?**

In the mid-'70s, it was a very hard economic time, especially on the East Coast, so I moved out west. Before I landed in Las Vegas I was in the Bay Area, and worked for various companies on the owner side. I worked for Mervyn's department stores and Bank of America, and got a taste of what it was like representing the owner and the owner's interest—hiring architects, hiring contractors, working with real estate people and seeing, from the owner's perspective, how the whole development process works. It was very valuable experience.

I then decided to go off on my own, and in 1978, ended up working for Henry Conversano, who was, at the time, the preeminent casino designer in the industry. In those days, there were a handful of designers, and I was fortunate enough to interview

with him and got a job right away. I realized then that this was my niche. There were a lot of people in the business from New York, and I traveled back and forth to Atlantic City, so I got to see my family. I liked the whole nature of the energy, and I soon became a project manager for his firm. That brought me to Las Vegas, working on a Steve Wynn project that Conversano was designing. That project didn't come to fruition, but I ended up staying and working for Steve Wynn. What I really liked about Las Vegas was that it had the small-town flavor, but with a large-town appetite and a large-town sophistication—if you were in the right circle of people. Fortunately, because of the level I was coming in at, I got to meet some very exciting and interesting people who were shaping and building the Las Vegas that we see today.

**What were some important insights you learned from people such as Steve Wynn?**

That if you're in the service business, the customer has to know that they're getting value for their dollar. That translates to quality, to giving people something that exceeds their expectations. People are willing to pay more for a better experience. What I've done is applied that same philosophy to our business, where the main focus is on providing a better-than-expected level of service for the same cost to our clients, so that they feel they're getting value for the service we provide.

**How would you compare the Vegas architecture of the '70s compared to it today? How has it evolved?**

The big thing, of course, is scale. Earlier, most properties started off as a three-story, low-rise with a desert-resort feel, like the Desert Inn and the

Flamingo. The visionaries of this city—government officials, airport officials, transportation officials, the water and flood-control officials, the builders, the movers and shakers in the casino industry, the movers and shakers in the banking industry—all came together to make Las Vegas what it is today. If you were missing major segments of that, it wouldn't be as successful or such a unique place. I think we're a great model for other cities to see. Many times, Las Vegas looks to other cities for what we're doing wrong in terms of planning. I think the reverse should be happening. I think things are done here in a very spirited and entrepreneurial, cooperative way. Other cities could learn a lot from what we do here. There's a very healthy economy, a lot of jobs and population growth.

Today, we're seeing places like the Cosmopolitan, which we're the executive architects for—you're seeing mega properties with very high density, vertically stacked. We've all heard of the expression "Manhattanization"—done in a positive way, there's a lot of building and a lot of mixed uses, vertically stacked and integrated on top of each other: one, because of the availability of the land, and two, because of the cost of the land. We're seeing that normal, natural progression, and it's very, very exciting. We've seen a big flurry in the condo market, and then a tremendous fallout on those, but the condo-resort model, the kind the Cosmopolitan is using, is very strong and makes a lot of sense along the resort corridor.







[At left] A rendering of the Cosmopolitan.

[Bottom] The Pool at Red Rock Station.



**How did you get involved with the Cosmopolitan, and what excites you about the project?**

We met Bruce Eichner, who had wanted to get into the Las Vegas real estate market for a few years, who had expertise in timeshares, very successfully, in New York and Miami. His vision was always the mixed-use of the timeshare, not just a stand-alone. We're the executive architects for that project. It's very exciting because just in terms of sheer square footage, it's close to seven million square feet on eight acres. The density ratio is probably the highest in Las Vegas, and probably in the Top 10 in the world. To be the architect for a project like that is a milestone. It's a beautifully designed project. Bruce really broke a lot of the old rules that people never did. I think he was very brave to do that.

**On Red Rock, Friedmutter provided all architectural, master planning and interior design for the \$925 million project. Please give our readers a sense of the time scope of this and how all these facets came together.**

Our company today wouldn't be the company it is if it wasn't for Station Casinos. We've been working with them for approximately 10 years. Station Casinos got us involved initially with Texas Station. We did an expansion there, and the working chemistry and the rapport with our firm and Station Casinos was very strong from the beginning. Station Casinos, like most casino owners, is very entrepreneurial in its approach to its projects.

Green Valley Ranch was for us, our first ground-up hotel-casino in Las Vegas. It set the precedent of quality, aesthetics and a level of entertainment excitement for the area. It was coordinated with the planning of The District. We kept the buildings very low and didn't stack the hotel on top of the casino as they are on the Strip. We kept it a very residential-resort feeling, and yet it has all the excitement, the size, the capacity that any property on the Strip has. It doesn't have 3,000 rooms, but it has something that's proportionate to the area.

Red Rock Station became the next manifestation of that, and when we were looking at that property, Frank and Lorenzo wanted something of the same quality. In an effort not to cookie-cutter it, we took the whole notion of the '60s and '70s, of the Rat Pack and Old Vegas, and brought it up a notch. It has an edgier design, to appeal to a broader market of younger people and those in their 50s and 60s. The No. 1 thing that Station looks at is customer convenience. Parking, and proximity of parking, is a big thing. It's not just the amount of spaces, it's the

quality of those spaces and the distance from the destination to where the people are going. Once they're in the property, the flow of the casino and how it relates to restaurants, entertainment, meeting rooms, spas, hotel rooms, lobbies, etc., is paramount.

That project was 28 months from the beginning of the real design to the opening, which is incredible. It's less than half the time of Wynn, which was 60 months. Through that partnering of everybody — the owner, the design team, the contractors — it really came together, and I think what we see there today is proof that when you have a solid team, the right team of people, you get incredible results.

**What's the design of your home like?**

I would not design my own home. I wouldn't even know where to start. I believe in hiring people who specialize in what they do, and if I were going to build my own home, I would work with a residential architect.



Sushi + Sake at Green Valley Ranch.

**What is your favorite place in Las Vegas?**

Because we designed it and the food is great, my new favorite place is T-bones at Red Rock — especially where it opens up to the back yard — it's just incredible. It kind of reminds me of sitting in the back of my house, except I have 150 strangers with me.

**What do you drive?**

I have several cars. I have two M-5s, BMWs, one is an '03, one is an '06. I have an Aston Martin DB9, I have a Porsche GT2, I have a Maybach '62, which is a longer wheel base, I have a Bentley Arnage-T, I have a Ferrari 360 Spider and I have a Porsche Cayenne. I'd like to point out that I lease all these things, so they rotate, and I don't own any of them. I have them for two or three years, and then they're gone. I put an average of 2-3,000 miles a year on each of them. They're fun things to have.

**What three words describe you best?**

I like to think integrity—we're all born with that, we're all born with honesty, and it's yours to do with what you will. And I like to use the word mentoring, for those who would listen.