

YOUR GUIDE TO EVERYTHING LAS VEGAS

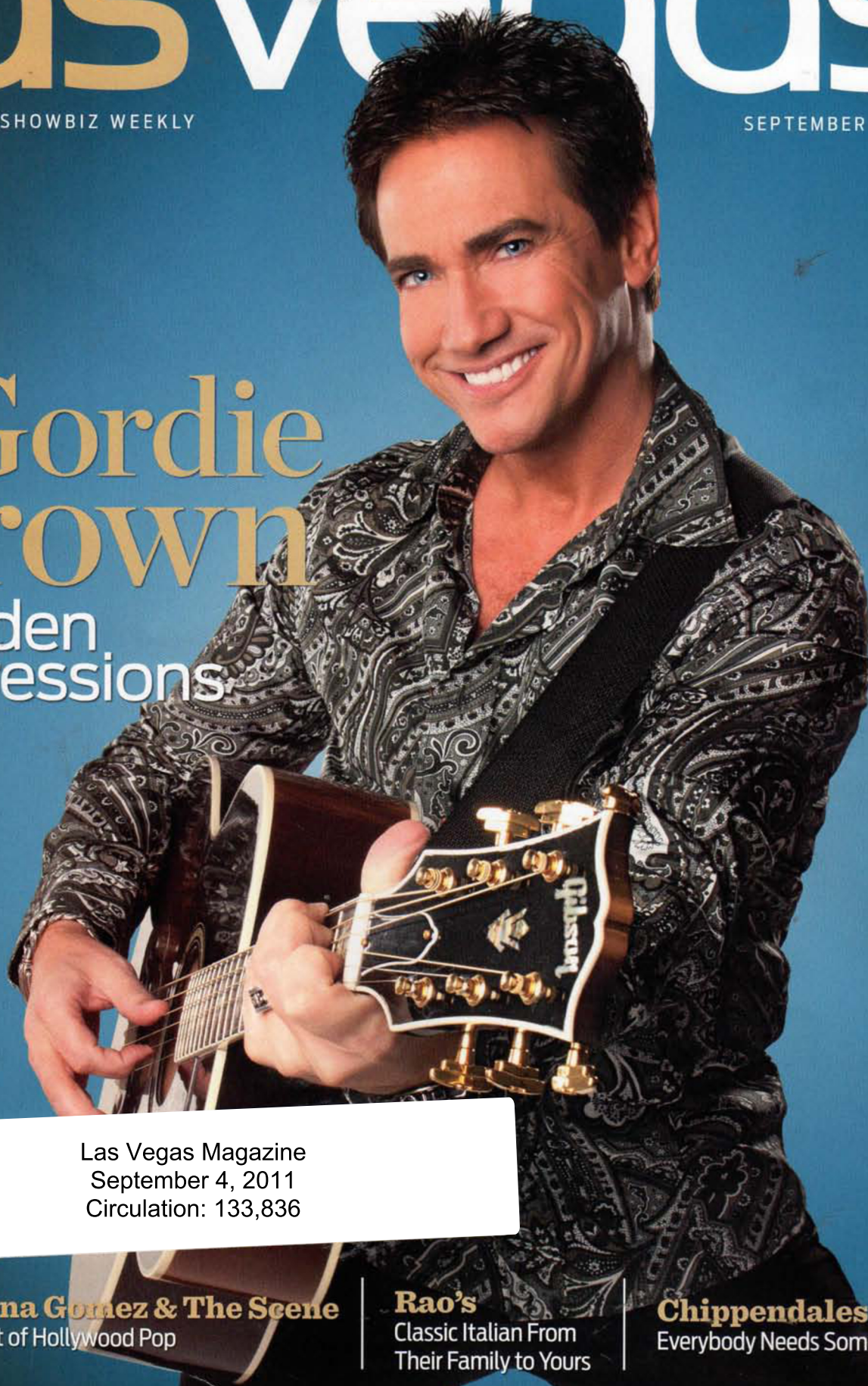
# lasvegas<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE + SHOWBIZ WEEKLY

SEPTEMBER 4, 2011

## Gordie Brown

Golden Impressions



Las Vegas Magazine  
September 4, 2011  
Circulation: 133,836



**Selena Gomez & The Scene**  
A Night of Hollywood Pop

**Rao's**  
Classic Italian From  
Their Family to Yours

**Chippendales**  
Everybody Needs Some Bodies



# WORTH the WAIT

Why mess with tradition when Rao's turns out Italian fare this good?

BY BROCK RADKE | Photos by Christopher DeVargas



*Uncle Vincent's lemon chicken*





**B**on Appétit recently released its list of the 11 toughest restaurant reservations in the country. To absolutely no one's surprise, the most impossible reservation remains at Rao's, the East Harlem legend where yearlong waits are not uncommon and Madonna was once denied entry. The restaurant has been operated by the same family, dishing out traditional, authentic Italian cuisine since 1896.

So, is the Las Vegas Rao's at Caesars Palace as tough to get into as the original New York version? The easy answer is no. If Vegas means anything, it's that convenience is key, and everyone has equal access on the Strip. But this Rao's is also very busy and very popular, and if you're wondering if you should make a reservation right now, the easy answer is yes. The most important similarity between restaurants old and new is that both are worth the wait, no matter how long.

Rao's at Caesars Palace is open for dinner every night, and its two 10-table rooms mimic the vibe of the original. It's a cozy, warm space that feels festive and familiar, complemented by ever-present Christmas lights, the sounds of big-city favorites like Billy Joel and Frank Sinatra, and a jovial saloon in the middle of the room.

As for the food, no changes are necessary here. Ask for recommendations from your server and be prepared for a long list; so many of Rao's dishes have been maintained and passed down from age-old family recipes, and everything is somebody's favorite.

Among the most popular appetizers are classic baked littleneck clams and a roasted red pepper dish with pine nuts, garlic and golden raisins. If they're making Caesar that night, it's a great salad choice. If not, the incredibly fresh seafood salad—calamari, shrimp, crab and large chunks of sweet lobster—is not to be missed.



Arugula and pear salad



Traditional Rao's meatballs

Rao's is the very definition of a family restaurant, and the menu is family-style, so expect large portions and plan to share. (Or as we were instructed, "Eat slowly and don't give up.") Pasta dishes are highlighted by quality ingredients and simple preparation. The house marinara sauce, made with rich San Marzano plum tomatoes, is garden fresh and all you really need to top rigatoni, linguine, spaghetti or a variety of other noodly options. Orecchiette with garlicky broccoli rabe and sweet sausage is a more substantial favorite.

Beyond pasta, the legendary Uncle Vincent's lemon chicken is a true throwback. But it has aged well, bright with lemon and not at all sweet, perfect for saturating tender, broiled chicken quarters. Another great chicken dish is the spicy Scarpariello, more crispy-on-the-outside meat mixed with hot and sweet Italian sausage, yellow and red bell peppers, the hot vinegar tang of cherry peppers and lots of garlic in a savory white wine sauce.

Stay spicy with a pan-seared veal chop or double-cut pork chop, also augmented with hot and sweet peppers, or choose the soulful osso buco, tender veal shank in a rich jus. Of course, the Rao's experience is not complete without meatballs, two baseball-size beauties served in that tremendous tomato sauce. Have them for dessert if you must, but you must have them.

Caesars Palace 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Wed.-Sun., 5-11 p.m. daily. 702.731.7267