

# SINATRA'S LITTLE BROWN BOOK

An address book said to have been Frank Sinatra's reveals the extent of his influence and connections—and why his first attempted retirement was so short-lived.

BY WILL FRIEDWALD PHOTOGRAPHY BY HENRY LEUTWYLER

**T**HINK OF THE MOST legendary, exclusive parties of the past century: Truman Capote's Black and White Ball or *Vanity Fair's* Oscar party. Imagine the guest list. Now think of the man comedian Alan King once described as an event unto himself. The only thing Frank Sinatra had to do to set a room buzzing was walk into it. What did *his* guest list look like? We no longer have to wonder. Photographer Henry Leutwyler has documented a personal phone book said to be Sinatra's—every entry from his personal assistant to two U.S. presidents—in a collection of still-life images to be published as *Hi There!*, a monograph out in June from Steidl.

A collector who insists on remaining anonymous said he purchased the book at auction in 1998, the year Sinatra died. A few years ago he brought it to the attention of Leutwyler, who subsequently photographed four pages for *Document*, a project that became a book and traveling exhibition in 2016 and 2017. As he said in a phone interview from his native Switzerland, "Then it occurred to me, I should have shot the whole book."

The address book, which includes just over a hundred names, appears to date to the late 1970s or early '80s, a period when Sinatra was performing again after an attempted retirement a few years earlier. By the late 1960s, Sinatra was facing a career impasse and felt increasingly out of step with the times. His movie roles had dwindled to almost nothing, traditional nightclubs were closing, and after finishing a five-year run of annual *A Man and His Music* specials in 1969, he'd lost his enthusiasm for television. His voice still sounded fantastic (four albums recorded in 1969 prove that) but he wasn't sure what to sing: the Great American Songbook, or pop and rock songs popular with younger audiences? In June of 1971, after announcing his retirement, he put on a classic farewell concert—a farewell that ultimately consisted of a two-year hiatus. As he said in a 1975 interview with television host Bill Boggs, "I was really fighting my way out of

the doldrums." Once he started performing again, he was primarily a stage artist and, following a trend started by top rock acts, played sports stadiums and other huge venues with a combination of classic songs and newer material.

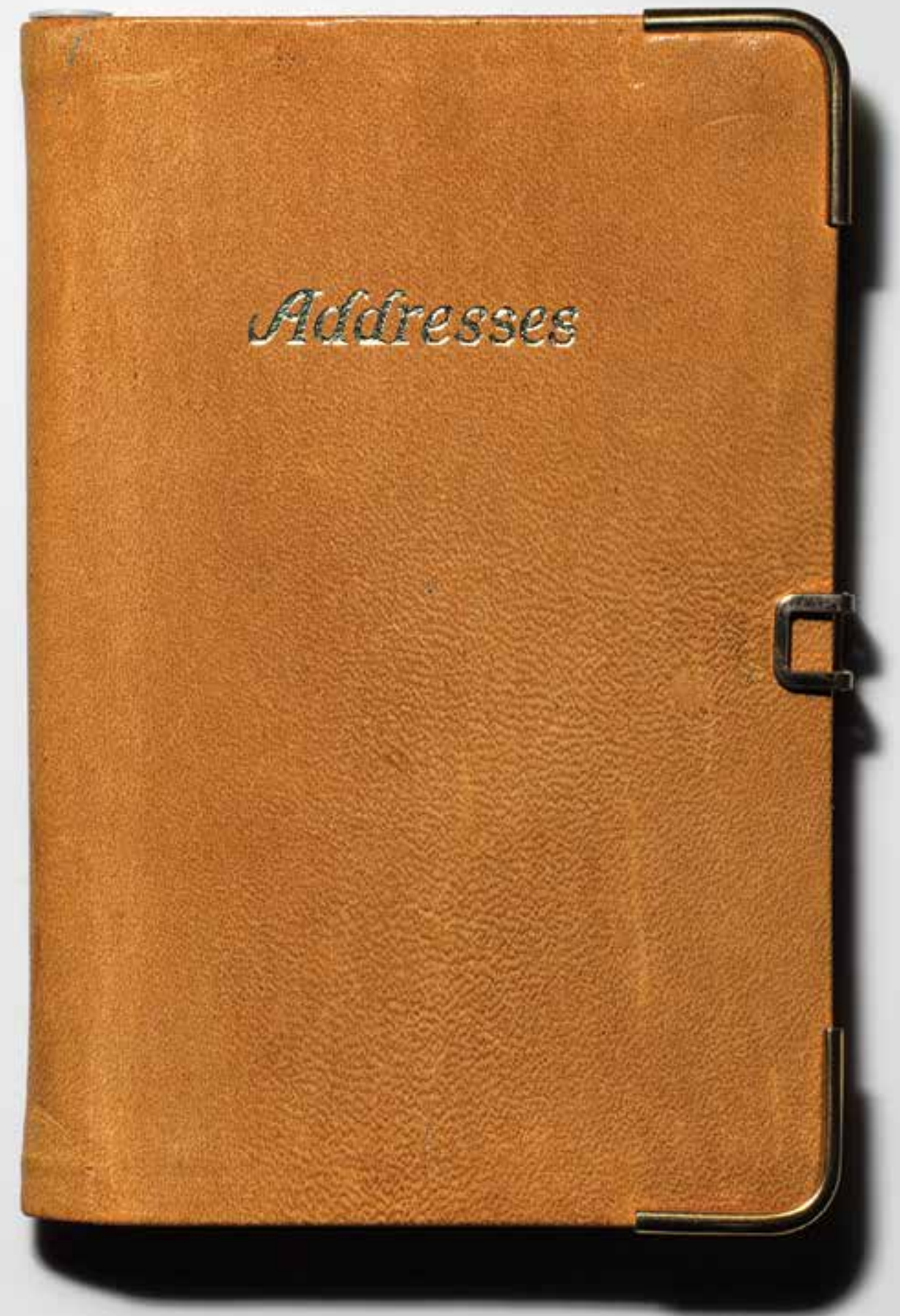
Sinatra's little book, dating from several years into his comeback, illustrates how his return seems almost inevitable in hindsight. Midway through, four incongruous names sum up the eclectic range of his social circle: Tony Mottola, Sinatra's preferred guitarist for most of this period; Ed McMahon, Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* sidekick; Wayne Newton, a Vegas mainstay; and, notably, "Nixon, Pres." Sinatra had been a liberal Democrat for most of his life; he was the first major entertainer to campaign for civil rights. During the Vietnam era, he'd been pulled increasingly to the right, not least by his friendship with Vice President Spiro Agnew, and then Nixon. His highest-profile performance during the hiatus came in April 1973 at the White House. When Nixon led a standing ovation, Sinatra's musical director, Nelson Riddle, reportedly observed, "You can't do much better than that." A performer with such easy access to power found it challenging to relinquish the spotlight.

Based on who is and isn't listed, it's reasonable to assume that this was one of several little books, but it's hard to imagine Sinatra kept another with as many boldfaced names. The first thing one notices are the political heavyweights: in addition to Nixon and "Ted" Agnew, Henry Kissinger (one of the few individuals, along with Sinatra's daughters, still alive), Gerald Ford, Senator Barry Goldwater and Prince Rainier III of Monaco (listed under his family name, Grimaldi). The book includes a dozen or so legendary showbiz figures: Kirk Douglas, Cary Grant, Gene Kelly (who reunited with Sinatra for a 1973 TV special), Jerry Lewis (listed side by side with his manager, Joe Stabile), Dean Martin, "Bob" Mitchum, Roger Moore, "Greg" Peck and Don Rickles.

One of the more endearing entries is for Sammy Davis Jr. Sinatra had become especially close to Davis after the 1954 car accident that

## SQUAD GOALS

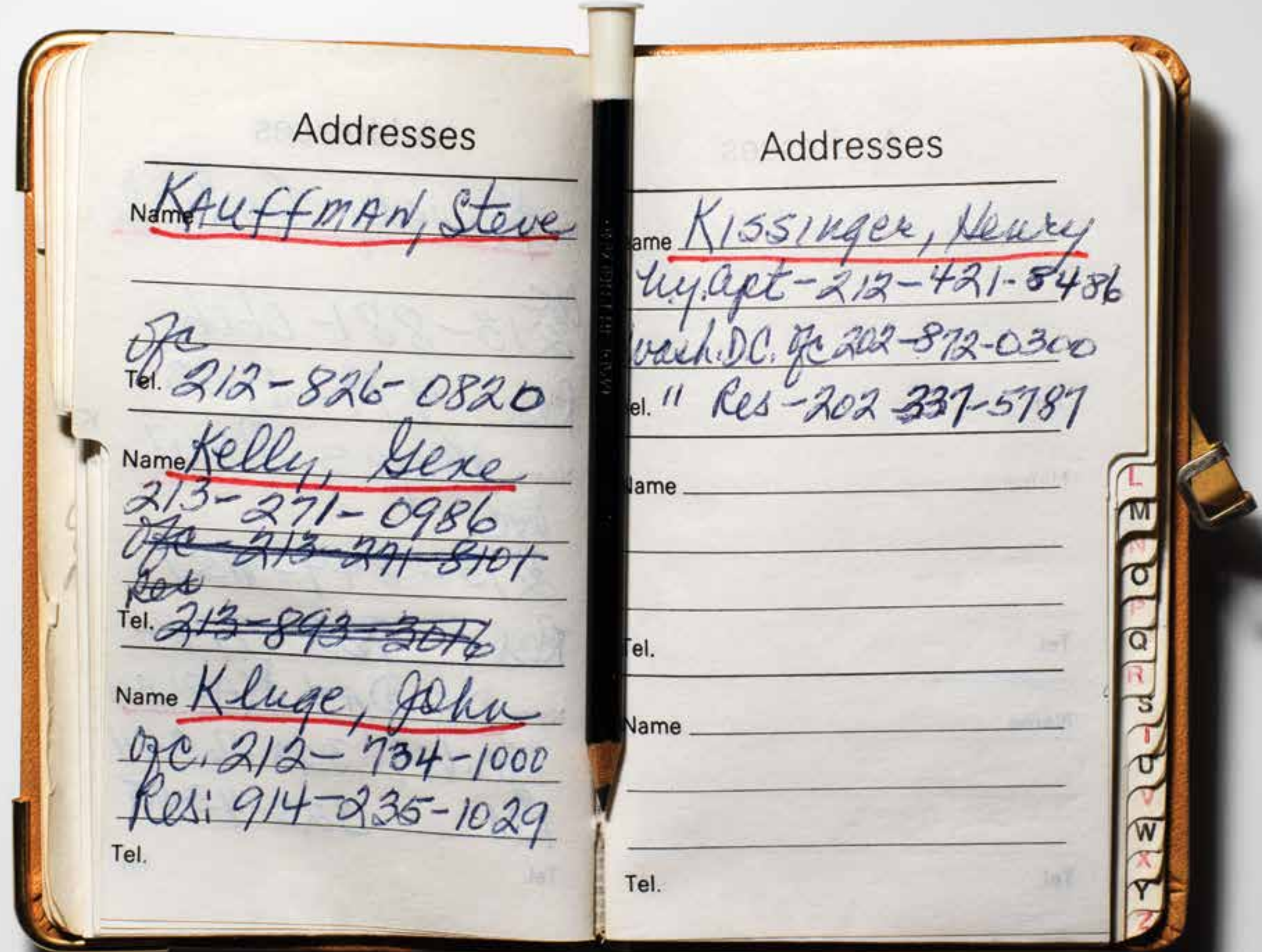
In *Hi There!*, out in June from Steidl, Henry Leutwyler photographs every page in an address book said to be Sinatra's, which includes presidents, moguls, showbiz legends and many of the musicians and confidantes who were close to him.



"WHEN YOU SEE AN IMAGE OF A FAMOUS PERSON, YOU'RE SEEING A LOT OF CAREFULLY ARRANGED HAIR AND MAKEUP. THE OBJECT SHOWS THE LIFE."

-HENRY LEUTWYLER

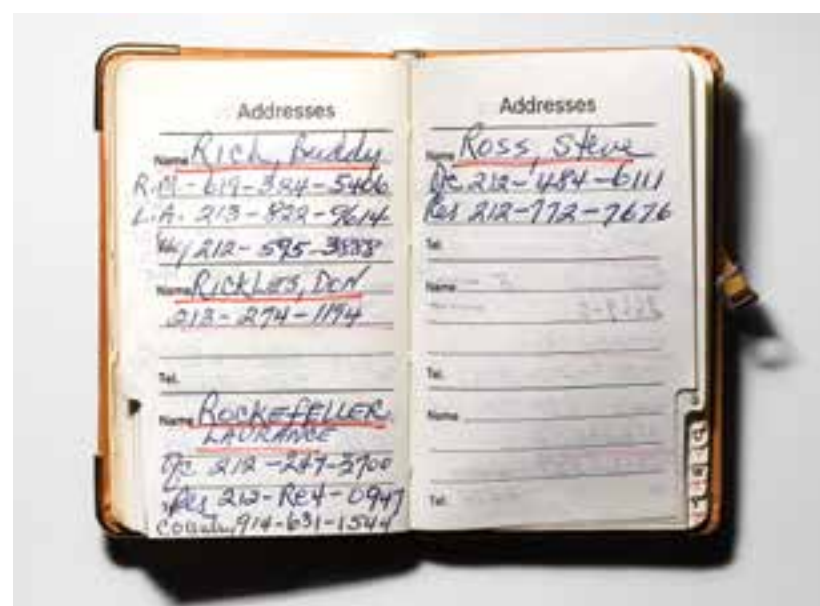
**POWER BROKERS**  
Among the names in the book are several political heavyweights, including President Richard Nixon, Vice President Spiro ("Ted") Agnew and Henry Kissinger, one of the few listed who is still alive.





“A MILLION OBJECTS THAT BELONG TO FAMOUS PEOPLE WORK THEIR WAY INTO OTHER PEOPLE’S HANDS. YOU MAKE INCREDIBLE DISCOVERIES.”

—LEUTWYLER



resulted in the loss of Davis’s left eye. Along with Dean Martin, they worked together extensively beginning in 1960, for the express purpose of campaigning on behalf of then-senator John F. Kennedy. For roughly five years, the trio (along with actor Peter Lawford and comedian Joey Bishop) made informal live appearances, TV shows and movies in an act known to later generations as the Rat Pack (a term Sinatra disliked), whose egalitarian machismo and self-parody helped define the era, no less than JFK. In 1988, Sinatra planned a 29-city reunion tour with Martin and Davis, but Martin only made it to the first few shows; he was replaced by Liza Minnelli, but the emphasis was on Sinatra and Davis, relentlessly kidding each other while also showing the love that had bonded them for more than 30 years. Davis is listed in the book only as Smokey. Sinatra addressed him that way since, apparently, he was such a heavy smoker.

There’s no shortage of tycoons and executives: Walter Annenberg, Roone Arledge, William Paley, Laurance Rockefeller and Steve Ross. Steve Wynn, the real-estate and hotel-casino mogul who played a major role in creating modern Las Vegas, also gets an entry. As Wynn said in a 1998 interview in the *Las Vegas Sun*, it was Sinatra’s idea for him to switch from the more prestigious venues on The Strip to the emerging Golden Nugget downtown—thus helping to revitalize an entire district of the city. “He walked in here and said, ‘This is perfect,’” Wynn recalled. “He was the only man in show business of that caliber who wanted to come downtown. He said this room reminded him of an old saloon.”

There are also several doctors and dentists—hardly surprising for a man whose throat was at the center of an entire industry. (One name was recognizable to me: New York-based Dr. Wilbur J. Gould, whose 1994 *New York Times* obituary described him as “Throat Surgeon to Famous Voices.”) Also various agents, managers, lawyers and publicists who represented the Chairman over the years: Sonny Golden, Mickey Rudin, Hank Cattaneo and Lee Solters along with Sinatra’s right-hand man, Jilly Rizzo; an assistant named Larry “Nifty” Victorson; Dorothy Uhlemann. A sticky note at the front of the book reads, “Any number not in this book—I’m only a phone call away—Ha! Ha! I’m under ‘U.’” This leads to the possible conclusion that the handwriting in the book belongs to Uhlemann (or else to another assistant, LaVerne Gunton).

It’s in the listing of musicians that we get the clear impression that this book is telling only part of a larger story. Both of Sinatra’s two “personal

songwriters,” Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen, are here, but of his regular touring rhythm section, longtime drummer and guitarist Irv Cottler and Tony Mottola are listed, but not Bill Miller, his preferred accompanist for more than 40 years. Frank Military, who worked for Sinatra’s music publishing company before graduating to vice president of Warner/Chappell Music (and bringing Sinatra the “Theme from ‘New York, New York’”) is included, as is publisher Sarge Weiss.

Of Sinatra’s musical directors, Gordon Jenkins, Billy May, Joe Parnello and orchestral contractor Joe Malin all get entries. His most celebrated collaborator, Nelson Riddle, is absent, as is Don Costa, the arranger who came closest to replacing him. Riddle, who helped give Sinatra his signature sound in the 1950s on more than 300 tracks, had a falling out with Sinatra toward the end of the 1970s. Even so, he later gave the singer near-total credit for the tempo and general outline of each number they worked on together. “Frank would have been thinking about songs for days,” Riddle recalled to NPR’s Robert Windeler shortly before the arranger’s death in 1985, “and I used to sit there and take notes. And he, in a sideways joke which I think had some validity, said that I was the best secretary he ever had because I’d take notes and three months later we might do the album. And you could never depend on him forgetting what he had said three months previously. I took the notes on what we discussed, and that’s what he got.”

**BEYOND SINATRA**, Leutwyler has made a specialty of documenting relics connected to other notable artists. “A million objects that belong to famous people work their way into other people’s hands,” he says. “Things that end up at auction, or as gifts.” The photographer puts more time into tracking down these artifacts than he does into shooting them. “I spend most of my days researching. I always have at least a hundred projects going at once. They will never be finished before I die. I’m constantly in touch with museums, collectors, auction houses, friends, family; everybody knows somebody who has something, and you make incredible discoveries.”

One such project was his 2010 *Neverland Lost: A Portrait of Michael Jackson*, which includes, among other items, the late entertainer’s signature black fedora, military jackets and left-handed gloves. Leutwyler believes that such objects can tell you more about a person than a portrait. “I had been and still am a celebrity photographer,” he says, “but when you see an image of a famous person, you’re also seeing a lot of carefully arranged hair and makeup, and most of the really interesting stuff about the person has been argued out of the image by their PR person. You’re not really seeing the essential truth of the individual.” An image of Jackson’s rhinestone-studded shoes is revealing, but only when you see the well-worn soles,

which make plain how hard Jackson was working when he danced. “The object,” Leutwyler says, “shows the life.”

Two images from his 2005 *Elvis by the Presleys* make this point brilliantly: Early in the book, we see Elvis’s comb, a vital reminder that throughout his career, Presley’s hair was part of his visual signature. Later in the book, there’s a more disturbing image: a TV set with a bullet hole in the screen, a telltale sign of a living legend in frightening mental and physical decline.

The leather-bound book is also something of a time capsule, as it references a few old-school showbiz characters, including two pioneers from the very early days of broadcasting, the proto-crooner Morton Downey Sr. (father of the controversial talk show host) and Freeman Gosden (his wife, Jane, is the one listed; he died in 1982). Gosden co-created *Amos ‘n’ Andy* and played the former. Sinatra had listened to the radio sitcom as a teenager, so it must have been satisfying for them to pal around as adults. Gosden was also Sinatra’s best man at his wedding (the singer’s fourth) to Barbara Marx in 1976. Barbara herself is not listed, but both her son, Bobby Marx, and her father, Charles Blakeley, are. For that matter, none of Sinatra’s wives or girlfriends get an entry—except his first wife, the former Nancy Barbato, who’s listed with their three children (Nancy, Frank Jr. and Tina) on a single Sinatra page. Apart from an occasional wife or widow of a close friend, these are the only women in the book. It’s likely Sinatra kept a separate volume for female friends, platonic and romantic.

There are several individuals who were part of Sinatra’s personal journey—Frank Garrick, for instance, who was Sinatra’s godfather and the reason an Italian-American boy from Hoboken was given a popular Irish name, Francis. Matty Jordan was a boyhood friend who went on to open Matteo’s, one of Sinatra’s favorite restaurants, in West Los Angeles.

Sidney Zion—a lawyer and journalist, and the only “Z” in the book—is appropriately the final entry. Because Sinatra had been known to punch out a photographer or two in his day, it’s generally assumed that he hated reporters and newsmen. Far from it: He read multiple newspapers, prided himself on keeping up with current events and was close to several journalists, among them Pete Hamill, but none more so than Zion (who, in addition to being a political columnist, was an eloquent spokesperson for Sinatra’s music and the Great American Songbook). He was also a two-fisted imbibor who could keep up with the Chairman shot for shot. As Zion once told me, whenever Sinatra was asked to name his favorite songwriter, as he often was, he demurred, not wanting to cite one and thereby offend the others. When Zion asked, he got what might be Sinatra’s only direct, unfiltered answer. Hoisting his shot glass, he said, “Larry Hart,” and downed his drink. ●

**CALL ME MAYBE** Gerald Ford, Gene Kelly, Dean Martin, Roger Moore, Laurance Rockefeller and Steve Ross all get entries. “Smokey” was Sinatra’s nickname for Sammy Davis Jr. The entertainer was a legendarily heavy smoker.