

Sound Studios For The Spirit

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The pressure on top acousticians today to remain at the top has forced them into new and uncharted territory, and the process has yielded an audio 'evolution of consciousness'. Jesse Fox-Allen interviewed one of this new breed. Sound Wizard, in their chic jungle headquarters near Pondicherry in South India. **Sound Wizard** belongs to a new wave of acoustic designers that have expanded their brief to produce not just acoustically-balanced spaces, but also spaces comfortable for humans to occupy. While these 'wholistic' designers value an intuitive approach to acoustic design, they include amongst them engineers whose training equals the highest in the industry.

SOUND WIZARD

Audio Design and Consultancy

The designers at Sound Wizard argue that engineering, while important, isn't everything and mathematically perfect design doesn't necessarily guarantee a space that works. Beyond the maxim that sound quality begins with the source, they focus on the other, unconsidered forces that shape the source. For firms like Sound Wizard, this translates into atmosphere.

Chief designer Paris-born Didier Weiss believes the atmosphere of a place is not beyond human control: "Many of the elements that form the atmosphere of a studio are not directly related to the recording of music.

For example a beautifully-landscaped Zen garden, a swimming pool, or even just a great view over a landscape can produce an undisturbed working atmosphere that has the power to inspire."

Didier holds that "creativity is supremely important for artists to perform to the best of their abilities. An irritating atmosphere is an awful environment in which to perform anything, and such an environment is not going to inspire any musician to the heights of creativity. Serious artists cannot escape environments where they feel comfortable and are inspired and stimulated to excel in their musical talents

Ergonomics and architecture into audio Studio Design?

The design and interior of the building itself definitely play a central role when creating a stimulating working



Front wall covered with aluminum giving this control room a sci-fi and very grand feeling

environment. Ergonomics is essential to make a working place comfortable. All individuals work better when they're relaxed and comfortable.

But do terms like 'wholism' and intuition really have a place in the design of an acoustic space? Many died-in-the-wool acousticians would find the question laughable, and say that sound, while complex, generally conforms to algorithms and formulae, the antithesis of unquantifiable intuition.

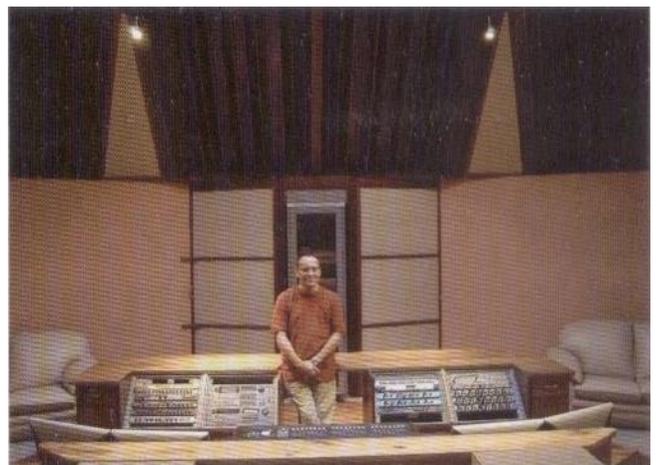
Western classical music

But late in the 19th century, a young man proved them wrong, When the Boston Symphony Orchestra needed a new concert hall, they brought in a leading architectural acoustic firm. Their brief: seat 2,600 audients in a room that sounded as good as the best European halls. The space became known as one of the finest concert halls in the world, but not without the help of an unrelated individual. The Orchestra's owner noticed the work of a young Harvard University assistant physics professor's (using seat cushions) in transforming the acoustics of an otherwise unusable nearby lecture theatre. His name was Wallace Clement Sabine and he developed "the first mathematical formula for predicting reverberation time." Sabine expressed his intuition through mathematics for all to see and apply.

To create an audio environment that works does not begin with mathematics, it begins with feeling and it

ends with feeling. Maths fills the space in between. Mathematics becomes the language, the communicative medium that when correctly applied, carries the feeling, accurately.

Didier believes the best results come from the blend of calculation and intuition and that human values can and must coexist with sound engineering. "When we worked on Genelec's showroom in Chennai, our aim was to produce the best possible atmosphere in which to experience their monitor speakers. Our approach was from a standpoint of pure acoustics, but also human comfort."



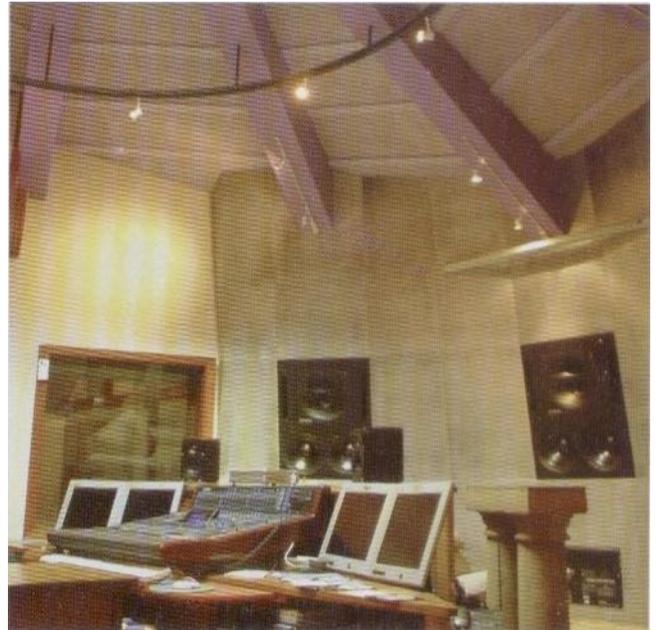
Dider Weiss leaning on the producer's desk with large natural wood QRD's (quadratic-residue diffusers) on the ceiling behind him



A controllable sky light opening in the centre of the ceiling offering natural daylight or complete darkness to the room



Mixing systems set in an environment that also defines aesthetics. With a screen set in front, the room is multi-functional



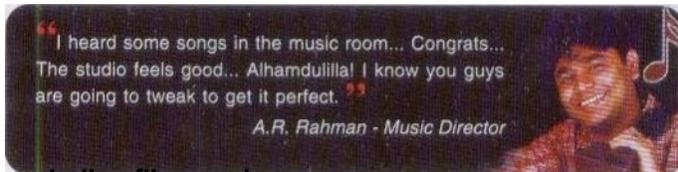
Main work station by central controllable skylight

Sound Wizard's philosophy

All of Sound Wizard's projects, whether top-notch studios, home studios, auditoriums or even home theatres have involved considerations of visuals, proportions, interior design and lighting, not to mention acoustics. Sound Wizard's philosophy has always been to create an uplifting surrounding without overwhelming the individual.

Good friends

Didier sees Sound Wizard's role as: "to stay strong and uncompromising within the physical laws of sound but also to integrate it in such a way that the user will never feel they need another creative space. Our strength is the combination of experience, passion, sensitivity and knowledge. Our clients have become our good friends because we've shared their enthusiasm to create truly wonderful creative spaces. We hope to go on doing that."



Indian film music

Today, in the globalised 21st century Indian, classical western and other styles, inform an international musical culture. With the largest film industry in the world, Indian film music has risen into its own genre. South Indian film composer, A.R. Rahman occupies one of the leading positions of this form. Like the great musicians of the 19th century, 21st century Rahman also sought to create an ideal space to create music, but he was interested in more than just acoustics. He wanted what most creatives want - quality tools in a comfortable environment. Not just fantastic monitors with perfect acoustic treatment, he wanted somewhere he could just hang out and be totally creative. Expressing his appreciation for the comfortable feel of his studio to Sound Wizard, A.R. Rahman says: "Heard some songs in the music room... Congrats... The studio feels good... Alhamdulillah! I know you guys are going to tweak to get it perfect. Just wanted to let you know what I felt."