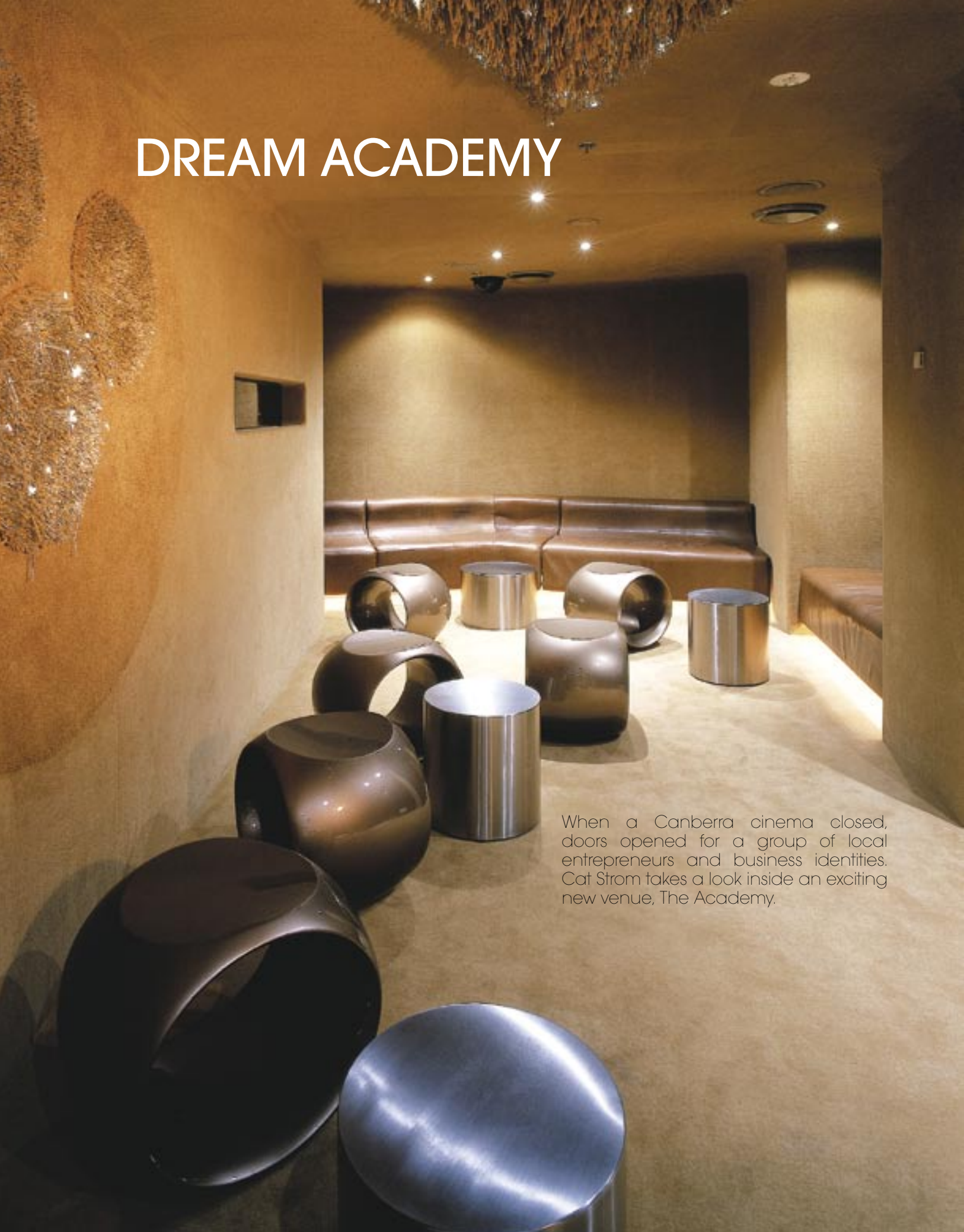


DREAM ACADEMY



When a Canberra cinema closed, doors opened for a group of local entrepreneurs and business identities. Cat Strom takes a look inside an exciting new venue, The Academy.

There are many buildings in our nation's capital that are stark, grey reminders of '60s architecture. They bleakly sit as monuments of bad taste in a city where the people often seem as drab as the buildings they frequent. But enough about politicians, there's much more life in Canberra than some would expect!

Enter The Academy club, a venue that is a collision of '60s modernism and '70s extravaganza. Located in an original 1960s cinema, the venue pays homage to all that was hip and cool in that era. (Think a slightly more sophisticated Austin Powers, if that's possible, and you're on the right track.) Trendy, colourful and with a relaxed vibe, The Academy has fast become Canberra's premier nightclub.

The Center Cinema was not only a landmark building in the capital city, it was also its first cinema, opening in 1966. As the brash cinema megaplexes took over, the Center finally closed its doors. However a group of local entrepreneurs and business identities saw potential in the venue, forming a consortium to purchase the building with aims to develop it into a nightclub.

Having invested \$2.5 million in fitting out the club, the owners are keen to have the venue in use as much as possible.

"It works well just as a great space and we have a full-time functions manager," said Chris Fraser, The Academy's Marketing Manager and leading DJ. "The venue is starting to become successful with the corporate market, not only in terms of the look and the design of the place but the facilities that we have to offer make us very competitive in the functions market. Most function venues offer just a room and not much more. We're offering more of an experience, plus they get the best sound system in town, a cinema screen that is fantastic for product launches and a great lighting rig."

Mindful of the size of Canberra, and in order for The Academy to be viable, Fraser has had to target other markets too. Thursday night caters for uni students, Friday night hosts big guest acts, and Saturday night is based around resident local DJs while catering to a slightly older market.

"The Candy Bar 'happy hour' between 5pm and 7pm attracts the over-35s crowd who want a drink after work," he said. "And during the school holidays we hold under-18 events. Basically we grab them from the age of 13 upwards!

"It's a tough market which, even in Canberra, is very competitive, as there are some really high-quality bars here."

"Think a slightly more sophisticated Austin Powers, if that's possible, and you're on the right track."

Interior Design

Drawing on inspiration from the original cinema, The Academy club is comprised of three distinct areas: the main nightclub, a cocktail lounge named The Candy Bar and a VIP room entitled The Pod.

The nightclub, which holds 450, fills the space where the auditorium once existed, with the slope of the floor filled in to provide a terraced area down to the dancefloor. The original cinema screen has been retained, becoming the main feature of the room. Above this area the projection room has been redesigned into The Candy Bar.

The team of interior designers from Melbourne-based SJB Interiors, headed by Andrew Parr, were contracted to transform the vacant shell.

"The room already had a lot of form making, such as the strong sculptural ceiling, and we've tried to be sympathetic to the original architecture while adding new elements," explained Parr.

As the original cinema would have had padded walls it was decided to keep this design element with just a change of colour and pattern. This had the added bonus of assisting the audio by cutting down on unwanted reflections.

Seventies kitsch and glamour is reflected in the main bar overlooking the dancefloor which is slightly curved in design and covered in small copper-coloured metallic tiles. The metallic theme is continued through to the floor with a gold glitter epoxy.

The most striking features in the main room are the three large suspended light balls 1500 millimetres in diameter, fixtures that simulate the classic mirror ball in a more contemporary fashion. Retailing as Fil De Fer Pendant Lights, these fixtures are constructed from aluminium wire with integrated tiny lamps. Their bizarre appearance reminded the designer Enzo Cattelani "of the light, rolling tumble weeds, blown by the wind in the Mexican desert".

Just as striking are the BdLove Lamps, designed by Ross Lovegrove, which act as both a sculptural light source and a seat. Manufactured in moulded plastic, these benches can comfortably seat two to three people. Fraser has been experimenting with the tall, needle-shaped lights by adding coloured gels.

The Pod room is one whole continuous camel-coloured carpeted space, snug and womb-like. Shaggy outcrops of carpet are woven with fibre optic lights that twinkle and sparkle. The Pod room caters for 30 people and is regularly booked out at the weekend.

The stand-out feature in the opulent Candy Bar, apart from the great viewing window over the main dancefloor, is the three-dimensional shag pile rugs coating the walls. Woven with Lurex thread, these wall sculptures complement the shimmering tiles of the bar and the butterscotch leather banquetts. Above the bar, Tom Dixon mirror ball pendants hark back to the disco era.

Audio Visual

The screen is obviously the most dominant visual tool of the venue. A resident video jockey has at hand an NEC video projection system, dedicated graphics PC workstation running real-time video mixing software, DVD player, VCR and vision mixer to compile his material. This can be anything from music clips to cartoons to live footage from the crowd via a couple of remote control digital zoom cameras. The screen is also handy for branding and advertising upcoming events.

The Academy recently held a 3D night where the video jockey processed all of the visuals into 3D on the screen and gave out 3D glasses on the door. "It was a little gimmick that turned out

to be a huge success," said Fraser. "We're also working towards holding movie nights."

DJ Booth

Fraser describes the DJ booth as "every disc jockey's wet dream". Built on a concrete slab so that it's totally removed from the stage where people dance, the booth receives no interfering vibrations. Equipment includes three Technics 1210 turntables, two Pioneer CDJ1000 CD players and an Allen & Heath XONE 64 mixer.

Monitoring in the DJ booth posed a challenge as ideally the speakers would be in the air but that was not possible in this case. Neither was it possible to incorporate the monitoring into the sides of the booth due to its height.

Lighting

Many nightclubs install lighting rigs that become the room's main, and often overpowering, decorative element. This was certainly not the case at The Academy. The lighting may be the latest technology but it is subtle and not overused.

Local company Nova Multimedia designed, supplied and installed the lighting, audio and audio visual equipment.

"The room speaks for itself," said Nick Nonas, managing director of Nova. "It was important not to hinder the overall look, hence we've used black coated trussing and lighting fixtures. Really the Fil De Fer Pendant Lights are the main lighting feature in the room."

The truss, manufactured by CLS in Melbourne, is A-shaped and on four motors so it can be raised or lowered, via remote control, for maintenance of lighting fixtures.

"With the moving lights we pretty much knew what we wanted, having looked at some other clubs around the country, as well as smaller bars," said Fraser. "As a result we didn't trial anything – we knew the Martin fixtures were the bee's knees as far as moving lights."

Chosen for their brightness, speed and gobo range were 12 Martin MAC 250 Krypton moving head fixtures (see box item).

Lighting control comes via a Martin LightJockey – a Windows-based controller that is very easy to use and popular with the club market. LightJockey comes with a large fixture library, user-friendly graphic functionality, advanced shape generator for fast and intuitive automated movement programming, as well as all the benefits of the Windows environment such as resizing of windows and drag and drop technology.

A LaserPro laser system with three heads and a couple of mirrors was also installed.

"We decided to build the monitor speakers, two EAW DC5 full range boxes, into the DJ console bench," explained Fraser. "They're placed either side of the DJ, set up wedge style and angled that way. I've never seen this done before but it has worked really well."

Audio

From the outset, sound was identified as the foremost priority when designing the venue. Fraser visited several of Australia's leading clubs, including Home in Sydney and Family in Brisbane, to evaluate their audio systems.

"We soon came to the conclusion that we wanted the EAW Avalon series of speakers used at Family," he reported. "It was obvious from



•The Pod room features shaggy outcrops of carpet woven with fibre optic lights



the start that we would have to fly (hang from the ceiling) the speakers. Graeme Stevenson from Production Audio Services, the Australian distributor of EAW systems, did some software modelling of the room to decide the placement of the speakers."

As a result of Stevenson's design work, four flown EAW Avalon DC2 full-range three-way main speakers supply the sound for the main dancefloor area, while six small DC6 two-way loudspeakers control the sound around the bar area where the audio needs to be lower than on the dancefloor. A DCT1 Supertweeter array (for high frequency sound) is flown directly above the dancefloor and Fraser reports that this is particularly effective.

"The hanging tweeter array in the centre of the room works really well," he said. "The EAW Avalon boxes are beautifully designed especially the subs, six DCS2 dual 12-inch horn-loaded subwoofers, which we wanted to feature in the room as people like to see what they're paying for. We wanted to place them into the stage but we couldn't, so they're placed behind the cinema screen. However it has worked out really well, the bottom end seems to work better from that position. We also have another two DC6 full range boxes for room fill."

The Candy Bar has a totally separate sound system and its own DJ booth, but there is an audio signal running up to it so the sound from downstairs can be heard there. This will be useful when the venue begins hosting live acts in the next few months.

"Booking agents and bands have responded well to the idea," said Fraser. "Of course they will have to bring in their own production."

Audio in the Candy Bar consists of four EAW UB221 full range speakers, two EAW SB120P sub bass boxes and XTA DP6i digital processors, as well as both Crown and Powersoft amplifiers. The DJ booth has two Technics 1210 turntables and a Denon DN2500 dual CD mixer. «

»The Academy Club: (02) 6257 3355 or www.academyclub.com.au

»SJB Interiors: (03) 9686 2122 or www.sjb.com.au

»Nova Multimedia: (02) 6239 2722 or www.novamultimedia.com.au

»Production Audio Services: (03) 9878 1444 or www.productionaudio.com.au

EAW Avalon Club PA System

EAW's Avalon line of loudspeaker systems is designed specifically for high-energy dance clubs. For example, the Avalon subwoofers are built with double the number of woofers per box to really supply the 'oomph' dance music requires. At the other end of the spectrum there are two high-frequency boxes (comprised of four drivers each) that supply all the high-pitched filter squeals that form a big part of today's dancefloor material. All up, the Avalons may not be the cheapest option but they look as good as they sound.

» **Production Audio:** (03) 9878 1444 or www.productionaudio.com.au



BdLove Lamp

Designed by Ross Lovegrove, the BdLove Lamp is a moulded plastic bench featuring a tall, needle-shaped light. It comfortably seats two to three people and is available in four colours.

» **KE-ZU:** (02) 9571 8200 or www.kezu.com.au



Enzo Catellani Fil De Fer

The Fil De Fer pendant lights are part of the Out Collection from Italian lighting style gurus, Catellani & Smith. Each fixture is approximately 1500mm in diameter, constructed from aluminium wire and laced with integrated micro lamps.

» **Hub Furniture:** (03) 9650 1366 or www.hubfurniture.com.au



» Product Focus

Martin MAC 250 Krypton

Last year Martin Professional's popular 250W moving head fixture, the MAC 250 Profile, was updated both inside and out and reborn as the MAC 250 Krypton. The driving force behind the new version is the technology and efficient design of the MAC 2000, a product too expensive for most clubs. The new MAC 250 Krypton, however, comes in a smaller size and at a lower price.

The MAC 250 Krypton features a number of significant changes including:

- A new optical system for brighter output and improved image quality: An improved glass reflector produces extremely high light output for a 250W lamp.
- New gobo patterns: A newly designed rotating and indexing gobo wheel offers a new selection of replaceable metal and dichroic gobos giving the MAC 250 Krypton an original and fresh look.
- Improved movement: New pan and tilt motor technology produces improved movement,

making the new MAC 250 series fixtures the fastest moving heads that Martin has ever manufactured.

- All-new design: The new design is efficient, making service and maintenance easier with fast access to modules and critical components. And the stylish look allows the Krypton to fit smartly into any application.
 - Krypton retails for \$5899 including lamp.
- » **Show Technology:** (02) 9748 1122 or www.showtech.com.au

