



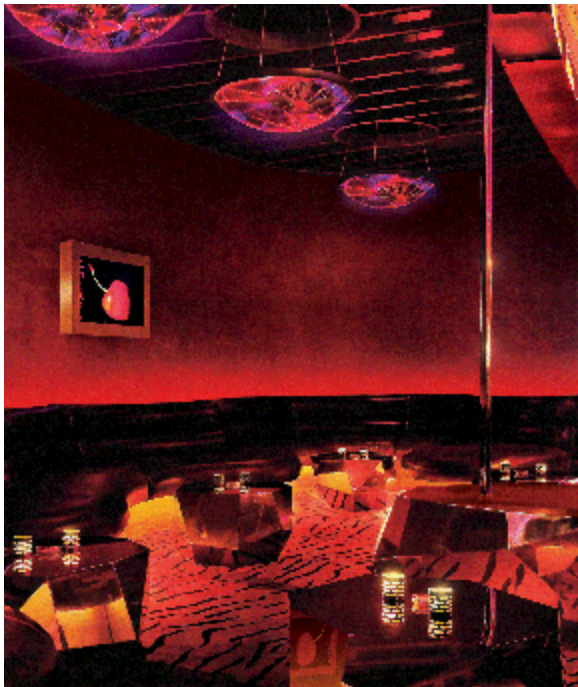
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Cherry On Top

Feb 1, 2007 12:00 PM, By Hannah Kate Kinnersley

“Anyone who walks into that club for the first time walks out of there with a neck ache because you can't stop looking at it — it's really insane,” says Stephen Lieberman of Cherry Nightclub at the Red Rock Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. Lieberman, president of SJ Lighting in Agoura Hills, CA, is responsible for this particular insanity, along with club designers David Mexico and Josh Held of The Rockwell Group and sound designer Dan Agne, president of Sound Investment Audio.



Although Red Rock is the first billion-dollar casino to be built away from the bustle of the strip in the mountains near Las Vegas, there is nothing laid back about its nightclub. Held says their mission — from owners Rande Gerber of The Midnight Oil Company and Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta of Station Casinos — was to create a place that visitors would find more memorable than any other club they had ever been to.

Theatrical lighting designer Lieberman's brief from Gerber was to design the most sophisticated system he could come up with. "There was a lot of pressure to produce something spectacular," says the designer. "But the restrictions were none." The club comprises a 10,380-sq.-ft. pool area and an 8,480-sq.-ft. interior. The main room has a domed ceiling broken up into a checkerboard of metal panels and voids that extends over the main bar, dance floor, and VIP areas. Held calls the dome an "umbrella of audio and visual stimulus." The Rockwell Group team designed the patchwork of metal to reflect an abstract image of dancers back to them. This canopy of light and sound was created in collaboration with SJ Lighting and Sound Investment to accommodate light fixtures and speakers.

Lieberman detailed the entire dome with concentric circles and arches of Color Kinetics iFlex. He explains, "We wanted something spectacular when it was on but would blend in when it was off." Inside each panel, he placed a double-bent radial pipe from which to hang nodes, using 2,000 separate nodes in all. Andrew Giffin, a Vegas grandMA programmer, oversaw the electrical installation of the LEDs to keep everything within channel count, and he is also available for the club board operators when they run into issues.

Lieberman placed 12 Martin Professional MAC 250 Entours and MAC 250 Wash fixtures inside the dome. He also used 150 10W finger strobes from Diversitronics. "Not a knock-you-over-type strobe light — it's a very organic display," he says. He also relies on six Martin Atomic 3000s in the dome for more drama. All of the LEDs are run by DMX, and each finger strobe is controlled individually, as are 90 pin-spots. Lieberman chose an MA Lighting grandMA console with five NSPs (Network Signal Processors) for 20 DMX universes. He says, "I wanted to give them as many different elements as possible — a lot of different tools for different events." Those tools also include the Atomic 3000s with color scrollers and 100 ETC Source Four PARs.

Another new toy Lieberman got to play with was the Jem Hydra fog system, starting with a prototype because the system was so new and then switching to a production model. There were some teething pains — the installation required plumbers to run copper pipes — and some fittings had to be sent in from Europe, but aside from the logistics, the Jem Hydra gave Lieberman plenty of choices. He says, “From a design point of view, the machine is perfect. The heads are small; the machine is powerful.” The Jem Hydra has a remote reservoir that can be stored away in a tech closet and heads that can be positioned up to 300m apart. “I wanted to get multiple heads up in the air pointing straight down, and because there is no fog juice in the heads, you can hang them in any orientation,” he says. Lieberman has fog streaming straight down from the top of the dome almost to the floor, 30' below, and before opening night, a nervous security guard had to be reassured it was not liquid nitrogen.

Another innovation is using video chandeliers from Montreal-based visionaries Lumid. Rather than simply projecting images onto a wall, the Rockwell Group worked with Lumid's president, Dominique Alary, to customize his video pendant for the club, with the goal of broadcasting music videos and live images to patrons. A Sanyo XU58 DLP video projector is hidden in the ceiling with the image beamed onto an angled mirror and into the curved surface of the acrylic pendants. “The trick,” says creator Alary, “is the way we treat the surface so that the image goes through one side and comes out better defined on the other.”



Alary originally started using the product he calls the Lumid sandblast finish because traditionally sandblasted surfaces can be stained simply by touching them, but by shooting a nanotechnology crystal spray on to it, the surface does not stain, even in an environment where red wine and worse can routinely be spilled on them. But the industrial designer also found that the crystals pick up the light so that projections appear brighter and more well-defined. “It's like a comb going through your hair,” he says. “It detangles the image.”

He chose the DLP projectors because he liked the sharpness of the image and needed a wide-angle lens; the projectors can't be installed too far away from the reflectors in the ceiling. There are six video pendants in the club: two in alcoves in the main room and four of them in the VIP sections so that patrons can watch live images from the dance floor or a sports event. Eventually, they will be able to watch images from other Midnight Oil clubs around the world. The 3'-diameter, 3,000-lumen pendants are a twist on the old TV in a bar. Alary thinks of them as a porthole, serving both artistic and functional elements in the club without the intrusiveness of a huge screen.

One of the goals for The Rockwell Group in designing Cherry was to put every patron in the spotlight, whether by broadcasting images of them through the pendants (hooked up to the AV system by Sound Investment Audio) or by using two-way mirrors over the sinks in the adjoining men's and women's restrooms. Held says, “Las Vegas is about voyeurism — seeing and being seen.” So you can not only check to make sure your date washes up in the bathroom, but also celebrity-spot in the elevated VIP rooms and have your best moves on the dance floor broadcast around the club.

Patrons arriving at the club enter through a 40' mirrored tunnel of chrome panels, red LED lights,

and small Funktion One subwoofers installed flush with the wall that Held describes as a “womb to cradle you in an envelope of warm light and deep bass.” This transitional space is designed to block out the slot machines and other casino noise and prepare patrons for a different experience, or as Held says, “to cleanse the palette.”

The speakers used in the tunnel and the rest of the club, including the 10,000-sq.-ft. private pool area, are Funktion One. Agne and director of technology Todd Konecny placed around \$2 million worth of sound equipment in the club, much of it customized. Agne says, “Rande Gerber wanted the space to make a statement, so the speakers are part of the eye candy.” In the main room, they are placed in four cages hanging above the dance floor, although outside in the pool area, they are hidden inside banquettes and cabanas, partly for aesthetic reasons and partly to protect them from the harsh desert climate. Agne, in one of his trademark designs, “floated” the 40'-diameter dance floor above the subwoofers so that dancers can feel, as well as hear, the music. To do that, he worked with the Rockwell team from the beginning to raise the dance floor in relation to the rest of the room, but says the undertaking was well-worth it. “It's crazy how much energy does get moved to the floor — it really makes you want to dance,” he says.

To maintain sound quality inside and outside by the pool, the whole network is digital. Konecny says, “The huge technology obstacle was to get everything happening at the same time and working together.” Club patrons in the pool area can access audio and video from about eight different sources, including live sound at the DJ booth, video from the dance floor or a live sports event, or replaying the set from the night before. The system is highly customized to force everything to work together, but for signal processing and routing, they used Pioneer and Crestron models. Because the system is entirely in the digital domain, at one point during setup, Konecny was able to wirelessly connect to the music server and play tunes from his Mac throughout the club. The music server is from Palo Alto, CA-based Roku, enabling the DJ booth to access licensed music on a laptop and call up playlists. Additional sound gear includes two Pioneer DJM1000 mixers, a TC Electronics Finalizer 96K, nine XTA DP6i digital system controllers, two Biamp Systems Audiaflex, and a variety of MC2 and Crest amps.

Cherry also has some traditional nightclub features, including the obligatory mirror balls and some less-traditional sculptural elements. A 7" Takashi Murakami original of two cherries greets visitors at the entrance, and the men's bathrooms are graced with custom cherry-red lip-shaped urinals from designer Meile van Schijndel of Bathroom Mania in the Netherlands. Last summer, the urinals caused so much controversy at a McDonalds in Holland that they were removed, but so far, Cherry patrons are more appreciative of the artistic statement, or at least have a sense of humor about it.


Cherry's location already sets it apart from the mainstream, but by focusing on technical innovation, as well as aesthetic issues, the Rockwell Group achieved the goal of creating an experience that Held says, “transcends the gaggle of over-the-top nightclubs found in every casino in Las Vegas.”

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