THE INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION FOR TECHNOLOGY IN ENTERTAINMENT

mondo dr

DAVID LABUSKES
AVIXA CEO talks us through his own history and the company's future.

NIGHTCLUBS
Our first report dedicated to the night-life genre.

AMPLIFIERS
A comprehensive list of the powerhouses in audio.
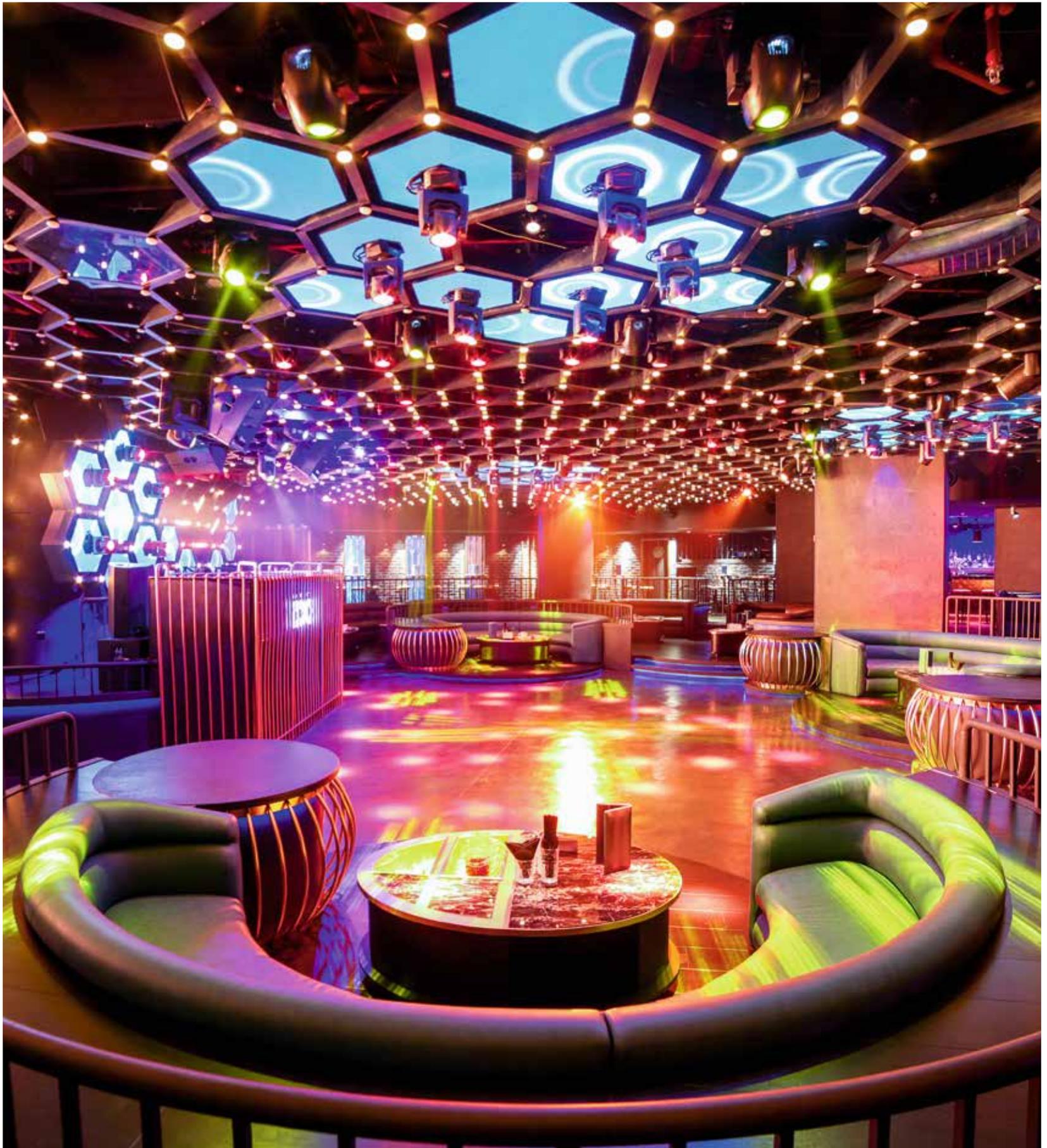
INNER CITY ZOO

DUBAI, UAE
EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA

One of the latest venues to be added to the Dubai high-end nightclub scene has been given the VIP treatment with its audiovisual design.

Created by the team behind Lock, Stock and Barrel (LSB) in Barsha Heights, Dubai, Inner City Zoo marks Solutions Leisure Group's entry into the UAE's nightclub scene and the return to the nightlife sector for Solutions Leisure Managing Director, Paul Evans, and Creative Director Freek Teusink. The pair - who have known each other for more than 20 years - had previous operated nightlife venues in Egypt, such as Ministry of Sound and Hed Kandi Beach Bar, but in more recent years have been more active in the F&B industry.

Inner City Zoo is located at Rixos The Walk Hotel, JBR, Dubai, which also houses a second Lock Stock & Barrel that is two-and-a-half times bigger than the original venue and American steakhouse concept, STK. All three

are operated by Solutions Leisure Group, with the latter being a joint venture with New York-based The ONE Group.

With the culture of the Solutions Leisure Group outlined on its website as: 'copy and paste is not in our dictionary. Repetition is not in our DNA,' it'll come as no surprise that a lighting designer was brought in early on this project. Paul and Freek's LD of choice was Ben M Rogers, Design Director & Consultant, Ardent Limited. It was a familiar pairing, as Ben completed the lighting design at the original, aforementioned LSB, and in turn the new venue by the same name, too. "I was more involved with the creative development of this venue than the other venues, in that, it started off with a concept of wanting a great lighting and visual show," said Ben. "We could have just

done a black box, but as a company, Solutions Leisure Group don't do that sort of space. It's not a warehouse. They want more texture to it, more style, more feel, so even the black walls are still textured brickwork."

The name of the venue took some time and some trialling, but Inner City Zoo depicted a wild side, yet an urban feel at the same time. A lot of the artwork in the venue reflects the name, and it was a good reference point for the design too.

"We talked early on about different types of pixel options and an immersive LED environment, but not wanting to go too heavy on video," Ben continued. "I didn't want just a standard video screen, and what we've ended up with is a fragmented screen that's in different shapes and different sizes. I think this allows us to bring video

content in, but as more of a textual element rather than watching a TV. We've also originated custom content which exploits the screen layout on the walls and roof".

The iconic hexagonal pattern on the roof was one of the first elements of the design, and everything else stemmed from there, so guests can see the pattern replicated around the venue in different forms. "That is the main DNA of the space," said Ben "The design team from Broadway Interiors brought hexagons into bar frontage, the portholes in doors and even the tiles in the bathrooms.. The hexagonal screens were sourced during a trip to Prolight+Sound, Frankfurt in 2017. After seeing the solution at the exhibition, Ben was in no doubt that this was the visual answer. "I sent whatsapp videos back to Freek

in Dubai and got an instant thumbs up". He explored a few different versions at the show, but in the end settled on a slightly customised version to allow for power and data feeds with touring grade connectors and mounting hardware to fit the unique layout. The screens where sourced through Mark Nicholson at MMS Distribution in the UK. "Mark is my go to fixer for bespoke and specialist LED products," he said. "I source through him because because of the personal and relaible service and after sales." The hexagons are made by RGX in China and run on Novastar VX4S processors. In addition to the video panels the entire roof formation also has an individual led pixel matrix using a customised fitting from Glasson Electronics built into the bespoke roof frame. This matrix of 1,200 RGBW LED pixels is driven via artnet from MADRIX software. "Madrix has a great interface and it's generative and sound active effects allow the matrix to respond directly to the music whilst the operators can still dictate colours and patterns to match the overall light show". The other video screens in the venue are in the form of 6 panels which sit in cages built into the walls and a panel in the front of the DJ Booth cage. These screens are the APIX2 panels offering a 2.9mm pixel pitch supplied by Music & Lights in Italy. The AlphaPix family use black faced SMD LEDs for high contrast and superb colour consistency, they are faced with a smoked glass and can "disappear" when
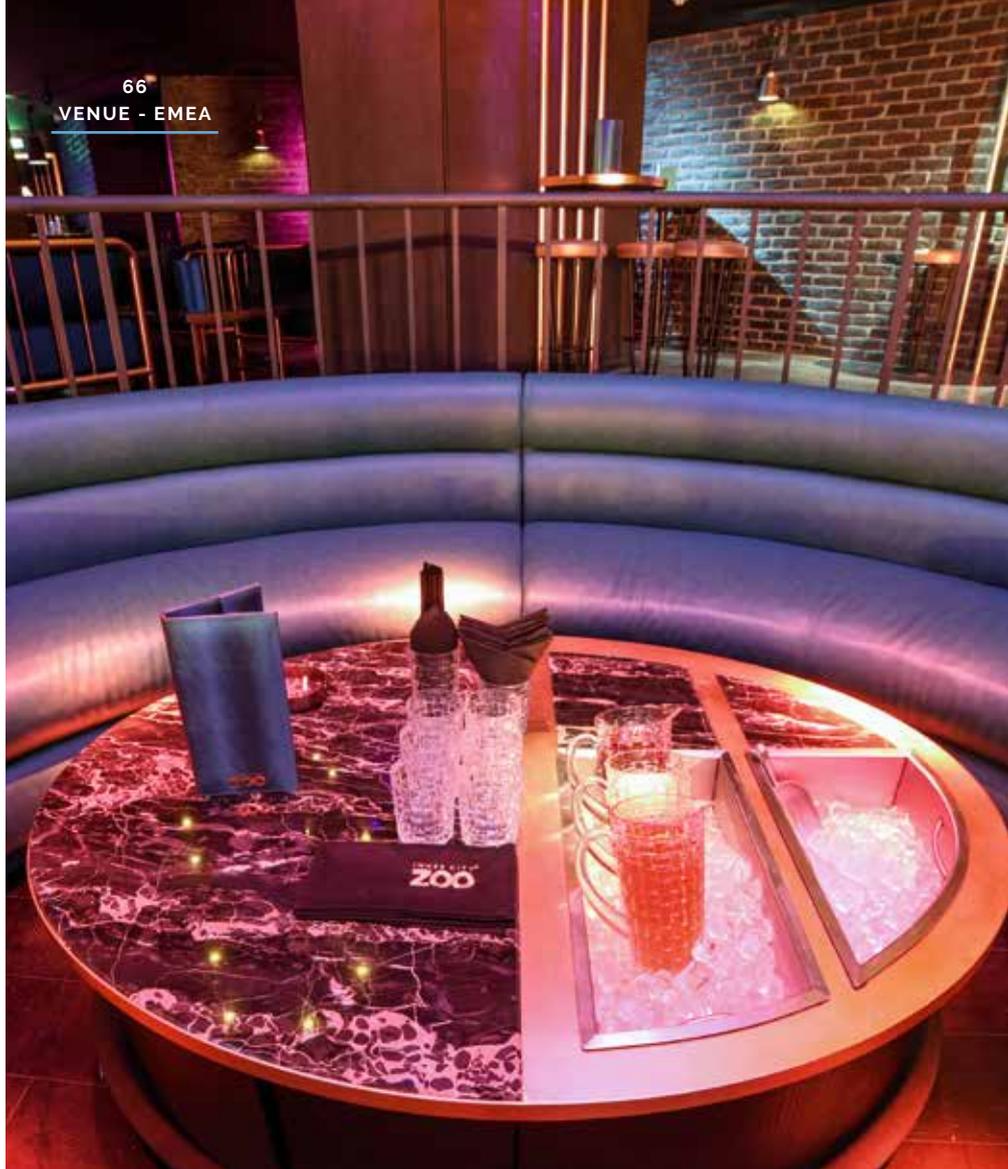
not in use. ArKaos Media Master software takes care of content for these screens. Ben has been using ArKaos products for almost 20 years, so he is more than familiar with the range and its capabilities. "I find it hands on, it's efficient, there's a good team behind it, the support is excellent, and it's actually pretty intuitive - and its very competitively priced. For Inner City Zoo, we've just used the ArKaos software license, having implemented our

own hardware to provide the two graphics outputs used to drive all the screens in the venue.
As well as the video panels, Music & Lights also supplied the intelligent lighting fixtures too. "I was introduced to the product line originally in the UK because A.C. Entertainment Technologies look after the brand there," Ben explained. "I did some work with Dave Horner from Visual Connection who was

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

LIGHTING & VISUAL
54 x RGX customised hexagonal screen; 1,200 Glasson Electronics RGBW LED pixel; 1 x MADRIX software package; 30 x Music & Lights APIX2 panel; 1 x ArKaos Media Master Pro software package; 16 x Music & Lights Stark Blade 8 fixture; 56 x Pixie Beam fixture;, 12 x Luma 700 Spot fixture; 23 x Ruby Beam moving head; 8 x Music & Lights SunBlast3500MAX strobe; 8 x Music & Lights Display COBFC LED Par; 90 x Elation ELARQ1 LED Spot; 4 x Prolight Concepts GB1 ReflectaBea; 22 x MP75 LED fresnel RGBW; 34 x EventSpot RGB;, 20 x Studio Due SlimBar RGB fixture; 2 x iLight SCLED LED dimmer; 40x SGM R-2 RGBW track spot; 29 x SGM R-2 WW track spot; 2 x Hazebase haze machine; 2 x Magic:FX smoke jets; 4 x Magic:FX CO2 guns with backpacks; 1 x Spike 4k and 2 x Spike 2k LPS-Lasersystem laser; 1 x Pangolin laser software package; 1 x MA Lighting grandMA2 light console; 4 x LSC Lighting APC12 relay switching box

SOUND
6 x TW AUDiO T24N loudspeaker; 2 x TW AUDiO BSX subwoofer; 4 x TW AUDiO B30 subwoofer; 14 x TW AUDiO T20i loudspeaker; 8 x TW AUDiO B18 subwoofer; 2 x TW AUDiO M15 monitor; 1 x TW AUDiO B15 subwoofer; 5 x Powersoft X8 amplifier; 2 x BSS Soundweb London BLU-50 processor; 2 x BSS Soundweb London BLU-DA processor; 2 x Pioneer CDJ-2000 Nexus 2 multiplayer; 1 x Pioneer DJM-900 Nexus 2 mixer

innercityzoo.com

implementing them into his cruise ship projects - so got to play with the products then got to know the people. They've got substantial warehousing in Europe as well as a large and fast factory in the far east - they hold good stock, the service and the support is good. I looked into other options but Music & Lights have an excellent line of products which covered the majority of what I was looking for - they've got a range of LED spots heads that are unmatched on function and price." For Inner City Zoo, Ben selected StarkBlade8, PixieBeam, Luma700 and Ruby fixtures from Music & Lights to be part of the ceiling feature, they are interspersed between the hexagonal screens "all have great optics

and output - and the continouse pan and tilt on the blades and beams really enchance the texture of the design". The venue also features eight of the brand new Sunblast 3500 LED strobes, which are generally run well below full capacity and are still able to dominate the room. These sit alongside more effect machines including Hazers from Hazebase in Germany with CO2 guns and smoke jets from Magic:FX and Spike 4K and 2K RGB lasers from LPS-Lasersysteme, which run on Pangolin software. Finally Ben deployed the unique GB1 Mirror effect head from Prolight Concepts in the UK. "This is a super simple but hugely effective mirror effect system with a series of concave discs on DMX control with

small mirrorball mirrors on them - the effect is neat and unlike a mirrorball when not in use they are small enough to be un-noticed." For Architectural and feature lighting Ben turned to Prolight Concepts again for a range of Event Spot and LED Fresnel fixtures that provide the table and architectural feature lighting, Elation Profession for the compact ELAR Q1 spots for decor features, and to SGM for their track mounted LED heads "these where an ideal solution in the low ceiling that surrounds the main floor as it allowed us to have all the flexibility that a track system affords whilst retaining the individual dmx dimming and colour control we wanted.

An MA Lighting grandMA2 light is in ➤
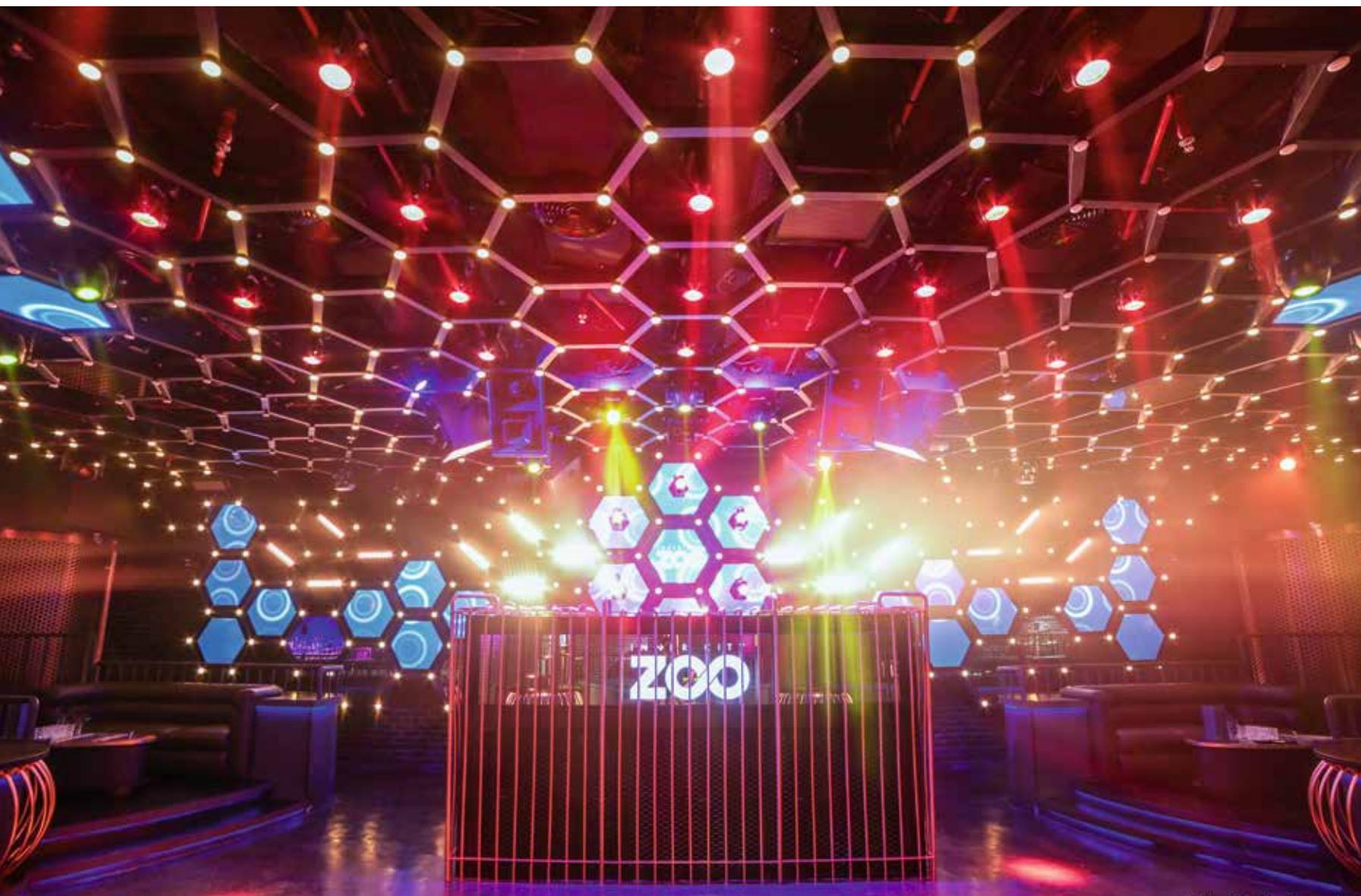
"They've got good warehouses and they hold good stock, the service and the support is good, as is the price. I looked into other options but Music & Lights had the right product at the right price, and they've certainly got a range of LED spots that no-one else has got."

place for lighting control of all elements - including all the architectural lighting elements. "When we looked at the size of the venue and the amount of control we needed, it's nearly 4,000 parameters of control, I needed the hands on approach," said Ben. Obviously, a grandMA2 light is a big investment for the venue, but it means that all of the desired control can be achieved. Some of the MADRIX pixel control is tied into the grandMA2 light, as are the special effects and media server control, so in total the venue is running 16 universes, but the larger desk from MA Lighting is more than capable of handling that, hence why it was chosen.

Completing the lighting inventory is LSC Lighting's APS12, which were supplied through VV & Sons in Dubai. "They're just brilliant," said Ben. "It's a really straightforward box - a relay switching box with multi-pin outputs. But it'll power up in sequence, it'll do DMX, it'll tell me what my voltage is, how much power I am using. It's just a really clever, effortlessly simple box that everybody should have installed or on the road."

When it came to challenges, Ben described the usual scenario of time constraints, and a lot of people working in one space at the same time trying to do multiple jobs. There's a lot of technology for quite a small space, and in order to ensure the prime end result, the timeline of wiring, acoustical treatment, and installation the roof all had to be well managed. Add to that the creative director asking for more drama, wanting more colour and accents as the venues final finishes evolved - "That suits me though," laughed Ben. "I am a theatre boy, so asking me for more drama is fine. I can do drama." But there is no doubt that the project pulled together in the end, as venues - especially in Dubai - tend to do and the club has opened to an array of complementary reviews, packed nights and attracted major international artists and club brands to join the party. For the audio solution at Inner City Zoo, Paul and Freek turned to another long-term collaborator, Pulse Middle East. The brief for the sound system was high SPL; a crystal clear, warm sound; powerful, accurate, full-range bass reproduction;

and to be able to achieve 130dB throughout the club. Joe Chidiac of Pulse ME described the design process: "We started from the DJ booth with the design for a large FOH system. After defining the necessary FOH system, fills were specified for near-field sound and low-frequency reinforcement in the rest of the club."

The FOH system comprises six TW AUDiO T24Ns for wide coverage and high SPL, these are complemented by two BSX FOH subwoofers in infra mode and four B30's stacked on top. "This combination can accurately reproduce the full range of low frequencies with an even dispersion and fits together perfectly," continued Joe. Although it was smooth sailing with the FOH system, as he explained: "The FOH subwoofer system caused the concrete structure of the club to visibly vibrate, causing both structural and acoustic concerns, as the system could be heard throughout the hotel. The subwoofers had to be raised on a sprung floating platform to reduce the transmission through the building structure allowing the club to run with a high volume level inside and little disturbance through the rest of the hotel." Joe also had to flip the T24Ns upside down because they were installed inside the hexagonal ceiling feature and the structure

was obstructing the horns, but flipping the cabinets fixed the problem.

TW AUDiO's T20i's are deployed as extra speakers around the club for localised near-field sound, and B18 subwoofer are distributed around the outside of the club to provide localised low-end reinforcement. The placement of the T20i's had to be adjusted during the design process due the to ceiling height being reduced as more ducts and other services were added above it, but with some adjustments, the cabinets now work very effectively. "The structure built around the FOH subwoofers reduced the output to the sides significantly too, so the B18 stacks in the corners had to be delayed and adjusted carefully to compensate for this loss," Joe added.

A couple of M15 monitors and a single B15 subwoofer takes care of the DJ setup, which includes two Pioneer CDJ-2000 Nexus 2 multiplayers and one Pioneer DJM-900 Nexus 2 mixer.

Powering the system are five Powersoft X8 amplifiers, which are Dante enabled. "Smart integration with the company's Armonia software and interactive tuning made it easy to align the system before the club construction was fully completed, as it wasn't practical to continuously play

pink noise through the system," said Joe. "Active damping control allows control of the subwoofer damping, so we could adjust the subwoofer response to make it more or less punchy." The X8's also offer options for input redundancy and a three-phase supply, which eased phase balancing for electrical contractor.

Pulse ME specified two BSS Soundweb London BLU-50 processors and two BSS Soundweb London BLU-DA processors for DSP control. The latter offers Dante / AES67 audio and BLU link, which means it can be used to add Dante / AES67 to one or more BLU link devices. "We could use the leveller function in BSS to limit the sound without the usual compression artefacts," explained Joe. "Using two independent pairs of matrix units meant that in case the primary system failed, the amplifiers would automatically failover to the secondary, identical system."

Using familiar contractors proved to be a failsafe decision for Solutions Leisure Group, it seems the team have cemented a winning partnership with Ardent Limited and Pulse ME. As the group's first venture back into the nightclubbing world appearing to have gone relatively smooth, it's likely it won't be too long before we hear about the new venture.