

NEW CLUB + BAR DESIGN

crobar / New York, USA

Callin Fortis and Lionel Ohayan, December 2003 crobar is one of a crop of new super-clubs that have been unleashed on New Yorkers over the past couple of years. Like many of the other venues, it is located in Manhattan's destination du soir, Chelsea, and is the third crobar to emerge in the US, with sister clubs in Chicago and Miami, all owned by Callin Fortis and Ken Smith, crobar follows in the nightclub tradition of being forged from a reclaimed industrial warehouse space, and is apparently the first large-scale venue to be built from virgin property in New York in over a decade. A mammoth 2.320 square metres (25,000 square feet), the club occupies three buildings that, together, span an entire city block.

Fortis and his Big Time Design studio, in collaboration with Lionel Ohayan and ICRAVE Design Studio, were responsible for the interior, which integrates state-of-the-art technology with the existing fabric and character of the warehouse. and, in its use of such materials as copper and steel, retains its early twentieth-century metal-foundry legacy. He likens 'the sociology of nightclub design' to creating a roller-coaster ride, and uses the analogy of the Roman Coliseum when describing his approach 'The people's experience of the "event" and view of the gladiators varied from man to man, based solely on the designer's ability to manipulate flow through space.' he explains. He goes on to say, 'I ask hundreds of tactical questions. I want to encourage emotion and disassociative experience' (Loft, April 2004).

Major structural renovations, including the addition of new floors and staircases, were carried out to

create a venue with three interconnecting spaces: the Main Room, Reed Room and Prop Room (for VIPs). 'crobar's voyeuristic personality derives from architect Steven Holl's theory of three connections of space. Each space can be approached from multiple vantage points, none of which ever reveals the whole,' explains Fortis.

The throbbing heart of the venue is the vast Main Room, measuring 930 square metres (10,000 square feet), which accommodates 1,500 clubbers in a space devoted to dancing, although there is also a large, asymmetric trapezoid shaped bar, featuring a counter top of brass shavings encased in yellow resin. Taking advantage of the 18 metre (60 foot) high bow-truss ceiling, Fortis created a central, 230 square metre (2,500 square foot) dance floor and framed it with 'soaring, sculptural demi-arches'.

These support a wrap-around mezzanine (allowing for arena-style voyeurism), which encircles a 30 x 10 metre (100 x 32 foot) video-projection media wall and 'floating', copper-clad DJ booth, that juts out over the heads of dancing patrons. Cutting-edge technology is in full effect - while reigning from on high, the DJ can flash messages to the crowd by programming a 'LED ticker', installed beneath the elevated booth.

Lighting effects include light pods that rise and fall, and dynamic laser beams that zip around the room. Whether the entire room is suddenly bleached white with light, or freezing-cold nitrogen clouds descend from above, to cool the clubbers below, it is technology that provides the drama.

The Main Room is connected to the Reed Room by a 3.5 metre (12 foot) wide by 3 metre

(10 foot) long tunnel, referred to by Fortis as a threshold. 'Once inside, there is literally NO TURNING BACK. That makes the heart beat faster, the palms sweat, and adrenaline pump. Inside, I installed "white noise" generators that cancel the two disparate sound frequencies of the other rooms and create a moment of silence once you step inside,' says Fortis. 'That's a bit of humour in a nightclub that is "all about music". As you exit the tunnel, the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

You can't help but want to dance and smile' (Loft, April 2004). Towering, illuminated resin rods provide yellow shafts of light in the Reed Room, at juxtaposition with the midnight-blue light that emanates from the open-grate ceiling. Raw, durable surfaces abound in this 250-capacity space; exposed warehouse brick and a concrete bar are upstaged by an intriguing backdrop of chain-mail curtain, revealing the secrets of the ladies' room beyond.

Luxury is reserved for VIPs in the barrel-shaped Prop Room, described as '60s-ski-lodge-meets-Barbarella'. Original wood beams have been retained in this loft-like space, which is lent a golden hue by the burnished copper leaf of the domed ceiling. A series of niches in the walls, illuminated in different colours, animate the room. The timber bar, with lighting recessed below the counter top, casts a warm glow in the midst of the space. Finishes are luxurious, with perimeter banquettes of tan mock-crocodile and black marble tables, making this a cosy haven providing respite from the hedonistic chaos of the Main Room.

