

Night

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DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTIONARIES SIEGE THE O2

BELOW: The biggest ever club installation of a 3D LED matrix wall can produce graphics, lights or video

RIGHT: the staggering expanse of GB's main room where different levels ensure everyone's part of the action





Gatecrasher Birmingham

Big Time Design brings Miami club culture to the Midlands for the dance brand's boldest project yet

The Gatecrasher lion, so symbolic of the brand's glory days, may have hung up its glow sticks and laid down in the ashes of the Sheffield club, but Gatecrasher has reared its head once again - now a very different beast - and come back bigger and bolder than ever before. Following the closure of Bed nightclub and the fire of Gatecrasher Sheffield, only Gatecrasher Loves Nottingham and Gatecrasher Seven in Leeds remained, and the dance brand's fans waited with baited breath to see if a new clubbing phenomenon would rise.

And rise it did, a whole 65 feet into the air, the form of a £ 1,5 million, 2,400-capacity nightclub in central Birmingham, following the acquisition of The Works. The Miami-influenced venue spreads across a staggering 35,000 sq ft, comprising four levels, four individual rooms, six feature areas and nine bars. Says Gatecrasher founder and MD Simon Raine: "We had no intention of taking an old Works nightclub, but when we visited and I stood on that balcony and looked down I just thought 'wow what a fantastic space'"

The superclub has surpassed all expectations and - along with matter at the 02 this month - is probably the most impressive large-scale club NIGHT has come across in 2008. This is evidence of Simon's ambition to revolutionise Upper Broad Street, create an impact on customers and shake up the UK's clubbing scene. Uninspired by the UK's club design, Simon looked abroad and instantly became excited by the work of renowned US designer Cal Fortis, of Big Time Design. Cal is responsible for the award-winning designs - best interior design, best renovation - of the world's most famous clubs, including Crobar New York, Crobar Chicago, and the Cameo Theater in Miami. His clubs are revered the world over with fans including Paris Hilton, Harrison Ford, Lenny Kravitz, Cameron Diaz and George (looney, to name a few. Says Simon: "He understands nightclubs better than any designer; he sees a nightclub from many different perspectives, as an operator, a creative designer and from the point of view of the dancer. We are taking some big risks in the UK with some of his designs, but these are risks that he has

already taken and which work exceptionally well in the US market. Our matrix wall is like the one in Cameo, but he's re-designed it, so it's the future of where Cameo Miami was. He's made it bigger, better, brighter and with more features."

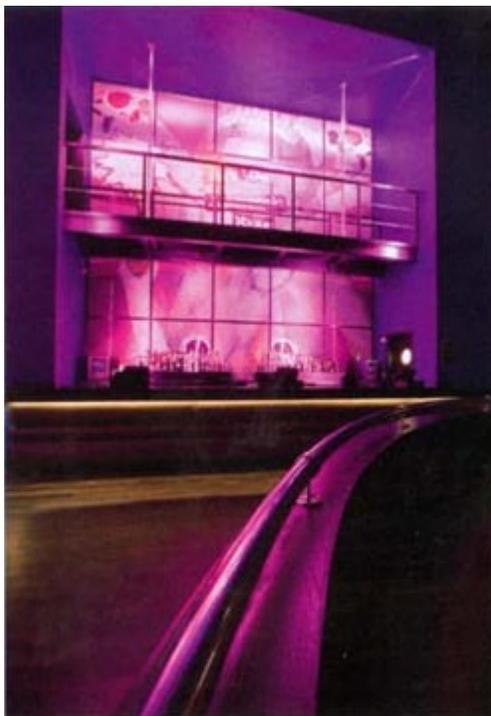
The matrix wall Simon talks of is the most iconic of many spectacular, bespoke architectural features that transform the venue into a stage for spatial drama. The first thing that strikes people as they enter the cavernous main room is this 11 metre structure, which looms overhead, stretching from floor to ceiling, built from square LED panels, and displaying light, graphics and video. It has a three dimensional design, with three vertical columns intersected by two horizontal sections, and has been covered on all sides by LED panels brought over from China by Lighting Effects Distribution, under the technical management of Woody. Damian Gale of Willow Sound & Vision, which installed the lighting, video and LED video at the club, says: "The Video LED columns were a unique challenge due to the sheer scale of installation,

this work along with the back colour change took approximately 1,000 working hours to install. [along with Cannock Electrical and Mechanical Installation] but the finished effect is jaw dropping. We have performed many video LED installations but never 11 meters high and 20 meters wide! We feel that Gatecrasher has performed an amazing task changing the existing venue without major structural building changes; what they have created gives the customer a unique experience wherever they stand, this is a hard act to follow.”

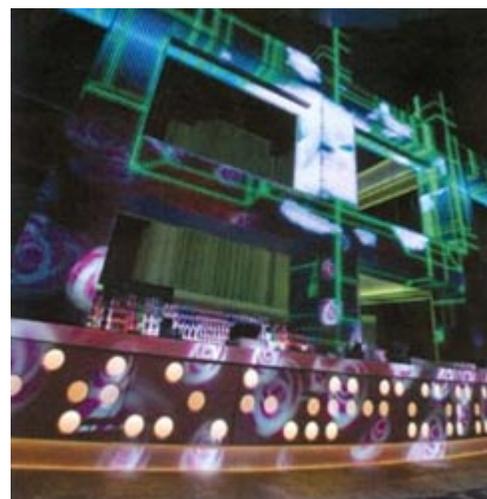
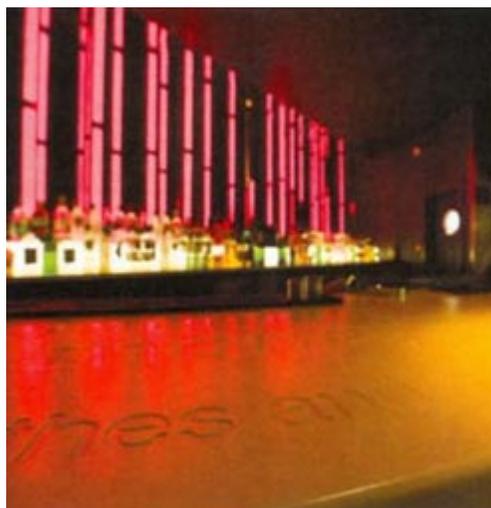
Definitive Media’s Stuart Wilson made the content for the matrix by producing over 250 bespoke video LED loops, specially designed to work with the 3D effect of the display. With the 3D construction of the LED display, the team had to design the visuals with pixel perfect mapping, which allowed the visuals to wrap around the structure seamlessly. Each video sequence was split into layers and assigned to each face of the wall, which gave the ability of full control over the 3D display. The playback system is Arkaos DMX with LED mapper to match the screen resolution to the LED display. Around the rest of the room, Pioneer DVJs combine with Resolume graphics computers to give a fresh twist to visuals, mixed by the new Edirol V8 vision mixer and Projected by five Benq projectors.

Elsewhere, Gatecrasher Birmingham (GB) is coloured by vibrant images, open floors, catwalks, sin bins, dancefloors, kissing booths, and a 14ft mirror ball DJ booth. Fortis describes the design of the club as a high-concept homage to New York’s Palladium and the era of disco. Cal’s influences stem from the mid-’80s when Ian Schrager and Steve Rubella post Studio 54 New York sin bin, The Palladium, was in full swing. Fortis explains: “There was a freer sensibility to nightlife then — everyone mixed on the dancefloor, clubland was full of sex appeal and sizzle. I want to bring back that kind of danger and rawness to clubland; Scarface meets the dark side of Saturday Night Fever, meets a Brazilian hooker in an analogue, not digital world.” Simon adds: “Gatecrasher Birmingham is a film set, a huge expansive studio space with oversized architectural pieces inserted to create a juxtaposition between Fear & Loathing In Las Vegas meets the visual aspects of Blade Runner. It’s more than the music, glamour and flashing lights of previous Gatecrasher venues.”

To create and implement such an eclectic and complex design scheme, Simon hand-picked “the best design team in the world”, drawing on the expertise of Cal and Matt Rawlinson Design Ltd for conceptual design, who worked in collaboration with overall design project managers Design at



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GB’s huge feature wall alternates between the Queen’s head; and the bizarre space monkey; view of the matrix wall from the bar below; philosophical readings on the bar etched by Multi Surface Fabrications Ltd



Source, led by Stuart Trett, and main contractor Phelan Construction. Stuart explains the design process: “Big Time Design did the conceptual design and big set pieces for the main room and Matt did conceptual design for Bed, whilst we pulled all of those areas together, made them happen and in addition to that did the entire design for Mansion, Orange Pop and all the intermediate areas.” He continues: “Simon wanted to absolutely get away from what’s become a relatively stagnant and jaded UK club blueprint for nightclub layouts, which is what Big Time brought to it by getting the seating out and onto the dancefloor and breaking down that very large space.” Rows of long arching blood red leather ‘sin bins’, balconies and a section of elongated steps that are meant to represent large museum steps for lounging on, mean that the surrounding areas of the dancefloor are all part of the action. To the left of the dancefloor is a ceiling-high feature wall,

which towers over the entire room. Huge lexicon panels are adorned with translucent iconic prints, alternately portraying a queen and a monkey. In front is a platform for GB’s theatrical entertainers, who can also perform on the trapezes set high above the heads of the crowd.

Although the main room is the key discussion point of the venue, the entrance to it was pivotal to the design because the journey to the main room was meant to be instrumental to its impact. Once past the initial turnstiles and up the stairs, clubbers are met with a preliminary ‘departure lounge’, meant to echo the experience one has at an airport before they embark upon a trip. The room hints on the glamour within, with pendant chandeliers, ripple fold drapes and reflective ceilings. A 180 degree turn takes guests down a long futuristic tunnel, with colour-changing lights and a glass wall to one side. Around the corner is a corridor covered in old ‘crasher’



posters — a brief encounter with the brand's heritage - before being suddenly swept into its astonishing new world, the main room of GB. Stuart says: "The idea of the turnstiles on the way in and the tunnel makes it a bit like standing in a Disney queue line and wondering when you are going to get in." At the back of the main room lies Orange Pop, a separate room with its own DJ, sound system and lighting effects. Dramatically different in design and vibe to the main room, Orange Pop blends a kaleidoscope of coloured light and furnishing with pop art Lichtenstein wallpaper, rubber floors and playful LED displays on the hackbar depicting different lettering. Another play on words – a common theme throughout GB – is featured on the bar top; a yellow LG Hi-Mac bar is etched with writing, which was fabricated by Multi Surface Fabrications Ltd, along with the white rectangular bar in the Posh room. Says Stuart: "The writing is by Roy Lichtenstein. It's about the meaning of fame and success – you might be rich and famous, but everybody drinks the same Coca Cola, goes to the same places and wears the same shoes. So it's tongue in cheek, poking irony at the fact that everybody is at Gatecrasher thinking they're cooler than cool."

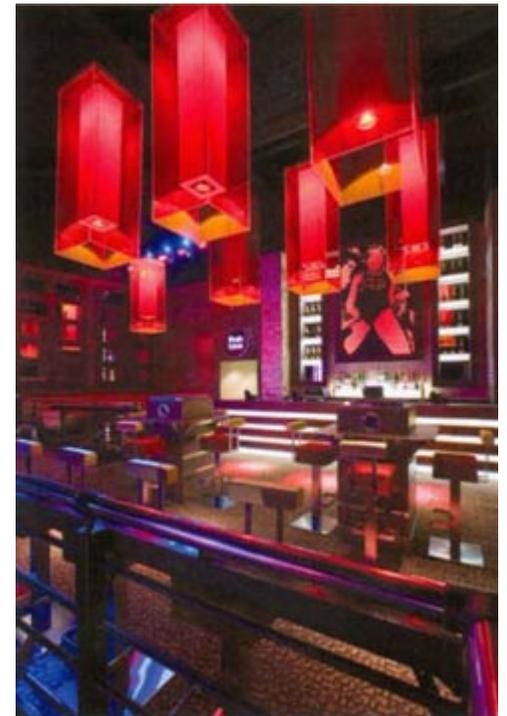
Designers Republic has implemented a series of overt signage around GB, identifying different zones such as 'Powder Room'



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: the departure lounge is the first stop on a customer's journey; a futuristic tunnel leads to the main room; kissing booths look through to the dancefloor; the Posh mezzanine level features brush imagery; Orange Pop is an explosion of Pop Art colours



and 'Smoking Kills. This Way'. In Orange Pop, small 'kissing booths' look through to the main room, ensuring people aren't detached from the action. Above Orange Pop on the open mezzanine level is Posh, a private bar with mood lit seating – Tokyo Pop chairs from the club's loose furniture supplier and manufacturer Abbey Furnishings, headed by Nick Scanlan. Design at Source was also responsible for the design of Mansion, a large room off to the right of the main room, which caters for the mainstream crowd with R&B and pop. The environment is again in contrast to the other rooms, offering an opulent and sultry ambience via black velvet drapes, crystal chandeliers and mirrors.



On the third floor above Posh is Bed, which can function as a separate club. Matt Rawlinson (who designed Gatecrasher Loves Nottingham and Gatecrasher Seven) created the concept for Bed in the initial stages of planning, as a space for the older, more sophisticated crowd. A central dancefloor, circular lighting rig and ten mirror balls give the room a disco feel, whilst the elegant bar area is flatteringly covered with leather panels that form a curve over people's heads and reflect the ambient lighting.

Each of the four music zones — main room, Bed, Mansion and Orange Pop — will play different musical genres each night. Going against the grain of its past,

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Matt Rawlinson designed Bed bar; Bed brings back disco; the Mansion provides sexy surroundings for R&B fans



GB will host indie nights on a Friday and launched with DJ sets from The Editors and Babyshambles' Adam Pica. Says Simon: "Deep down we still love dance music and house music, but most people in the UK don't want dance music. Gatecrasher has always been about music, it's about delivering an experience with music. Simon states that the drama and impact of the main room demands a big sound. GB shouldn't have a problem packing the punch due to its custom made sound system by Opus Audio, which is in excess of £50,000. Each speaker cabinet has been build for a specific area in the club. Opus Audio also provided the custom audio control and amplifiers for the venue, with Pioneer taking precedence in the DJ booths.

It is no trade secret that Gatecrasher is not in a strong financial position at the moment, having taken a loss on its Summer Sound System festival and thrown all resources at this new venture. And Gatecrasher Seven: whilst great on paper, has recently wrestled with the tough Leeds crowd, in a tug of war for their attention amongst a competitive late night landscape; it is uncertain how successful the re-design of Gatecrasher Seven was this year in reclaiming trade. Simon admitted in June: Our core audience expected more than we delivered". But you've got to give it to Gatecrasher far having the halls to develop such a bold new beast. Simon is well aware of today's tough trad



ing conditions. He says: We chose Birmingham as it's the second largest city in the UK with an immediate audience of three million people on the doorstep and historically Birmingham has been a great clubbing city."

The clubbing brand is steaming ahead with plans to refurbish its Area nightclub in Watford and a nationwide search for architecturally significant buildings to convert into nightclubs across the UK.

Cities including Manchester, Glasgow, Brighton, Liverpool and Dublin have all been earmarked as part of the group's expansion plans through 2008 and 2009. Operations director Adrian Swain, who is involved with the Broad Street Improvement District and Pub Watch for GB, comments: We have had more opportunities in the last six months than we've had in the last five years." Simon adds: "I think we are still prepared to take a risk and are always trying to buck the trend with new design concepts or technology, if you take risks then the rewards are much greater. Nightclubs and brands need to constantly evolve, it's a simple process of 'change or die'."

Gatecrasher is currently in negotiations with international territory licence partners to develop Gatecrasher branded venues, and are actively seeking new partners across the globe. Meanwhile the international events and touring side of the business will continue CO operate across the globe in over 20 countries worldwide, seeing Gatecrasher parties in Russia, The Ukraine, Hong Kong, the Phillipines, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Australia, New Zealand, Bali and Brazil to name a few. But of Gatecrasher's immediate focus, Simon states: "Our most important focus at the moment is GB, this will set one of the boldest statements. Then our next stop is THE return to Sheffield." Across the road from the old lion's resting bed in Sheffield, the earth is preparing for a new beast to take form.

VITAL STATISTICS

Gatecrasher Birmingham
182 Upper Broad Street
Birmingham B15 1DA
Tel: 0121 633 1520
Owner: Gatecrasher

Hours

Mon 9.30pm-3am // Tue-Fri 10pm-3am
// Sat 9pm-4am / 6am (Bed)

Key Contractors

Interior Design and Architecture:
Design at Source // Design Consultant (main room): Big Time Design // Design Consultant (Bed): Matt Rawlinson Design Ltd // Mechanical & Electrical Consultants: Cannock Electrical & Mechanical installation // Main Contractor: Phelan Construction // Lighting & Video Installation: Willow Sound & Vision // LED Lighting: Lighting Effects Distribution // Sound Installation: Opus Audio // Seating & Upholstery: Abbey Furnishings // Bar Equipment: Concept Bars & Refrigeration // Graphic Design: Designers Republic // Flooring: Carpets of Kidderminster // Bar Fabrication: Multi Surface Fabrications Ltd

Drinks

Pouring brands: Smirnoff vodka, Tanqueray gin, Johnny Walker whisky // Premium draught lager: n/a // Standard draught lager: n/a // Lead PPL: £3.60/£3 (Corona) // Lead PPS: £3.80/£3 (Smirnoff Ice) // Cocktail list: No

Technology

DJ Equipment: MAIN ROOM! DJM-1000 mixer. DVJ-1000 DVD players, CDJ-1000 mk3 CD players, EFX-1000 effects unit ROOM 2: DV.I X1 IND players. 61M-800 mixer ROOM 3: DJM-600, C6J-1000 and ROOM 4: 161-800 CD players. 61M-500 // Lighting: tO x Robe 12000T yokes, 8 x Robe x 1200AT moving yokes, 2 x Robe 575AT moving yoke washes, 4 x Robe 515XT scans, 16x Martin Wizards Extreme, 4 x Martin Atomic Strobes, 4 x Martin Colours, 96 x Leds Tubes, 11 x Leds 4 Cell Blinders, 5 x Leds Flood. ShowCAD Artist console // A/V Equipment: 5 x BenQ SP 870's, 5000 Lux projectors. 2 x Resolune video servers, 1 x Edinol V8 vision mixer // Matrix Wall: 2,064 x X-Puzzle Panels, 4 x X-image Pro Drivers, 78 x Xstrip Led Strips, 1 x Arkaos media server, 42 x X-Bar high power ROB wash lights