

■
"there is a tendency to abandon whirling motorized effects in favour of scanner-type units"

is a belief that to satisfy the public and operate profitably there are certain technological trends that need to be followed.

Nicola Ticozzi, president of APIAD (Associazione Produttori Italiani Attrezzature per Discoteche e Teatri—Italian Association of Discotheque and Theatre Equipment Manufacturers) says, "regular club-goers are used to seeing concerts and television shows with spectacular lighting, so that when they go to discos, they want to be the center of attraction or at least part of a similar 'happening.' I think that lighting plays a key role, and there is a tendency to abandon an excess of whirling motorized effects and huge centerpieces in favour of scanner-type units such as Clay Paky's Golden Scan and Coemar's Robot. As the prices of similar units lower, they will become the mainstay of club lighting."

Designer Daniele Mancini sees the future of clubs as fiber optics. With over seventy clubs in Italy to his credit, and almost as many abroad, including the Circus Maximus in Helsinki, Mancini says, "The limits imposed on designers by traditional or neon lighting for creating atmospheres will shortly be a thing of the past, thanks to fiber optics, which in addition to being far more adaptable and effective, are also a lot safer. I've just finished the Papillion, a club in which I've used an enormous quantity of fiber optics—they are definitely going to be a key element of club design in the future."

Mancini designed the Hermitage in Assisi, which opened December 1987. His transformation of what were originally monastery cellars into a nightclub is a masterful combination of antique traditions and modern technology. A recurrent theme is the curved gothic windows made from stained glass similar to that used in Assisi's churches—except that in these subterranean surroundings the windows are false back-lit panels on the walls.

Having opened the door with a magnetic card, club members pass through the various zones of the Hermitage—pastel tones evoke elegance and comfort, as in the pink zone with its floral motif seating. Flowers and floral designs recur around the dance floor. In spite of the elegance of the Hermitage, Mancini stresses that generally speaking there is no need to use costly materials to create the right ambiance. "If used with imagination and flair in the right combination, even simple materials can give the desired effect. In the Hermitage, for example, I used mirrors, opaline glass and chrome tubing, all classics in disco designing."

Whether designing a huge maxi-venue such as his pre-Colombian kitsch concept for San Benedetto's Atlantide, or a smaller club like the Hermitage, Mancini feels each is equally challenging: "With one you have to avoid a club that ends up looking like an aircraft hangar filled with hardware, furniture, and props, and with the other, in such small premises just one mistake can compromise the entire project."

Designer Silvestro Lolli of Reggio Emilia has his own ideas about trends in Italian clubs, which he has implemented in the Genux in the Brescia province in Northern Italy. Opened June 25, 1988 with a total area of over 18,000 square meters of floorspace, gardens, pools, and fountains, the Genux is Italy's largest venue. It can be divided into three separate—and sound-proofed—clubs, thanks to a series of mobile partitions. Lolli's use of marble, granite, natural stone, and statuary in the club's interior is offset by an imposing sound and light installation by Outline and Coemar. According to Lolli, the adaptability of the Genux is a precise indication of the future for the large venues. "Today, such clubs are huge investments, and their success depends entirely on attendance figures. A combination of good taste and economy is increasingly important, as is the choice of a theme which stimulates imagination and curiosity. Maxi-venues must be able to be divided into smaller areas, each with its own sensations and experiences for clients. Technical trends will include the demise of lighting as a show in its own right, with lighting taking an increasingly important role as an element in appreciating the club as a whole."

One of the newest Italian clubs is the Vertigo, which opened January 18, 1989 in a three-story former restaurant perched on top of the San Luca hill outside Bologna. The Vertigo was designed by Luca Tausani, whose studio has also designed some of the Adriatic coast's top venues such as Misano's Bala Imperiale with its ancient Roman ambiance, and the OK Village—a scaled-down village with streets, shops and restaurants.

The furnishings at the Vertigo are in tribute to the rationalist masters of the 1900s, such as Le Corbusier and van de Rohe. The whole club exudes rich comfort, right down to the Persian carpets. The name Vertigo comes from the effect created in the Room of Mirrors on the top floor—in a decidedly Baroque atmosphere of this room, you can either listen to live music or look down through a spectacular huge window onto the dance floor below.

The tendency towards more intimate environments is nothing new to Italy's best-known older clubs. The Paradiso in Rimini, which recently celebrated its 30th birthday, was originally the family villa of its owner, Gianni Fabbri. "We've created a lounge typical of a country house on the second floor," said Fabbri, "oriental rugs, tasteful furniture, and a fireplace for cool winter nights with a corner for live jazz bands. The intimate atmosphere created by designer Gianni Gavioli gives clients the impression of coming to visit friends at home." While the exterior has changed very little, the Paradiso has seen many interesting innovations over the years, such as the installation some ten years ago of air ducts on the adjoining open-air terrace that shot out streams of hot air, allowing patrons to sit on the terrace in cold weather. This idea recently was abandoned when the decibel level from the club so disturbed neighbors that a glass wall had to be put up around the terrace to keep the sound in.

A few miles down the Adriatic coast from the Paradiso is the Altro Mondo Studios, one of Italy's first mega-discos. Owners Bevitori and Galli recently gave the club a complete face-lift, including new sound and light systems.

The sound and light installation by WR Electronics includes seven Spectra Physics lasers and 3.2 kms of fiber optics controlled by six computers. A glass wall rises from under the floor level becoming a stage for the club's in-house dance troupe, a giant video DJ booth also rises to almost touch the ceiling, and nine elevators lower dancers and robots from above the ceiling to floor level. In addition to the main sound system, powered by eight WR300 amps and three WR500's, there is a holphonic set-up with twelve 700*700 amps. The same gargantuan proportions are found in the lighting of no less than 1600 luminaires.

One of the highlights of the Altro Mondo Studios' new technology is a row of transparent human-like figures suspended above the crowd fed by the laser/fiber optics systems, shooting beams out of their eyes as their neon hearts and veins beat in time to the music.

Michele LoScotto, an ex-sound designer, is a technical consultant and freelance journalist specializing in club technology, based in Rimini, Italy.