

In Italy, the national broadcasting company, RAI, called in Strand Lighting to help develop one of the world's largest studio projects...

MAJOR NEW ITALIAN STUDIO COMPLEX

Anyone who gets involved in planning and installing the lighting for a television studio can justifiably pat themselves on the back when the project is complete, and the studio goes on air.

For Strand's Manager of Technical Services, Mike Collier, Project Manager Danilo Federici and his team in Rome, there were no less than nine parts on the back - one for each studio in the awe-inspiring new complex created by Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) at Grottarossa to the north west of Rome.

The centre, called RAI Centro di Saxa Rubra and which came into full operation in January 1993, comprises ten studios in total for the news and news-related programming for RAI's three national television networks - RaiUno, RaiDue and RaiTre. The tenth studio had been completed in May 1990, was refurbished with a new Gemini 2+ as part of the recent installation, and will be further upgraded with a computer suspension control in August to bring it in line with the other nine studios.

Strand Lighting was awarded the contract for control, dimming, luminaires and suspension to be supplied in stages, beginning the summer of 1991. This involved Strand working with RAI in the early planning stage which commenced with detailing the suspension system.

RAI's Technical Director, Angiolo Scarpini, was the senior manager at RAI responsible for the overall selection of the equipment and the planning of the installation along with his technical support staff of Luciano Ricci, Giovanni Pisanu and Franco Franconi. Following Sig. Scarpini's retirement from RAI prior to the project's completion, Sig. Ricci was promoted to the position of Manager for Technical Support, and assumed the responsibility.

The dimming and control aspects of the centre formed one of the largest single orders Strand has ever supplied in Europe. Studio lighting at the centre is controlled by 1,158 EC90MD 32A modules in 37 racks spread through seven dimmer rooms, linked to six Gemini 2+ and three M24 desks. Control and dimming facilities are common for the twin 'A', 'C' and 'D' studios; the three



One of the nine new studios at Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) Rome.

'B' studios, and studio 'F' have independent service areas.

Mike Collier's project team were involved in the early planning stages right through to installation and commissioning, and Danilo Federici, Project Manager and 'the man in the trenches' according to Mike Collier, was representing Strand on-site each day during the project, directing the installation, manpower, logistics and liaison with RAI's technical team.

A total of 316 self-climbing hoists and 998 movable trolleys were supplied by Strand, and early involvement of the team meant that for studio 'B' (with its 9 metre-drop hoists) arrangements could be made for the hoist fixing rails to be cast into the pre-formed concrete beams. This saved a considerable amount of time on-site, as the alternative would have been drilling out the mounting points in the finished concrete building shell.

Although the hoist control was originally planned as a simple up/down switch system, Sig. Scarpini and his team requested a change to include computer-controlled front ends with position control capability. The manual systems were modified during the design process to allow their use as manual backup systems.

An ingenious solution was found for the problem of providing lighting positions along

the long side walls of the studio. Three-phase industrial power track (the type used to distribute power in factories) was run along the side walls, with three 32A dimmers powering each 10m length. Special pole-operated trolleys were made for luminaires, with a switch to connect the luminaire to one of the three dimmers controlling the segment of track. This system offers great flexibility, and a compact method of lighting in confined positions close to the side walls.

Although RAI owns a large stock of Quartzcolor studio luminaires, the new Saxa Rubra studios required a further 926 Polaris, Castor and Pollux Fresnels, Arturo softlights and Iris cyclights.

But Strand's services to RAI did not finish with the final completion and check-out of the studios. Complete operational training courses for the console operators were held on site at RAI for both the dimming and suspension controls.



This was followed with separate service and maintenance training courses for the staff of RAI's maintenance department which is headed by Sig. Mariano Mercuri who will be responsible for the on-going maintenance of all the studios.

In addition, to satisfy the Italian legal statutes for proper safety of electro-mechanical suspension systems in public facilities, Strand will be contracted to provide periodic factory-authorized preventative maintenance of these systems in all of the studios.

As Mike Collier puts it, "With a project this big you rely on team effort. All departments at the Rome factory assisted, particularly the production department (headed by Paolo Pasquini) which provided most of the actual manpower for the installation of the suspension systems."



A 'twin' control room suite at RAI, showing an M24 and Gemini 2+ side by side controlling the lighting in two separate studios.

Photograph by Giancarlo Pantano

Both photographs by Giancarlo Pantano