



Studio Hilversum

Take a studio with a history, start again and expand it into a complex that offers a complete suite of facilities with multichannel all under one roof. **ZENON SCHOEPE** is impressed with the results.

TUCKED AWAY BEHIND a rather unassuming residential street in Hilversum lies one of the best kept secrets in the recording community of the Netherlands. It's not some producer's private room but a complex of studios that has only recently been completed and revealed itself as the full-service place that it is.

It's the brainchild of owner producer/sound technician Maarten Derksen who will tell you that things have changed dramatically in the Dutch market: studios have closed, a generation of studio owners and engineers have retired and there's a new order coming in that better represents the commercial reality. He'll also tell you that the fragmentations in the client base — once based predominantly on a hardcore of big artists and now peppered by many more smaller acts — means that there should be more potential clients. And there are, but they're not all doing the same thing anymore — recording albums — they now want their own DVDs or CDs for concert sale and promotion, having broadcast concert footage repackaged, uploading to the Internet. All the things that they can't do at home in their own rooms.

In his own words, Maarten saw a 'diversified AV industry' and figured it needed a diversified AV facility to serve it.

He took over Studio Jules, as it had been known, in 2001, renamed it as Studio Hilversum and turned it

around. Studio Jules had been a leading post facility in the 1980s and 1990s and the studio site has historical connections with Radio Veronica, which played such a vital part in the evolution of broadcasting in Holland. However, the turn around was done in stages with post from Maarten and CD mastering from mastering engineer Hay Zeelen, and adding rooms as time and budget allowed. Studio Hilversum now has six rooms all with PMC monitoring.

'What I had bought,' says Maarten, 'was a building designed in 1977! There were two studios, one with a Screensound in it for post and a mastering studio; and on the basis of the mastering activity we were

able to continue.' While they knew everything had to be changed at the studio they didn't know where to start. Hay had tried to encourage the former owner to develop into surround and DVD mastering and they knew they wanted to combine picture. But as Maarten points out, at that time there was no infrastructure in place to allow them to build the sorts of rooms they wanted.

'We didn't have any examples of how to build the company that we've just described or drawings of surround studios,' he says. 'When you read the manuals for Dolby and DTS you get two stories and when you read interviews with surround engineers you again get different stories. We had to find our own way here.'

'Eventually we started with the toilets and worked our way out and in the first year we made the basis for the place with things like the electrics. Hay continued with his mastering, I did some postproduction and it just grew.'

They designed their own acoustics and integrated their own personal favourites — Hay's bank of Weiss bw102s, for example — and because they kept working during the building it meant there were situations where they were earning in one area and designing the build in another and when that was complete they'd move over to the new room and start the build of the old one. The voiceover booth was





Maarten's studio for a year.

Building was finally finished at the end of last year as the culmination of three years' of step-by-step improvements — every studio has daylight and fresh air and air con. And you know that the clients wouldn't have suffered during the building, such is the professionalism at the place.

What they've ended up with is Hay's mastering studio, a video studio with Avid Adrenalin, a stunning music studio, a DVD studio and an audio post studio with voiceover booth. The beauty of the arrangement is that the rooms can work independently or can be employed as part of a bigger scheme when the project requires it. It means they can take on a concert recording by employing a 6-camera mobile video unit with 72-track hard disk recording and follow a DVD project right through the mixing, mastering authoring and on to replication. They can offer complete packages. 'We're geared up here to make the most of the hype associated with a TV concert and all the publicity it gets,' explains Maarten. 'We can get the completed video done in 5 days — the video editing, mixing, overdubs and out to market — and we can do that in that sort of time frame if we are involved from the beginning.

'A big market is the local singer market — there are more local amateur singers than there are professional singers in Holland. They have gigs lined up for every weekend around the country and they can make as much money as a professional singer. They want to have DVDs of them in a boat singing their songs that

they can sell to their own audience at gigs. A lot of people forget that industry but they are very serious people,' he says.

The facility uses Nuendo throughout with additional Sadies for mastering — Hay employs multiple screens to drive his equipment — it's networked, there's a DigiBeta connectable to every room, a webserver, email server and 40,000 sound effects all housed in machine cupboards.

It's a fully PMC 5.1 facility and the mastering room sports MB2S XBDs used in full-range mode for stereo but for surround the bass cabinets' filters are changed to act as the 0.1 by physically unplugging them.

'The association with PMC started with me in 1994 when I was mastering at Studio Jules with B&W speakers, which I had been using for a long time and they were starting to sound dated,' explains Hay. 'I tested a lot of speakers but I arrived at PMC and Bryston — I'd been using Bryston with the B&Ws. I started with the smaller PMCs and I was really astonished by the sound and the stereo placement. When Maarten found out how much it would cost to do a studio in surround with PMC we decided to do it passive and make a hard cut to change the filters.'

Smaller models are dotted throughout in 5.1 configurations and Maarten says that being a PMC facility means that a project that goes all the way through starts on small PMCs, ends up on big PMCs for the mastering, and is then finished on small PMCs in the authoring room.

The layout is cleverly integrated and interconnected — it looks great and clearly works well. The music recording studio has a custom-built ADT mixer, which was on order at the time of my visit, that will be fully surround capable. So there's no control room 'statement' desk in the traditional sense because they'll tell you that the requirement is predominantly for monitoring control with the way they work in Nuendo and with the outboard racks. It's radical stuff and while a lot of people talk about it very few actually do it commercially — Studio Hilversum does, and in multichannel too with a great live area. But then it's indicative of the 'can-do' attitude of the place staffed with experienced operators running state-of-the-art and sensibly integrated gear in great rooms.

It is still early days for the completed complex but all the indicators say that this is going to be a successful operation because it has grown organically with its clients in tow and each phase of expansion has added value and features, with a commensurate increase in efficiency for the facility as this has happened. You get the distinct impression that Studio Hilversum takes on the client's problems and makes them their own and then provides them with a solution — all under one roof. ■

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