



Photos: Louis Ramon Austin

Forward Studios

Studio builds traditionally sprout from previous studio connections and it is now rare to encounter a truly new enterprise. **ZENON SCHOEPE** travels to Rome to visit a genuine newcomer.

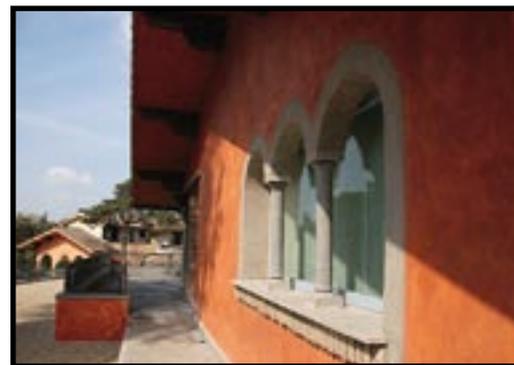
IN A SOUTHERN suburb of Rome lies one of the nicest and, it has to be said, most ambitious studio build projects in Italy for a good many years. Operating one control room with a large accompanying live area at the time of my visit, owner Massimo Scarparo is adding more rooms with another two expected to be functional shortly after you first read this and another area planned to open in the summer. If the work to date is anything to go by, Massimo's wish to put Forward Studios on the international recording map and to raise the ante in Italy looks fairly assured.

It's an unlikely site. Looking for all intents and purposes as a nicely refurbished period correct Roman Villa built on three levels, its sprawling basement area has been converted expertly into what will be a complex of rooms. The flagship A room, called Caesar, will be joined by the Aurelius multifunctional room,

the Trianus multichannel digital control room and the Augustus pre and postproduction suite. Plans and building are advanced and I was able to inspect the isolation and ducting structures and the cut outs for the monitors in the work in progress.

Massimo and his family lives above the complex and client accommodation is also being built on the site to supplement the high-end hotels that are situated within walking distance of the plot. All this in a facility that is 20 minutes to the Coliseum, very near to Ciampino airport, 25 minutes from the International Fiumicino airport and minutes away from the motorways that link to the rest of the country.

Massimo has a background as a musician and gleaned his studio experience from production projects. To him, Forward is something of a dream but he can't hide his belief that the complex could establish itself as a world player. He's also a businessman, and a very



successful one. He'll tell you that the studio will not represent a major source of income for him — he has made and continues to make his money in property management — but like all successful men he tells you that he's driven by ambition and a passion for projects. They are the things he cares about and he wants to make a difference.

Massimo also has impeccable taste and an eye for the finer things in life. You can see this in the landscaping of the plot, the elegance of his offices and his choice of equipment. The Caesar room, which opened in October, boasts Italy's first AMS Neve 88R and the first installation of Genelec 1036s in a room that is multichannel with the use of a 'mobile' Genelec system.

'To me Genelec represents the very best standard in monitors and reproducing sound. In the end it comes down to in fact that I really like them too,' says Massimo. 'I have a multichannel 1038 system planned for the Trianus room and we have 1031s and 1027s also available. For our clients we offer a variety of other nearfield monitors but for me Genelec remains the best and the world standard. I like the precision of them.'

There's also a Gold Series final run Studer A827 and any variety of digital formats too. Aesthetics are important to him. Thus the 72-channel 88R is a semi-wrap configuration in a room that is impeccably finished and detailed.

'It's a functional and an aesthetic idea!' he says. 'It also makes the best use of the space in what is a 96sqm room so you can get a lot of people in there.'

Building started some four years ago and involved major restructuring of the villa. Acoustic design is by Guiseppe Zappata, who Massimo rates very highly. His designs are clearly to a high standard and are done properly. Zappata's live room design was the product of his analysis of various recording situations and has resulted in a very large space that is also very flexible. It offers subtly different reverb characters throughout while also delivering four large and very usable booths.

The control room is a work of art and one of the nicest spaces I have been in for a long time. Isolation



is superb and is testament to the overengineering that has gone into the structure and the monitors sound simply fantastic. Outboard is in line with the choices of other top studios and the ubiquitous Pro Tools HD is in place with a fine selection of exotic and rare instruments. Caesar would do justice to any scale of production.

Massimo is still making decisions on the precise equipment choices for the rooms in progress but he is very exact about the functions that the rooms will perform. It's the large area dedicated to the Aurelius room that clicks the pieces into place and reveals what Massimo is intent on achieving as it will sport a live production console as its centrepiece. The room's position facilitates very easy loading-in enabling groups to use it as rehearsal and production area for live shows. What he is creating is a studio complex that could cater for all stages of a group's production needs. The preproduction for the album, recording and mixing of the album, the mixing of the DVD and rehearsals and production work for the live show. He's thought it out.

He has on-site technical support but no house engineer, as his intended international clients are likely to bring their own. He knows a lot of engineers and between them they have a wide range of contacts with engineers and producers around the world. It's how word of mouth starts.

'Forward Studios is a new type of studio for Italy,' he says. 'It was not previously possible to find rooms here that are as good as those in the best international studios in the world. I've always thought that it would be a good idea to build something like this.'

Bearing in mind the way that the studio industry has concentrated on consolidation in recent years, you've got to ask what he is doing building a brand new top-end complex at this point in time. What does he know that no one else does? 'I suppose I'm a little crazy but I have a passion for this business and I believe that there is room for an international standard studio like this when you look at the global

market,' he explains. 'The Italian market is not of primary interest to me. There is never a best time to build a place like this but it is always a good time to build top quality.'

He's aiming high and believes he will also have the high-end market in Italy to himself. It's a beautiful place, with smashing views, a great position, enormous character and an outstanding level of technology and build. His new rooms will combine to offer an unusual combination of facilities. One of the Caesar's first jobs was the mixing of an Andrea Bocelli project.

I am really looking forward to watching progress at what will undoubtedly be Italy's premiere facility. ■



Outboard — Lexicon 480, TC Electronics System 6000, MXR Flanger, Eventide DSX H3000, Eventide DSP H4000, TC Electronics 2290 (2), AMS 1580, Lexicon PCM70 (2), Lexicon PCM81, Sony DPS-V77, Yamaha SPX 90, Yamaha SPX 900, AMS RMX16, Yamaha DEQ5, GML 8200, Millennia Media STT1 (2), Manley Massive Passive, dbx 120 XP, SPL De Esser (2), SPL Transient Designer, GML 8900, Neve 33609 (2), Summit DCL 200, Urei 1178, Urei LA4, Empirical Labs Distressor (2), Empirical Labs Fatso, dbx 160a (2), API 550 PEO (3), Focusrite ISA 130 (2), AMS Neve 1081, GML 8302, API 550 pre (2), Focusrite ISA 110 (2).

Microphones — AKG C12, C414 (2), C451 (4), D12E (2), Audio-Technica 4050 (2), B&K 4009 (2), Beyerdynamic M88TG (2), Blue Bottle, Blue Mouse, Electrovoice EV PL20, Neumann KM143 (2), KM184 (2), M149 (2), TLM 103, U69, U87 AI (2), Schoeps CMC6 (2), Sennheiser 509, Blackfire (6), MD421 (4), Shure Beta68 (4), SM57 (8), SM58 (8).

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