



Alphabetland: X Is Back! ★ Classic Tracks: 'We Are the World' ★ Producer Dave Cobb ★ Acoustic Materials

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THE CLASS OF 2020
The Year's Hottest New Studios



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AUDIO DESIGN DESK 1.2 WORKSTATION
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SERENDIPITY & STUDIO DESIGN

John Storyk, Beth Walters and a Life of Science With Style

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Volume 44, Number 6

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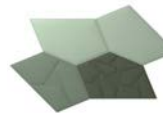
On the Cover: For more than 50 years, the inimitable John Storyk, who designed Electric Lady Studios for Jimi Hendrix in 1969, has helped shaped the very look and functionality of the modern studio. Pictured here with his wife, Beth Walters, pictured here on West Lake, Hangzhou, China.

Photo: Víctor Cañellas, WSDG China Representative

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Current

From the Editor

The Nexus of Art, Architecture and Technology

In August Electric Lady Studios in New York City turns 50 years old, and as one of a handful of OG modern recording studios in the world, it's still kicking, still hosting sessions and still reflecting the vibe of its original owner, Jimi Hendrix, at 52 West 8th Street. It's dark inside, isolated from the world. It's a musician's playpen in that early 1970s, Golden Age of Recording, man-cave sort of way.

Not far away, at 520 West 27th Street in Tribeca, sits Jungle City Studios, the jewel of today's New York City recording scene, owned and operated by Grammy-winning engineer Ann Mincieli, who does most of her work with the amazing Alicia Keys. It is also a musician's playground, though it sits on the tenth floor and offers a view of the Highline through its floor-to-ceiling walls of glass, opening up to the magic of the city for inspiration. It is as light as Electric Lady is dark. It opened in 2011.

Both were designed by acclaimed architect John Storyk, and together they reflect both the consistency of his work over five decades and the changes in his style in adapting to modern trends. Back in the 1980s, he started introducing more glass and light into his designs, learning to work with the reflective surfaces rather than shying away from the inherent challenges. When digital technologies started to appear in the late 1980s, and the size and function of control rooms began to change, with more artists taking control of their own recordings, Storyk saw the changes ahead and his little company began to grow. He has always been in tune with the times.

"It seems odd now, but when I look back over the years, everything I've designed has been a project studio, even before the term existed," Storyk says. "I've come to learn that the actual drawing, the physics, the geometry—that's the easy part. The hard part is in finding that emotional connection of the owner or the artist to the space. It's their room, their project studio, and it should reflect the way that they work. I've thought about that on every studio I've designed."

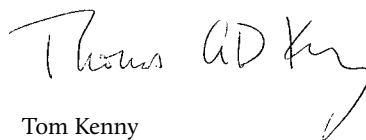
Between Storyk himself and his team at Walters-Storyk Design Group, we're talking about more than a thousand studios, all around the world, from traditional commercial music recording, to university teaching environments, to the emergence of today's podcast facilities. To Storyk, each has its purpose; each reflects the owner's passion. Studio design is the nexus of art, architecture and technology, he is fond of saying. And he seems happy today, talking from his second home in Akumal, Mexico, looking out at the Caribbean while his wife, Beth Walters, paints on a canvas in the background. Fifty years of living life at the nexus has turned out pretty well.

Last year, with the Electric Lady anniversary still many months away, the team at WSDG began planning a yearlong series of events to honor Storyk's 50 years in studio design. It was to kick off with a grand party at Le Poisson Rouge, a restaurant he had designed, during the October 2019 AES Convention, followed by a series of celebrations throughout the year in different locales around the world. Deposits were made, signs were printed, and then one night, Storyk says, he woke up at 3 a.m. and thought to himself, "I can't do this. It just doesn't feel right. Fifty years. It feels like I'm being put out to pasture."

He told the staff the next day, and, after the initial shock wore off, longtime friend Bob Skye piped in, "What if we call it 'The First 50 Years?'" Storyk immediately changed his tune. "I can live with that," he thought. A more intimate dinner was planned for close family and friends. His children flew in and surprised him. Eddie Kramer was there, as were Howie Schwartz, Howard Sherman and a host of clients, friends and colleagues. It was a wonderful night, much more fitting the Storyk style. Two days later, he was back at work.

That humility, of course, is countered by a bit of New York swagger. He is aware of what his work has meant to the industry at large. Storyk is a smart man, a tall man with a full head of hair and a wide range of interests, from the teachings of Richard Feynman to the world-changing innovations of the Wright Brothers. He is a student of architecture and the arts, going back to the Greeks. He studied philosophy at Princeton while pursuing his passion for architecture, a career path that had been whispering to him since age 11, around the same time he developed his passion for music. He spent the summer of 1969 studying with Buckminster Fuller. He likes Broadway musicals, and he's a lifelong Yankees fan. He is a most interesting man.

For the past 30 years, every June issue of *Mix* has been focused on Acoustics and Studio Design, with the cover shot selected from among the dozens of entrants from the world's top studio designers for the annual "Class Of" photo feature. This year, we chose to break form and honor John Storyk's First 50 Years. He's earned it.



Tom Kenny
Editor



PHOTOS: Courtesy of John Storyk



After 50 years, John Storyk the musician finally gets a session at Electric Lady Studios.

SERENDIPITY & STUDIO DESIGN

John Storyk & WSDG at the Nexus of Art and Technology

By Tom Kenny

Serendipity,” John Storyk says soon after it’s established that we’re recording. “Maybe we could get the art director to watermark that word and run it across all the pages of the article. That’s the one word that sums up my life. I’ve said that for a long time. Might be kind of cool. I’m sure it can be done in print.”

Hmmmm. He’s an architect, so he thinks visually. And the art director might go along...

“And Beth. We have to talk about Beth,” he interjects, referring to his wife of 31 years, interior designer and textiles/fabrics sommelier Beth Walters. “There is Life BB and there’s Life AB—Before Beth and After Beth. I mean that quite sincerely. None of this would have happened without her. And again, serendipity. We were both invited to the same Thanksgiving dinner back in 1985, and we haven’t been apart since.”

Of course we’ll talk about Beth. It’s the Walters-Storyk Design Group. She’s going to be on the cover with you...

“And we can talk about Jimi, too,” he adds. “I’ve told the story a hundred times, and it never gets old. Talk about serendipity. I was 22 years old. I was an architect just starting out, by myself, living in New York City. It’s 1969. There was no grand plan. Then I get this phone call from Hendrix’s manager, Mike Jeffery, and he tells me that Jimi would like me to design a nightclub for him. I’ve always said that it helps if your first client is a major rock star.”

And away we go. Let the three-hour Zoom session begin...

FROM ELECTRIC LADY TO WSDG

It’s hard to overstate the impact that Electric Lady Studios had on the recording industry when it opened on West 8th Street in August 1970. Storyk didn’t invent the modern studio; not by any means. A&R and MediaSound reigned in New York. Record Plant New York and L.A. emerged at about the same time. Tom Hidley was being noticed. Bill Putnam had built some amazing rooms. Later came Vincent Van Haaff in 1970s Los Angeles. Still, nothing quite epitomized studio life at the time



At work in the Highland Park, N.Y. offices, Clockwise from top right: John Storyk, Founding Partner; Beth Walters, Founding Partner; Nancy Flannery, CFO, senior partner; Josh Morris, COO, senior partner; and Andy Swerdlow, acoustician, partner.

like Electric Lady, with its blend of style, comfort and technology. And it was owned by a rock star.

Still, it was supposed to be a nightclub. According to Eddie Kramer, Hendrix's producer and engineer, Jimi liked to take breaks in the middle of all-night sessions and go out. One of his favorite clubs in late summer 1969 was called Cerebrum, down in SoHo, featuring an all-white interior, curved lines and a multi-colored lighting scheme. For nine months it was the hip place to go; it made the cover of Life magazine; and it was designed by a 22-year-old architect, recently graduated from Princeton, named John Storyk.

Jimi wanted a club. He bought The Generation, the hot blues club in town located at 52 West 8th Street, a club Storyk (a keyboardist and sax player) had frequented since his college days. Jimi had his manager call Storyk, and a couple weeks later he delivered initial plans. Then Eddie Kramer stepped in and, according to legend, said, "Jimi, you spent \$300,000 last year on recording. You don't need a nightclub, you need a studio." And just like that, while working days at an architecture firm and nights trying to make a go as a blues musician, Storyk's first real solo commission was canceled.

"I didn't even know him at the time, but I wanted to strangle Eddie Kramer," Storyk says with a laugh, noting that Kramer was best man at his wedding and is godfather to his oldest daughter, Nadine. "But then they turned to me and said, 'Well, you know, you could just stay on and do the studio.' I said, 'Guys, I've never been in a studio. I don't really know anything about recording studios.' They said, 'That's okay. You can read up on it. You'll figure it out.'"

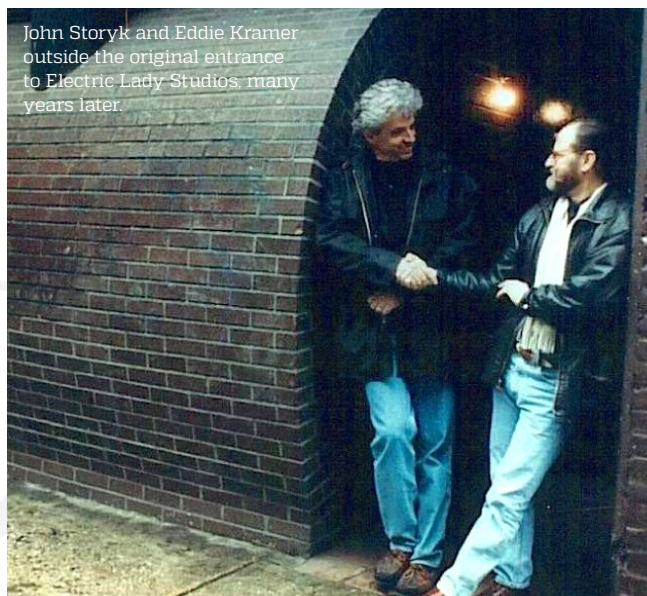
He did figure it out, along the way enlisting the help of Bob Hanson, an

isolation expert, and Phil Ramone, then the owner of A&R Recording, among many others. By the time Electric Lady opened in August 1970, Storyk had three more commissions, one from a blues hero named Leon Russell out of Tulsa, Oklahoma. "I was a blues fan in the middle of building Electric Lady, but I wasn't a giant Jimi Hendrix fan back then. When Leon Russell called, that to me was the moment."

Still, he didn't consider himself a studio designer. In 1971-72, he traveled through Canada with his then wife, eventually ending up in Boulder, Colorado, for a year while still working on studios back in New York. But that all ended, and he moved back to New York, entering studio design full time, including work in conjunction with Tom Hidley on a room at Record Plant for Stevie Wonder, set up by his friends Bob Margouleff and Chris Stone. He built it with audio engineer Bob Skye, who remains a close friend and a part of the company to this day.

He started his long association with Howard Schwartz Recording then, which would grow to 26 rooms. But it wasn't until 1974 and the beginnings of his association with Albert Grossman (who he'd first met in 1969 while designing the original Bearsville Studios) that Storyk finally figured that he could make a career of this studio design thing.

"I had just finished additional work on Bearsville Studios up in Woodstock, and Albert essentially adopted me," Storyk recalls. "He gave me a room in his Manhattan office on 55th Street. And he allowed me to live on his property in Woodstock; I ended up living there for 15 years until he died. There was a little three-unit apartment building and he gave me one of them. I would be in the



John Storyk and Eddie Kramer outside the original entrance to Electric Lady Studios, many years later.



PHOTO: Courtesy of John Storyk

Jungle City Studios, New York City, designed by Storyk for Alicia Keys and Grammy-winning engineer Ann Mincieli.

City for the week, and Woodstock on weekends.

“Albert and I collaborated on the next Bearsville Studios, too,” he continues. “And the theater, Todd Rundgren’s video studio, all the restaurants, a hotel for Albert in Oaxaca, Mexico. I even designed a house for him in Coral Gables. Albert was a huge builder. He became a mentor; a sponsor of mine in a truly Renaissance fashion. And Woodstock became my second home.”

By then Storyk had a small staff in Manhattan, spent his weekends in Woodstock and lived something of a rock-and-roll life. He built lots of studios, started to dabble in teaching, made a bit of money but still didn’t pay much attention to the fact that his career was also a business. He started to bring glass and natural light to his designs. He had embraced CAD. Life was good. New York City in the go-go ’80s.

“All these things were happening in my life,” he says. “And I had no idea that Beth Walters was looming on the horizon.”

ACT TWO: FAMILY AND BUSINESS

To Storyk, meeting his life partner proved the ultimate serendipity. “We were both invited to the same Thanksgiving Day dinner, back in 1985. She was a single mom with a six-month-old boy, I was sort of the date of the daughter of the person who was holding the dinner. But by the end of the evening, I like to say, Beth was my girlfriend, though I wasn’t quite sure I was her boyfriend yet. By the end of January, we were partners in everything.”

Walters, an interior designer with an affinity for fabrics and textiles, can strap on a tool belt with the best of them. She has worked in set design and

fabrication, fashion and theater. Within three months of their meeting, they consolidated apartments, cars, second homes and offices. Over the next five years, Walters oversaw the continual expansion of their upstate home and property in Highland, including a softball diamond, a pond, a swimming pool and the construction of an outbuilding that became the main offices for the new Walters-Storyk Design Group.

“Beth brought color to the company,” Storyk says, matter of factly. “If you look at my body of work, you can see when I switched from mostly wood tones and blacks and grays—everything that Howie Schwartz ever built was black! And then you can all of a sudden see my work changing. And that’s Beth. She became the colorist and I turned more to the geometries, which was always my first love and still is to this day.” Walters also helped establish a more hardcore business sense. “At this time, we had Nancy Flannery in the office doing the books and running operations,” Storyk says. We have two guys in New York and we’re making a little more money. But Beth turns to me one day and says, ‘We’re not organized and we don’t know anything about business. I’m a textile designer. You’re a musician-cum-architect. We barely know how to balance a checkbook.’”

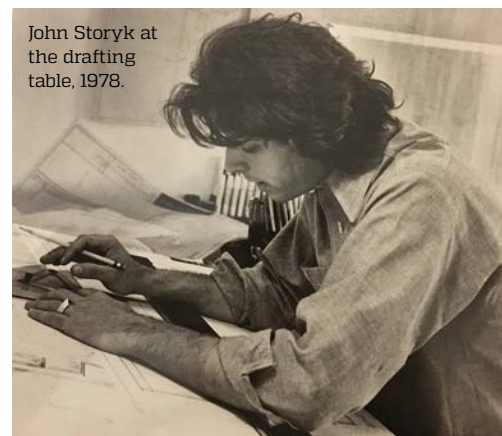
So in the midst of transitioning upstate, Storyk called his longtime friend Chris Stone, co-founder of Record Plant and a shrewd businessman to come up as a consultant and check out their operation for three days, look at their books, and then tell them what they should do.

“First thing he says is that we need an organizational chart,” Storyk recalls. “I said, ‘Chris, we only have five people.’ He said it doesn’t matter. You just need to know who’s doing what. Who’s reporting to what for what tasks. That had never occurred to me. Then he says we have to have an office meeting every week. And to this day, we have an office meeting every Monday at 9:30, every single Monday to this day. And third, he said, we have to abandon cash accounting and go into accrual accounting. Those three simple things changed our business, and I had never heard of the word ‘accrual’ before that meeting.”

The business would change even more dramatically over the next decade and a half, becoming truly global with the addition of offices in four countries and representation in a handful more. None of it was planned, not even the choice of countries. Global expansion, oddly enough, came about through the development of an internship program, which came about because of Storyk’s lifelong love of teaching, beginning at Full Sail back in the late 1980s.

“It started with a question from a student, who asked, ‘Do you ever have anybody work for you?’” Storyk recalls. “It’s as simple as that. We eventually created this three-month program, and now it’s extremely organized and we have applications and tests and everything. We house them; we pay them. Sometimes they become employees.

“One of our first interns was Dirk Noy, a Full Sail student,” he continues. “And within a week of being in the office, it was obvious that he was brilliant. He was already ahead of me as far as sheer acoustic theory. And he could draw.



John Storyk at the drafting table, 1978.

PHOTO: Howard Sherman

I wanted to hire him when the internship is done. He wanted to, but said that he needed to go back to Switzerland. I said, 'Okay, why don't you go back to Switzerland and you can represent us. Open up a little office. We'll front the money. Basel, Switzerland? I'd never even heard of the place.

"For the first few years, he basically tried to get jobs. He got a few. Then he hired a second person. We formed a company after two years, and we now have eight full-time people. And Dirk is now a 10 percent owner of our New York company. So the internships became employees, became representatives, became affiliates, became partners.

"It's the same story with Renato Cipriano from Brazil, who came a semester later. He's brilliant, and he's also a two-time Latin Grammy Award-winning mixing engineer who can draw! Same for Sergio Molho in Argentina, who has since moved to Miami and is now co-COO with Nancy Flannery. Our first project down there was for Fito Paez years ago, and now Sergio is a WSDG owner, too. They've all become family."

John Storyk is a family man. Though his own family wasn't particularly close-knit during his childhood, he holds tremendous respect for his father and mother, learning from them the importance of loyalty and commitment. He speaks with the pride of a father when he rattles off the list of people who have worked with him 20, 30, 40 years.

When he and Walters were approached by a large Midwest company about

five or six years ago and asked if they would consider selling, they took the meetings. After all, retirement was coming. By the end of the process, Storyk couldn't do it. He didn't consider that a legacy. Instead, he and Walters came up with a five-year plan to lend money to Molho, Cipriano, Noy, Flannery, and Morris, allowing them to buy into the company essentially through profits and a great deal of work. Those five years just ended. John and Beth now own 40 percent of the company; the employees own the rest. As Storyk says, "What a way to end the first 50 years and start the next."

Those financial moves are completely in character. John Storyk knows how much his career has meant to the shape of the modern studio, from Electric Lady to Jungle City Studios, and he maintains a bit of New York swagger to this day, but he tends to defer to (and remember) his friends and colleagues, like Albert Grossman, Ham Brosious, Bob Wolsch, Howard Sherman, Howie Schwartz, Marcy Ramos and so many others. At this point in his career, semi-retired but not really, he and his WSDG family have designed more than 3000 studios and production spaces. He's the first to say that he had a lot of help from his extended family.

One of John Storyk's favorite aphorisms is "studio design is the nexus of architecture, acoustics and technology." Now that he's completed the first 50 years of his remarkable career, he might want to tack on an amendment: "...with a dash of serendipity." ■

JACK DOUGLAS & JAY MESSINA JOHN LENNON RINGO STARR GEORGE HARRISON



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THE CLASS OF 2020



Every year in June, Mix takes a look at some of the best-designed new recording, mixing, and mastering studios that have opened during the past year. Because many communities are sheltering in place to protect people from the pandemic, some of the usual participants in this annual feature were not able to arrange for their latest projects to be photographed. Here is a collection of wonderful new rooms that were photographed in time, and we hope to showcase many more in upcoming issues.

Dimension 70 Studios, New York City Studio Designer: FM Design



Built in a turn of the century NYC building that has served as a synagogue, a whiskey still and an artist's studio, the Dimension 70 project presented Francis Manzella of FM Design with unique challenges, including structural rehabilitation, the installation of a completely new mezzanine level, and the desire to maintain as much of the personality of the building as possible. FM Design created a distinctive design for owner Fern Souza, integrating the original stained-glass windows and tall ceilings for the structurally floating main studio rooms.

"The side-by-side studio/control room layout is a one-of-a-kind solution for this very rare space," Manzella says. "We used a 'railroad' solution because the building is long and narrow—like railroad tracks. There isn't room for circulation hallways to move past the control room, so you need to pass through the control room to get

into the live room."

Featured equipment in the facility includes a 32-channel API 1608-II console, Griffin G1.5 monitors, Pro Tools HD, an 1891 Steinway Model I upright piano, 1957 original Neumann U47, and a great collection of additional instruments, microphones and outboard gear.

"Our studio was built to accommodate a variety of different project types—full live band tracking, basic overdubs, songwriting and composition, production/beat making, mixing, as well as intimate live events and performances," Souza says. "Of course we were focused on having the acoustics and the tech side be up to par with the best in the industry, but I love that we never had to compromise on the aesthetic and vibe of the space in order to get there—something that I believe is hard to cultivate and was very important to both of us throughout the process. The space mural was originally his idea!"

Boiler Room, Chicago, Ill.

Studio Designer: Walters-Storyk

Design Group

Studio owner Collin Jordan's Boiler Room facility was designed by the Walters-Storyk Design Group and installed in a 100-year-old, three-story brick building that Jordan owns in Chicago's Wicker Park District, a center for music and nightlife. Joshua Morris, WSDG COO/Project Manager says, "The building's ground floor was a virtual sound lock: 11-foot ceilings, and a solid slab floor made it unnecessary to float the room."

Jordan's equipment includes a Magix Sequoia workstation, Mike Spitz-modified Ampex ATR-102 tape machine, Crane Song converters, and the Dunlavy SC-IVa speakers that Jordan moved over from his previous studio. Jordan reports that the new studio gives his monitors "a remarkably enhanced level of clarity, and resonance; the phase coherency and frequency balance creates a 3-dimensional space where the sound is present in the room in an almost physical sense."

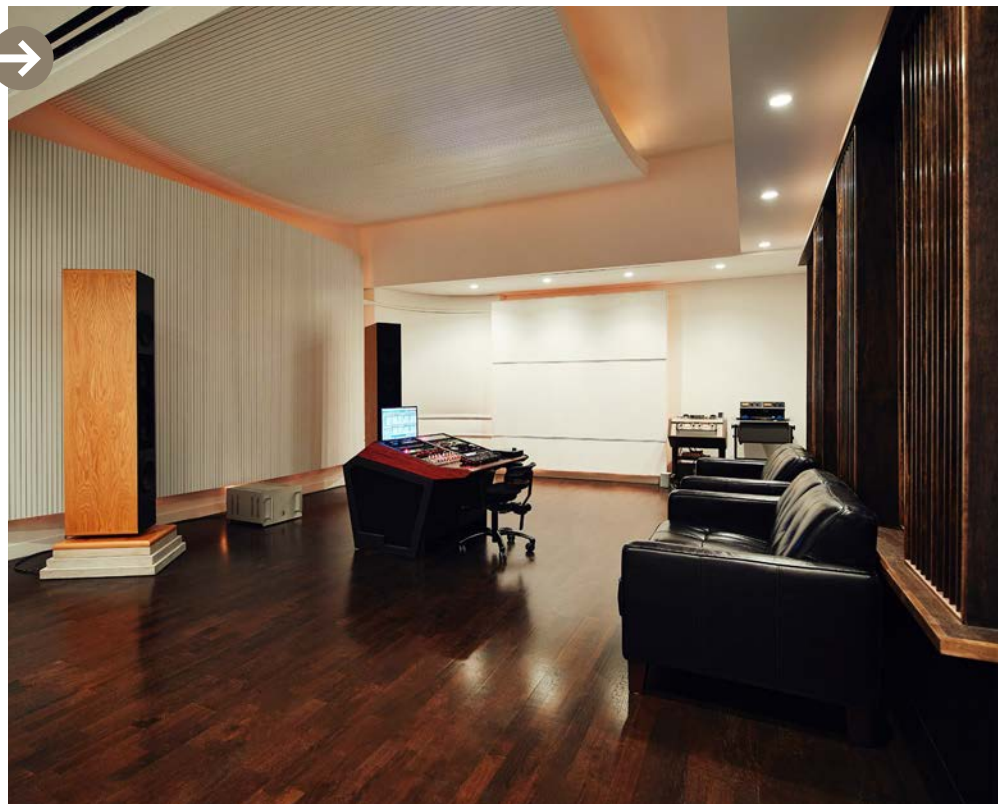


Photo: Nicolas Gumpertchen

Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, Brooklyn, New York

Studio Designer: FM Design

For this complex multi-studio project, New York University contracted with Francis Manzella of FM Design. Manzella accommodated ceiling height in the four main live rooms and one of the immersive control rooms by breaking through the floor slab above to provide double-height spaces; double-height exterior windows let natural light into all of the studios. The dense technical program required heavy sound isolation construction, while accommodating ADA requirements and working within the limitations of the existing building.

Major equipment in the new rooms includes ATC, JBL and Genelec monitors, to go with a PMC immersive system; Pro Tools HD, Logic and Ableton workstations; and consoles from SSL, API and Neve. A legendary Neve 8068, as well as other equipment and studio furniture, were provided through an endowment from the late Adam Yauch's (Beastie Boys) Oscilloscope Studios, made possible by Dechen and Losel Yauch.



Photos: Carline Puyro

The Backyard, Nashville

Studio Designer: Steven Durr Designs

Steven Durr Designs created this studio for musician and former Major League Baseball pitcher Barry Zito, with an eye toward the owner's comfort and expectations, and the idea that a recording studio should be a place you never want to leave. The Backyard studio creates a visual world that harkens back to the 1970s, yet features the latest technology. The architectural design features a stone iso booth and a custom ellipse-inspired cloud for monitoring accuracy. The Backyard is designed for one to two people to work comfortably and feel unpressured in a warm, ergonomically correct working environment.

Zito's equipment includes a Sound Construction workstation, PMC twotwo 8 monitors, UAD and Aphex mic pre's, Roland SVC 350 vocoder, Yamaha C-7 piano, Oberheim OB-XA, and plenty of electronic and acoustic musical instruments.



Photo: Barry Zito



Studio 21A, Beijing, China

Studio Designer: Walters-Stork Design Group

Engineer/producer TC Zhou engaged WSDG to design his new studio complex in Beijing, China. WSDG Art Director Silvia Molho and Director of Design Renato Cipriano developed studio concepts, designs and plans, which included precisely tuned, perforated wooden frequency absorber panels in the front of Zhou's mastering room. The floors, walls and ceilings of all the rooms in the complex are completely floated, and a third layer of filled concrete block was set on the perimeter of Vocal Booth C and the live room to permit independent work in all four rooms simultaneously.

Studio 21A equipment includes a 72-channel vintage Neve 88RS analog console and Augspurger monitoring in Studio A, an SSL Duality Delta board, Pro Tools HD Native system, ReflexionArts RA239 main monitors in Studio B, and much more.



Photo: TC Zhou



Boogie Live Studio at Irie Rhythms Academy Podcast and Radio Station, Miami, Fla.

Studio Designer: David Frangioni, Frangioni Media

This podcast facility was designed to be controllable from the studio or control room, so that programming can be presented by a team, or by one person who doubles as talent and technician. Collaborating with designer David Frangioni were acoustician Jeff Hedback, wiring/integration specialists Myron Surger and Philip Zanon, and carpenter Kike Moreno. Frangioni's client DJ Irie says, "Frangioni hit it out of the park with this studio. The fact that it sounds great and works every time, around the clock, says it all." Featured equipment includes two Wheatstone consoles, Genelec speakers, Auralex acoustic treatment, and Frangioni's custom-built wall and ceiling acoustic treatments.

