

# studio

UNITED KINGDOM

# 100 studios? A piece of Cake

**Chris Hook** joins Langdale Technical founder and MD Bill Ward as he looks back over his remarkable career and over 100 studio room installs

**PRODUCER/SONGWRITER** Steve Booker's new Cake Sounds studio opened its doors this summer following the installation, by Langdale Technical Consulting, of a 48-channel SSL Duality equipped control room – an install that marked the 100th control room design and build for Langdale Technical Consulting MD Bill Ward.

In a career that encompasses working for 12 years with Trevor Horn as head of technical at the Sarm group of studios and setting up installation design and build company NFK (the brand which morphed into Langdale Technical), Ward has, unsurprisingly, seen a number of major changes over a century of installations. He's also seen diversification into sectors as varied and unexpected as some of the largest mega-yachts afloat on the seas today to medical and educational facilities throughout the UK. However, Ward freely admits he is still always happiest working at the top end of the pro-audio market.

Along the way to the 100th install, top-end music studio installs in Britain have moved from being huge commercial

builds to almost exclusively private affairs. Ward was responsible for all the studio builds at Sarm, with some of the rooms being done more than once in his time there – such was the pace of investment. "It's something I'm still incredibly proud of – it was just the perfect place and the perfect time to be there," he says. "The technical team was responsible for some amazing builds, including the first SSL J Series and Euphonix console installs in the UK; we also had fantastic fun with builds at Sarm Hook End, Sarm West Coast in LA and even a couple of rooms out in Ireland."

However, nowadays it's notable that most Langdale commercial studio work is based abroad, although a strong private sector still keeps Langdale busy in the UK.

Since leaving Sarm, Ward has been responsible for builds in Russia, France, Iceland, Egypt, Norway and a host of other foreign locations, but, despite this, the majority of the work is still UK-based. This is mainly due to a very active post-production market, which has complemented the private studio market. Langdale has



A 2014 Langdale Technical install at the Shanghai Audio & Video Group in China

The SSL Duality at Nile FM in Cairo



**Unusual situations for Hook include a live area in an empty swimming pool, the newly installed SSL room that flooded up to the faders and the installation stopped by a political revolution**

been responsible for multi-room installations at a host of Soho facilities, including 750mph,

Factory, Jungle and Wave. Both 750mph and Factory have relationships with Langdale that go back well over 12 years.

Ward admits it's nigh-on impossible to choose favourite rooms, although some of the big music rooms and multi-room post-production complexes have been particularly rewarding (see box). From a music point of view, the rooms at Sarm West became great technical and creative benchmarks, and it's been pleasantly surprising that a number of clients over the years have matched those rooms. "They are the designs you love because they tend not to be limited by such tight budgets, which means you can be let off the creative leash a little more," Ward comments. However, at the other end of the spectrum, Ward also admits to still being surprised by the number of enquires that go something along

## The desk count for the first 100 rooms

- 26 SSL
- 24 Avid/Digidesign
- 21 Fairlight
- 11 Euphonix
- 6 Neve
- 5 Audient
- 2 Mackie
- 5 Other

the lines of: "Err, hello, I wonder if you can help. We've spent our entire budget on equipment already, we need to be open in five days time and we need someone to install everything quickly for us... can you come

and sort everything out, please?" Sometimes, it's very much a case of education first.

Over the years, there have of course been a number of more unusual situations, including a live area in a (thankfully empty) swimming pool, still complete with tiles, ladders and sloping floor; the newly installed SSL room that was promptly flooded up to the faders by the adjacent river having its second-highest flood in 100 years; and the installation stopped by a political revolution.

Although Ward admits that Langdale lives slightly more under the radar than it probably should do, this year has so far been one of the busiest to date. UK builds include an educational facility at the University of West London and the private SSL Duality build for Steve Booker, both of which are already signed off, and an order book with post-production work in Soho that will take things well into next year. ■

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## TOP BILLING

### Bill Ward pick his four favourite installs

**Sarm West Studio One** in London was a huge build in the mid-90s that started off as a fairly straightforward control room tweak and desk swap-out but turned into a major project that took on a year-long build life.

The project initially involved getting every worthwhile acoustic designer of the time to enter plans for the refurbishment of the famous 'temple' control room, which was an icon of the former Basing Street Studios. Following this, John Flynn's Acoustic Design Group came on board, by which time the project had taken on a huge expansion.

Massive building work ensued, with Ward responsible both for the project management and technical installation which saw the control room extended enough to house 80 channels of the UK's first SSL J Series console.

While Trevor Horn has since left the premises, it was recently chosen (again) for Bob Geldof's latest Band Aid initiative.

**The Beach**, Newcastle was a new build for singer/songwriter Paul Tucker, one half of the Lighthouse Family. This was one of those rooms that was built with very little technical compromise: the facility is based around a Neve VX60 console and the initial outboard list was huge – pretty much two of everything you could ever want. As Paul Tucker recently recalled: "It wasn't particularly cheap at the time, but it was definitely the right call – 14 years later we're still yet to have our first wiring problem."

**Harrogate International Centre** in Yorkshire is about as far removed from top-end studios as you can imagine, but it still represented one of biggest installs I'd ever undertaken. The space was designed as a multi-function conference and seminar space, and buried in the structure I installed as comprehensive an AV network as you can imagine.

The space itself was built with moveable

walls, which gives it incredible flexibility to go from one 600-seat space to 10 individual, acoustically secure rooms, although that in itself caused a few technical headaches.

Although not one of the '100' control rooms, it's a good example of the variety of work that audio technical design can include these days.

**750mph**, London, was the first of many, many post-production rooms and also the beginning of a longstanding relationship with White Mark, with whom Langdale has worked extensively.

When work on the complex commenced in the late '90s, it was as a new build at a site on Golden Square that had previously been used as a tailor's sweatshop and commenced with the removal of all the old steam lines that operated all the industrial irons!

It was a cutting-edge Fairlight-equipped technical design, and is also fondly remembered as the first installation where plasma TVs were installed. I think they were some of the first in the country – at the time of the install, they were fantastically expensive and the only UK supplier was Harrods.

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