



OPPOSITE PAGE: A kaleidoscope of colours on the dancefloor LEFT: boudoir glamour in the VIP area BELOW: decorative panels on the bar front glow with changing colours



LOCATION: CULCHETH, NR WARRINGTON VENUE TYPE: HYBRID

# Bacchus Lounge

When sophisticated leisure meets the village way of life

**F**or newcomer operator Paul Wright, it must have felt that the world was against him when he set out to introduce a wine bar to the villagers in Culcheth, near Warrington. It proved to be a long and arduous battle embittered with on-site demonstrations by members of the public and the council, a slanderous anti-wine bar website and a barrage of accusations against Paul's reputation. Paul joked: "If the villagers could actually take me outside and burn me like the Wicker Man they would!"

When he put in a planning application for Bacchus Lounge he was no less than the 52nd person to apply for a wine bar on that very spot. But where others had given up or failed, Paul persisted and became somewhat of a martyr for the modern way of life in the area. He said: "When they were demonstrating I felt like going outside and shaking them and saying 'It's only a wine bar where you can buy wine and posh beer, and you have seven vodka choices instead of one!'"

In a village with "two of everything", Bacchus brings a previously unheard of offering to the area's

late night economy – a hybrid coffee shop, wine bar and over-21's nightclub, complete with VIP booths, revered DJs like Graeme Park and a forward-thinking technology installation.

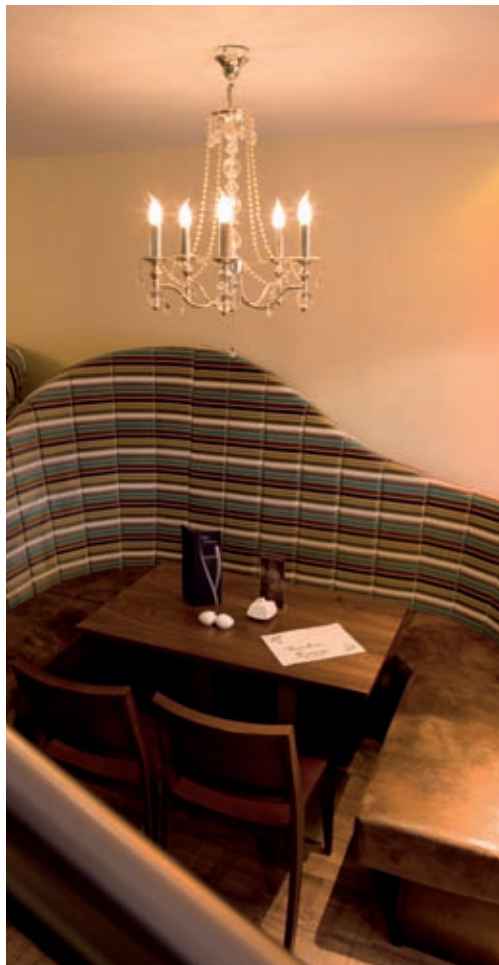
Although Paul admits nightclubs aren't his usual trade, he is an entrepreneur at heart, fuelled with an ambition to improve the quality of life in the area. In '99, Paul formed contract hire company PD Fleet Services Ltd and has since gone on to develop several other businesses, including security company Securite UK Ltd and a local nursery school. "My target was a little home, a little car and no boss. That was all I wanted," mused Paul. But this humble goal soon saw him making large profits and later led to the creation of the Paul Wright Group, under which Bacchus Lounge launched towards the end of 2008 (with business partner Liz Manfred owning 10%).

The ground floor operates as a 150-capacity café bar in the daytime. Minimal, contemporary décor features three stripey upholstered booths, lounge sofas and portraits on the wall, supplied by art dealer Lanza Martineta. This area morphs into

a late night bar throughout the evening, serving a range of cocktails and a variety of vodkas, and it acts as a feeder bar to the upstairs, 400-capacity club.

This venue is an unexpected surprise, more akin to what you would find in a city centre, rather than in the humble surroundings of Culcheth. Upstairs the secluded VIP area is something to boast about, with three dramatic, high-backed booths and ebony black champagne tables teasingly hidden behind beaded curtains in the corner. Paul claims he has invested over £70,000 in the club's sound and lighting in order to achieve a "big venue feel".

On top of the public protests, Paul's two-year plight with launching Bacchus was exacerbated by delays with contractors, and later by a lack of any experienced general manager – which has now been overcome by the appointment of Melissa Hickson. However, he did hold praise for Andy Brown from A D Brown Upholstery, who did "above and beyond" what he asked in designing bespoke upholstered booths, chairs and sofas; and for Sound Ceilings who fitted audio and plasmas, but also returned to add to the lighting installation. ▶



FAR LEFT: A local band is pictured in the artwork LEFT: Curved contours create inviting booths downstairs ABOVE: Operator Paul Wright in the club's exclusive VIP booths

► Paul said: "There are a few things I would do differently next time; I would do it all myself and pay an architect to do the drawings and then pay a site manager. But I would use Ohm sound systems again as they were really good. They gave us great advice and even showed us how they made the equipment."

Sound Ceilings engineered a bespoke A/V package for the venue, prioritising flexibility for the operator. In order to maximise control over the mood and atmosphere in each of the club's areas, Sound Ceilings created a zoned system for the audio using Nexia digital processing, programming zone control, EQ and compressor limits to ensure the venue's high quality sound would remain after programming equipment was removed. Sound Ceilings MD, Steve Bristo, specified Ohm full range speakers in different configurations to reflect the particular needs of each zone in the venue. Some of the 15" sub bass speakers were built into the fixed furniture for a subtle look.

On the main dancefloor at the back of the venue - where Wire FM's Pete Pinnington regularly spins his tunes - décor is stripped back to allow the club lighting full glory as it bounces off the white walls. Martin Mania moving heads dominate the dancefloor, along with a Martin Wizard three-colour laser and a hazer for smoke effects. Steve explained: "Finally we installed a mirror ball and laser spot mirrors, which added to the multiple effects and created a randomness that is very cool from a design point of view." The VIP booths, back bar and front

bar - which features protruding clear perspex panels stylishly patterned - are awash with colour-changing LED strip lighting, hidden within the architecture.

Since its launch, Paul has managed to bring many villagers around to the idea of a wine bar, particularly by his introduction of a fortnightly mid-week under 16's night, keeping the youngsters off the street. But there are still individuals who seem intent on finding fault with Bacchus. He said: "We had a high visibility check halfway through the night and they took some of the glasses away to check if they were shatter-proof - but then they realised they didn't have to be shatter-proof, so they smashed my glasses for nothing!" Despite the loss of a few glasses, and probably a few hairs on his head, Paul has no regrets about launching Bacchus. And whilst most of the locals have widened their eyes and warmed to Bacchus' wine bar sophistication, VIP style or clubbing culture, some still wait with baited breath to see what business the 'Wicker Man' will whip up next. ■

*Bacchus Lounge has launched an under 16's DJ competition, 'Revolution DJ Wannabe' in a bid to find the North's hottest young DJ talent. Hopefuls should send a half-hour demo to Paul Wright: paul@barbacchus.co.uk / Bar Bacchus Lounge, 31-33 Common Lane, Culcheth, Warrington, WA3 4EW. The live semi finals will take place in April, with the final in May. DJ Graeme Park, DJ Nev Johnson and NIGHT Magazine Editor Rachel Esson will be judging the competition. The overall winner gets a year's paid residency at Bacchus.*

## VITAL STATISTICS

Bar Bacchus Lounge  
31-33 Common Lane  
Culcheth  
Warrington  
WA3 4EW  
Tel: 01925 733912  
Owner: Paul Wright  
Website: www.barcchus.co.uk

### Key Contractors

**Concept Designer:** JM+P // **Electrical Consultants:** KDL Electrical // **Main Contractor:** Riley Construction // **Refrigeration:** Shorrock Trichem // **Light, Sound and Visual Installation:** Sound Ceiling // **Seating & Upholstery:** A D Brown Upholstery // **EPoS Provider:** Computer Store // **Security:** Securite UK // **Flyers & Promotion:** PPM Printers

### Drinks

**Pouring brands:** Grey Goose vodka, JD bourbon, Bombay Sapphire gin // **Premium draught lager:** n/a // **Standard draught lager:** £2.50 (Carlsberg; pint) // **Lead PPL:** £3.10 (Peroni Nastro Azzuro) // **Lead PPS:** £3.30 (Blue WKD) // **Cocktail list:** Yes

### Technology

**Sound system:** 8 x BR8 2" x 8" speakers, 3 x CFU A2 amplifiers, 3 x BR 15-B sub bass speakers, 4 x KS-03 8" speakers, 1 x CFU A1 amplifier, 1 x JBL Eon 10 speaker // **Processing and control:** 1 x Nexia sp DSP, zone & compressor limiters, 1 x wall remote control // **DJ Kit:** 2 x CDJ-1000, 1 x SLX24/SM58 mic, DJM-1000 mixer // **Lighting:** 1 x Martin Wizard, 3 x Martin Mania DC1 Aquas, 4 x GLP Ypoc 250 spots, 1 x Pulsar 216 replay unit, 180 x X-Chip RGB colour changing strips, 1 x X-Chip drive/psu box, 3m white Neon Flex // **Processing & Control:** PC based light controller // **A/V Equipment:** 5 x 42" Panasonic displays, 1 x S video switcher (8 in 8 out)