





LOCATION: MANCHESTER VENUE TYPE: NIGHTCLUB

# Bijou

Manchester's raw, industrial clubbing culture is introduced to a high-end peer

**M**anchester has long been synonymous with music and clubbing. Ever since Tony Wilson's Factory Records made its future-shaping mark on the city, it has been a hotbed for musical phenomenon and clubbing paradises. True to the 'up for it' nature of the place, the types of clubs that have grown to significance, on a local and national level, have been fairly raw, but very appealing thanks to their focus on the sound system and music, and less so their décor and service standards.

When Paul Bosomworth travelled north from London, he was amazed at the lack of higher end clubs populating the Manchester market and pinpointed a gap following his own experiences, as he revealed: "I only moved up here permanently about eight weeks ago and already I'm fed up with going out because there's nowhere decent. The talk here now is if you want to have a decent night out, you'll go to the casino to escape the crowds."

Many years in the licensed trade has afforded Paul a varied and successful career. His appetite whetted by working in bars during summer breaks

in Jersey, his rise began with that of the wine bar culture of the early '80s. After three years as manager of Collins Wine Bar in Richmond, Paul entered into his own venture – Captain Wooddogs, which was runner-up in the Evening Standard's Wine Bar of the Year awards in 1983, going on to top the category in the following year. With offers of plenty, he went to work with independent operator, David Caranladas, opening another wine bar before Caranladas bought an old Regal Cinema in Uxbridge, which he transformed into a nightclub, putting Paul at the helm.

This was Paul's passage into clubs, and it began a love affair that would see him at the driving seat of a diverse mix of venues. Some 20 years later it was the depth of his nightclub management experience that satisfied the need of Bijou's owner, who remained having been the main shareholder of the site's previous guise, Cocoa Rooms.

Paul's initial expectations of management responsibilities swelled to a more directive role, which gave him a hand in deciding on the nature of the club – dance club or high-end club – and

resulted in him designing the new venue.

Juxtaposing its industrial surroundings under the railway arches next to the River Irwell, the interior is slick and luxurious. Damask wallpaper and deep colours feature throughout the 1,000-capacity club, which has been differentiated into areas of varying function and exclusivity.

The ground floor entrance comes via an outside courtyard, the walls of which have been heightened for privacy. A reception area has been added as an extension to the existing structure and this opens out to the venue proper, which sprawls out to the left and right, and up to an equally sized first floor.

To the extreme left of the ground floor, a vodka bar serves speciality vodka from around the world. Moving towards the centre of the venue, boothed, brown leather seating lines the wall of the adjoining room and the central bar area. Here the combination of different wood finishes, luxurious leather, burgundy walls, white drapes and an LED-lit bar results in a '70s design fusion. This continues to the cocktail bar, which bookends the downstairs area. The inclusion of a bookable



PREVIOUS L-R: A central staircase leads to the exotic champagne bar at the top; downstairs in the cocktail bar; luxurious leather downstairs in the central seating booths L-R: The view past one of many decorative lighting features to the terrace that overlooks the water; a peek into the members lounge; an example of the types of patterned fabrics used throughout

► bed booth, backed by mirrors and coloured by a kitsch array of scatter cushions, gives a taste of the exclusivity, a theme that is developed on the first floor.

An open staircase beginning near the venue's entrance ascends up to the first floor, entering at a central void. Immediately ahead, the champagne bar offers sumptuous surroundings, with curved, tan leather seating, damask wallpaper, decorative lighting above the bar and a traditionally constructed back bar, which provides a platform for dancers, silhouetted by the arced window behind.

To the far left of this floor, a rectangular members lounge provides a retreat for those on the books. The design echoes that of the rest of the venue; a mixture of luxury and space, but hanging lighting features and a private seating booth give it a suitable point of difference.

Not content with a members lounge, the venue also boasts an entirely separate VIP room, designed for planned, ad hoc visits of Manchester's celebrity contingent. Taking influence from London's private members' bars, illuminated champagne buckets and intimate seating give it the desired appeal. A window allowing a view into and out of the VIP room has been fitted with intelligent glass that can be smoked over or transformed into a screen for video or graphics at the touch of a button. It's an area of the club that Paul is keen to keep particularly exclusive, as he explained: "Some members might be VIPs; being in Manchester, you've got a lot of

footballers, a lot of celebrities. On any given night there might not be any VIPs in the club so the VIP room will be empty. The thing is, if you start letting in friends of joe public in, it's never a VIP room anymore."

Barry Britland of Stage One Solutions handled the audio installation, opting for an Ohm sound system, with fill in some areas courtesy of a handful of Community speakers that remained from Cocoa Rooms. Commenting on the choice of system, Barry said: "The main objective was for the system to have good clarity, a good sound, which is part of the club's feel. The Ohm system offered this and worked well with the re-used Community system."

Paul agrees that whilst the design elements are crucial to the venue's appeal, the music policy, and in turn the sound system, is too; after all, this is Manchester: "The music policy's very important in Manchester. We're not playing any R&B or anything because that's not our crowd, so it's funky house and electro, keeping it sexy and appealing to the female market."

If rumours are true, there will be significant developments within the immediate vicinity of Bijou, all of which will be beneficial in terms of footfall to the site. For now though, the club will concentrate on bolstering the membership scheme further and making the most of the pinpointed gap in the Manchester market. ■

## VITAL STATISTICS

Bijou  
1-7 Chapel Street  
Manchester  
M3 7NJ  
Tel: 0161 834 6377  
Owner: Bijou  
www.bijouclub.co.uk

### Key Contractors

Interior Designer: Paul Bosomworth // Main Contractor: Turnkey // Light, Sound and Visual Installation: Stage One Solutions // Seating & Upholstery: Clive Upton // Flooring: M60 Flooring // EPoS Provider: Bleep // Signage: Wolstenholme Signs

### Drinks

Pouring brands: Skyy vodka, Finlandia vodka, Appleton rum, Jack Daniels bourbon, Bombay Sapphire gin, Jose Cuervo Gold tequila // Premium draught lager: n/a // Standard draught lager: n/a // Lead PPL: £3.40 (Corona) // Lead PPS: n/a // Cocktail list: Yes

### Technology

Sound system: 28 x Ohm VER6, 6 PR1513, 1 CFU Amplifier, 4 CFU amps, Clivo management system, Formula sound monitor system