



## Neighbourhood

Cherry Jam set new late bar standards in the capital when it opened in Royal Oak over a year ago. Now, armed with a taste for bespoke late night operations, Cherry Jam owners Ben Watt and Alan Grant have taken their formula to Ladbroke Grove where the former Subterania nightclub provides an altogether new Neighbourhood. Night speaks with Ben Watt to find out more...

Last year's feature on Cherry Jam highlighted the focus and passion of owners Ben Watt (of Everything But The Girl and Lazy Dog fame) and Alan Grant for quality, considered late night venues that genuinely offer their custom a space within which they can feel right at home.

More than just a nightclub, the duo's latest project, Neighbourhood (which opened in early September) is described

rather aptly as 'a music and social space' which 'promises openhearted, social clubbing in understated stylish surroundings'. These soundbites provide an insight into the ethos which drives the club and the sense of community which has, and remains, the touchstone of their projects. "It's one of the reasons we called it Neighbourhood," says Ben. "The ethos and philosophy behind the club is very much a

warm, social, soulful clubbing. All inclusiveness is very important - everyone at Neighbourhood is a star."

Neighbourhood has evolved from the shell of the former Subterania club in the capital's Ladbroke Grove area. The 600 capacity venue has proved the perfect opportunity for Ben and Alan to develop a venue which meets their criteria. Ben continues: "When we were in the hunt for a

venue before Cherry Jam, we were actually looking for a 400-500 capacity venue in West London. In the end we settled for Cherry Jam - an intimate 150 capacity space - but a great starting point for adventurous programming and great music. When Subterania emerged, we had to go for it. It was the perfect size." The Subterania site also provided the team with a location and venue with a great track record as



well as real potential for future growth. "The venue's history, its potential as a lost sleeping giant of West London was also important," says Ben. "We knew the latent love that everyone had for the place. Neighbourhood will basically bring a much needed, decent sized club to West London." Neighbourhood's evolution has been spearheaded by interior designers Powell Tuck Associates

who had previously worked with Ben and Alan on Cherry Jam. "Design wise the two venues are clearly connected," says Ben, "but in terms of programming we can cope with bigger hitters at Neighbourhood. Cherry Jam is still perfect for off-peak more leftfield programming." "We worked with same design team and builders as at Cherry Jam and wanted a similar vibe - urban with a warm finish,

**NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN**

Powell Tuck Associates were responsible for interior design at Neighbourhood sister venue Cherry Jam. Following the success of this venue, and a music studio designed for Ben Watt, the company were selected to provide the design for Neighbourhood. Here, PTA Managing Director Julian Powell Tuck explains the background and specifics to the project:

"It was with a little trepidation that we took on the job of remodelling Subterania Club in West London. The club had been designed by architects, Steve Donald and Sean Madigan, in the late 1980's and had become a cult venue for many years. The previous design had obviously worked well and been a great success."

"Ben Watt and Alan Grant wanted to do something new with the space. We had designed 'Cherry Jam' for them in Porchester Terrace and were pleased that they asked us to prepare designs for Neighbourhood. The stripped urban tough yet friendly vibe that they had so successfully developed in the smaller club needed to be made to work in a venue with a much bigger capacity."

"The new venue had very different design issues. Acoustic isolation was not so critical as the club is sited underneath the Westway, an elevated motorway section of road running alongside some main railway lines. What we most wanted to achieve was to remove the heavy post modern language of the original design and to improve circulation and visual relationships between key elements, bars, stage, DJ booth and upper gallery."

"Previously the bar had been the big architectural focus as you entered. The long and architecturally

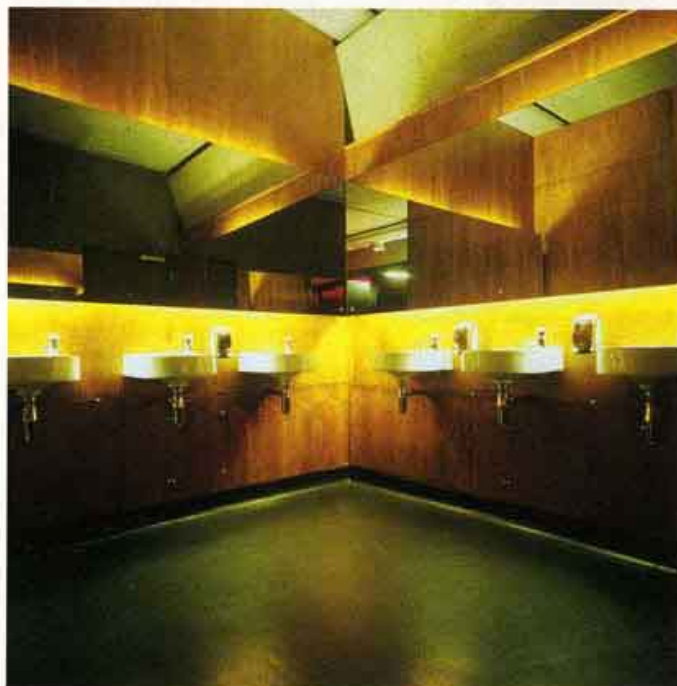
imposing bar was 'state of the art' thinking in the 80s. By moving this and changing the balance of the space we took the focus off one architectural element. We aimed to make people become immediately involved with the vibe of the venue, people, sound, and light rather than architectural elements."

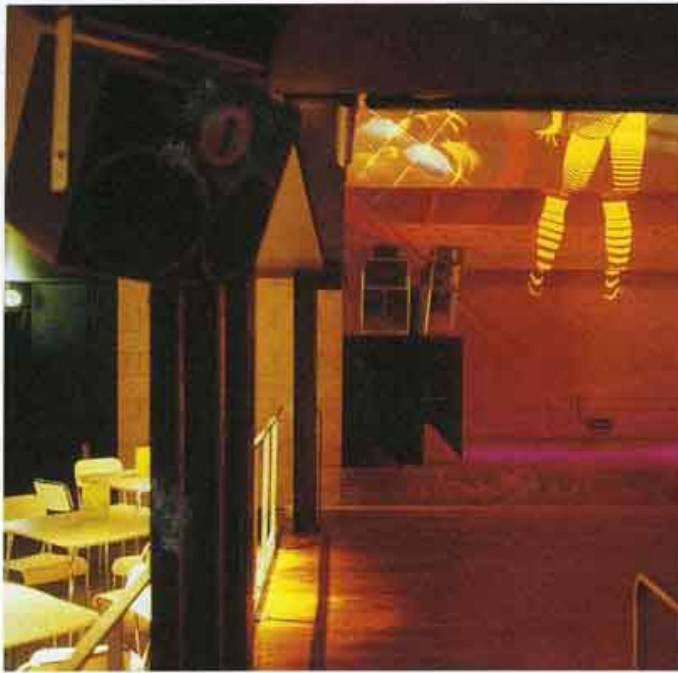
"Other design strategies included taking elements out of the space rather than adding new. We opened up the club to the concrete underside of the motorway. We grit blasted paint covering up wonderful concrete motorway structure and removed all physical clutter from an amazing hole that the previous architects and engineers had commissioned through the motorway structure."

"The upper mezzanine level was simply re-modelled to produce more useable space and a more intimate relationship with the ground floor and stage. A new stair was added to facilitate connections between floors. All WCs were increased enormously in size and numbers to cut queues. WCs were repositioned as the furthest point from the entrance to ensure constant people movement throughout all parts of the space."

"Once the spaces were reorganised we relied on the pure quality sound and projected light to convey the atmosphere. We designed special booth seating so that groups of people can claim their own territory."

"Overall the design is about not creating a branded or themed space that costs a lot of money to achieve and can be in and out of fashion in a short period of time. Rather we have aimed to produce a robust but carefully set up venue space that can become branded to suit an individual event or performance."





## NEIGHBOURHOOD AUDIO

Blue Box's Mark Metcalfe explains the theory and practise behind the Neighbourhood audio system:

"The main system is a four way active Funktion One system comprising of six F218 bass bins and six Res 4 mid high boxes in the skeletal version. These are orientated as two F218 and two Res 4s a side at the front left and right of the stage and one a side at the rear of the dance floor; two Res 4s flown from the mezzanine and two F218 in two custom built galvanised pods.

The look of Neighbourhood is very industrial and the silver Res 4s with their exposed mid and high drivers, wiring etc. complement this look perfectly. The rear fills almost seem to be part of the structure. A seamless amalgamation of architecture and high tech loudspeaker design."

"The system is configured in a quad cross left right configuration which, whilst enabling us to fine tune front and rear balances (band, eq and overall level), will also be surround sound ready to enable us to integrate future proprietary surround hard and software currently in development. The system is designed to be equally at home producing high energy dance music and subtle live stage based material. It was important that neither of the venues core programme activities would be compromised."

"The ante area of the dancefloor has two F88s as a stereo pair to give low level coverage to clubbers entering through the main entrance and create a warm up for the main dancefloor sound which envelopes you as you enter it's sound field."

"The mezzanine, which is a dance free zone, has three F88s along the back wall above the banquet seating to give a discrete but cohesive connection to the atmosphere the DJ is creating on the dancefloor with two more F88s left and right of the downstairs stage to give coverage to



the remainder of the mezzanine and create an upstairs reference point for live music emanating from the stage. The carefully thought out and spacious DJ booth was designed by Ben Watt, the centre piece of which is the Rane MP44 mixer which Ben road tested for several weeks before confirming it as his mixer of choice. Two SL1210 MKV decks and two CDJ1000II CD players are fed into this, as is a Pioneer FX500 unit inserted into the switchable channel FlexFX sends. This is to minimise the signal degradation introduced by the FX500 which is bypassed when not in use."

"The booth also hosts the heart of the live set up which is a Midas Venice 32 channel mixing console chosen for it's small footprint, flexibility and exceptional sound quality. Outboard consists of Yamaha SPX 2000 effects, B55 DPR404 compressors and Drawmer DS404 gates."

"In it's initial testing and set up the system has met with a very positive response and it's sound will be a core part of the club's ethos. The owners of Neighbourhood have a highly responsible attitude towards the well being of their clientele and the fact that the Funktion One system's dynamic clarity and lack of distortion mean long exposure on the dancefloor doesn't result in ear fatigue was significant in their approval of the system."

spacious but intimate."

Neighbourhood's music policy is a celebration of quality, underground dance music and has already featured guest and resident appearances from the likes of Dimitri from Paris, Groove Armada, Ian Pooley, Kurtis Mantronik and Norman Jay as well as Ben Watt himself, creating what Ben describes as: "Friday night blockparties dovetailing into Soulful Saturdays and deep Sundays."

Music is obviously very important to the venue, so much so that it defines the very personality of the place: "It's a central pillar,"

confirms Ben, "the DJ is the ambience co-ordinator. You can fill a venue but keeping it full is a skill, you need great staff, good pricing and music that draws people together."

So how does Ben see Neighbourhood fitting into the general clubbing landscape of the moment? What niche might it fill? "I try not to think or worry about what other people are doing," he says succinctly. "Myself and Alan have a view of how clubbing should be and we just follow our instincts, whether it succeeds is for others to decide.

"We've always been against the

superclub and superstar DJ ethos. We applaud inclusiveness, friendliness, the creation of a social hub against a background of inspirational music."

Ben continues: "A lot of people are moaning that clubland is dead. I just don't get it. If you work hard, put the right music in the right venue, treat the crowd like human beings and don't charge the earth - you've got a real chance. It's where we've had success with Cherry Jam and it's where we hope to go with Neighbourhood."

## CREDITS

Neighbourhood, Acklam Road,  
Ladbroke Grove, London

Owner : Ben Watt / Alan Grant  
Interior Design : Powell Tuck  
Associates

Sound Installation : Blue Box  
Cloakroom Systems : Q-Systems