

ProAudioEast^{Middle}

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BEACH LIFE

Em-Tec brings the Monte Carlo lifestyle to Abu Dhabi with Funktion One

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Premium sound

From unassuming to upmarket, the transformation of Sea Lounge at the Monte Carlo Beach Club when the sun goes down is a sight to behold. But does the audio match the setting? **James Ling** investigates



The Sea Lounge at Saadiyat Island's Monte Carlo Beach Club

SAADIYAT ISLAND AT SUNSET IS

a place of real beauty. With white sandy beaches, the twinkling of Abu Dhabi's sky line coming to life in the distance and an uninterrupted view out over the Gulf, there are few places *Pro Audio Middle East* has visited that are so tranquil. Everything, it would seem, has been designed to ensure relaxation.

As the sun goes down on a warm winter's day it is easy to see why this island is being built as a tourist destination. Who could fail to unwind in a setting like this? But as the music kicks in, *Pro Audio Middle East* is shaken out of its holiday brochure-inspired trance and back into the real world as the reason for the visit becomes clear. This is no sight-seeing trip – as wonderful as the views are – we are here to check out the sights and sounds of the Monte Carlo Beach Club.

Situated on Saadiyat beach, this is the first time the club's owner has opened a property outside its native Monaco. The striking vista makes it an obvious location for the members-only luxury venue, and there could have been few places more appropriate to offer the brand to new clientele.

The property itself is centred around luxury, relaxation and bespoke hospitality – factors the club describes as the core values of the Monte Carlo lifestyle. As such, it features four Mediterranean lounges and restaurants, gym and spa facilities and an infinity pool looking out into the sea. Set to the right of this pool and its private cabanas is the real reason for *Pro Audio Middle*



Sound on the decking is via a pair of Res 2SH

East's visit, Sea Lounge.

Approaching the beach-side bar you could be forgiven for not immediately seeing how Sea Lounge is trying to become one of Abu Dhabi's hottest night spots. The wood flooring, white columns and comfortable sofas give it the appearance of a quiet lounge which would only need a small BGM system to pipe out atmospheric music for members taking a break from the sun.

The drop off of the music means that it is not until you are nearly inside the bar that you start to notice that this is far more than a run-of-the-mill venue. Rather than the ceiling speakers you would expect, visitors are greeted by the sight of six white Funktion One F101 enclosures attached to the columns inside the lounge and two MB212 double 12-inch mini basses. During the day the cabinets provide ambience with low volume BGM. But after dark they fill the venue with the sound and clarity expected in a premium club setting.

A further pair of F101s provides a fill to the seating area between the lounge and pool. While not



MB212s provide low end inside the lounge

originally planned as part of the system design, this placement was requested by the club to extend the coverage to its poolside terrace. This decision meant reducing the cabinet count inside the bar from eight to six, but also expanded the footprint of the system into a third zone.

Moving through the covered portion of the venue and past the Pioneer-equipped DJ booth, its role as a party hotspot becomes ever clearer. The beachfront terrace outside the bar is covered by a pair of white Res 2SHs with low end provided by single 18 woofers under the mid-high section on either side of the decking. Visually the system may be minimalist, but the sound is certainly not. While not trying to be

a full-on club system, it still packs a punch and provides ample power for two of Dubai's high-end nights – Audio Tonic and Must Have Soul – to run parties on a Thursday and Friday night.

The elite scene that Sea Lounge was aiming to attract made its decision for sound and lighting equipment vital. All the technical aspects of the lounge needed to match its setting if it were to be taken seriously as a high-end venue. To take on this challenge it decided to turn to Dubai-based installer and distribution company Em-Tec.

'We take the same ethos into every project,' says Em-Tec general manager Andy Williams. 'Just to make sure the sound and every possible element is of the highest possible quality,' he explains. 'If any part of the audio chain is weak then the end product isn't going to be as strong. You wouldn't buy a Ferrari and then put in a Toyota gearbox,' he reasons. 'That's one principle I really have. Everything from cabling to connectors has to be premium. People are buying a premium product and they expect a premium sound.'

Acting on this ideal, Em-Tec added to the Funktion One system with cabling from Klotz and Van Damme plus connectors from Neutrik. 'Some people say cabling makes no difference to the sound, and maybe it doesn't, but you can get lag in the cable,' says Mr Williams. 'It's just about doing everything right and correctly, you don't want any weak points in the system so we always try to go for the best available for every part of the audio chain.'

The technical heart of the system can be found at the DJ booth. The Pioneer DJM 700 mixer and CDJ 900 multi players with F101 monitors make up the visible portion of the system. But it is in the rack below the desk where the core can be

found.

The compact rack holds the amps for the sound system as well as the control for audio and lighting. Power for the main bar's system comes from a Funktion One F40Q amp, while a pair of F60Qs power the Res 2SHs and subs on the terrace. The DJ monitors and pool terrace speakers however draw their current from a pair of QSC RMX Series amps. The reason for the difference



Six 101 cabinets cover inside the lounge

in amp manufacturer for this portion was due to the late design change to create the third zone with its own power needs.

Completing the audio setup is a Funktion One X04 crossover and a Formula Sound ZMR-243 zone mixer. It is this that enables Sea Lounge's transition from low-key lounge by day to party venue by night. The zone mixer controls the bar and pool terrace zones for ambient audio



Monte Carlo Beach Club's rack

during the day. After dark it is the main output from the Pioneer mixer that drives the large outside system.

Design and build

Em-Tec was in a fortunate position when it came to securing the deal for Sea Lounge. Monte Carlo Beach Club's director of operations, Luke James, was already familiar with Funktion One as a brand from his previous role at 360° and seemed determined to have a solution from the manufacturer in the lounge. 'He said from the beginning "I want Funktion One, can you make it work for me? I've got to make it fit within the budget, but I want it to be right and I want a premium product",' recalls Mr Williams. 'I don't know if

says Mr Williams. 'We came up with a spec with Tony Andrews in the UK. I usually come up with the design then sit down with Tony and discuss it,' he explains. 'The man's a genius. As well as being one of the best speaker manufacturers and building the best speakers money can buy, his visions of space and how to use the speakers are second to none,' enthuses Mr Williams. 'I'm totally tuned into that now, and most of the time we just agree because he's taught me so much. I understand now how the products work, why you should choose certain products for certain areas, the range and dispersion for each speaker from 110-degrees down to 45-degrees. 'It's all about where you want that sound to have the most



When the sun goes down the music comes up



they looked at other products, but from six months before the venue opened he was ringing me saying "I want Funktion One, will you come and have a look? Let's get the specs together",' he smiles. The long lead time also gave the systems integrator the opportunity to ensure it designed the best possible solution for the space. 'We had plenty of time in the design phase to make sure we got everything right,'

impact, especially when you don't want the sound to disturb other parts,' continues Em-Tec's general manager. 'As well as getting the sound right on the floor or within the bar you need the sound not to be going all over the place, you can't be disturbing people.' The long design phase didn't mean the installation was completely trouble-free. It was a two-week project for sound and lighting



The view from the DJ booth



Em-Tec covered both the sound and lighting for the install



A pair of 101s provide fill by the poolside deck

combined that took place at the height of Abu Dhabi's summer. 'It was 45-50-degrees most days,' recalls Mr Williams. 'It's right at the end of Abu Dhabi, right in the sea, so the humidity was like being in a full-on sauna set to maximum working here in that weather,' he laments. 'There was lots of taking up of flooring at 50-degree heat in 100 per cent humidity. Something that should take you 10 minutes – taking up a few planks – would take you an hour.'

The finish was another area that proved challenging. 'They didn't want to see any cabling, so there was a lot of chasing of cables through all the pillars, which is a very strange spray-on material,' notes Mr Williams. 'We had to cut all the channels out for the cabling. There was also lots of Cat-5 cabling because all the drivers for the LED lighting are under the DJ box,' he adds. 'All that needed to be connected up too.'

Despite these challenges, the job is one that Em-Tec is rightly proud of, and has proved a real hit with the venue. 'The moment we turned the

sound system on, there were lots of Monte Carlo staff from Monaco and they just came out here and were amazed,' says Mr Williams. 'They thought it was unbelievable compared to their sound system,' he smiles. 'It was really nice to hear, because you never know what the customer's will think will sound good, but all of them were smiling. We had about 50 members of staff out here just going "this is amazing".'

The lighting side of the project has proven successful too. 'We used Tryka LEDs for all the columns,' says Mr Williams. 'It's a real high quality light, it gives a clear, crisp output. You don't get spots of light and they are very true to the colour. We put in some Robe moving heads as well,' he explains. 'I think the lights really add to the venue. We didn't want to go over the top with lighting everything, we just wanted to be quite subtle because it's meant to be chilled out,' he recalls. 'When we very first came here we said "this has got to be cool".'

with it. It's a truly amazing, beautiful venue.'

Sitting back on the terrace at sunset it is easy to understand Mr Williams' description of Sea Lounge. The venue did not fall into the trap of style over content when it came to selecting its systems and as a result the overall quality can be seen and felt throughout.

'It's nice when the sound system isn't the last thought on people's minds. Some venues are like that,' concludes Mr Williams. 'When building a club, forget the design, forget the mirrors and the marble polished dancefloor, let's get the sound right,' argues the general manager. 'You go to a club to listen to music, if the sound is wrong, the whole thing is wrong. You can have the coolest wall paper and the most expensive sofas to sit on, but if it sounds harsh, horrible or weak, people just don't want to be in there,' he states. 'The music is what makes the nightclub a nightclub.'

‘Everything from cabling to connectors has to be premium. People are buying a premium product and they expect a premium sound’

A happy client means Mr Williams is pleased with the end result. 'I wouldn't do anything differently. The choice of speakers was absolutely spot on,' he states. 'It would have been nice to do the eight 101s in the bar area, but they felt they really needed some fill on the outside,' explains Mr Williams. 'From when you walk into the bar to when you reach the sea you can still hear it with crystal clarity all the way along. The venue is really happy with the standard and we're really happy

This is certainly the case at Sea Lounge.

As *Pro Audio Middle East* takes one final look around the Monte Carlo Beach Club there is a strong feeling that the philosophy of getting each element right will serve the venue well. It is targeting a clientele with high expectations and by selecting premium products it has put itself in the best position of meeting, if not exceeding these.

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