

New heights

Providing Manila with a reference for dining and entertainment, Ascend has also made sound one of its priorities. **Ollie P Quinquini** climbed aboard

METRO MANILA'S NEWEST

superclub, Ascend, lives up to its name in many ways. The three-storey club raises the bar for nightlife in the Philippine capital, offering a sophisticated alternative to the frenetic and intimidating clubbing found at other venues. The interior design was undertaken by local consultant Design Hirayama + Quesada in collaboration with Architect GR Flancia & Associates. With three distinct environments in The Lounge, The Club and The Skye members-only suite, Ascend elevates the quintessential nightlife elements of dining, partying and privacy to a new level.

Located on the city's plush Bonifacio High Street, Ascend's target is the upmarket AB crowd that enjoys hip hop and house music. It soft-opened in December 2007 with key special events including an after-concert party for Beyonce's crew, and officially burst onto the nightlife scene with a grand launch on 25 January. 'People are more discriminating with their nightlife experience now,' said managing director Oliver Mendez. 'The purpose of Ascend is to bring world-class clubbing to the Philippines. With three different rooms and

environments, we give people a choice – if they want high-energy dance, they can go to The Club. If they want a relaxed, chill-out atmosphere, they can go to The Lounge, and for VIPs, the Skye is up there on the third floor to enjoy. The common factor in the three rooms is good music.'

The Ascend concept permeates the nightclub. The Lounge features spiralling metallic backdrops framing its booths, while chef Rolando Laudico presents his take on the name with his sumptuous Towering Tapas. The Skye, meanwhile, is the ultimate getaway for the rich and famous.

When it comes to sound systems, Ascend also scales the heights. Since a club is often only as good as its music, a lot of consideration and research went into identifying the best of the best in audio abilities. Mr Mendez turned to the experts for a qualified recommendation. The unanimous decision was 'the Lamborghini of sound systems' – Funktion-One. 'I was in touch with Judge Jules, a DJ based in the UK,' Mr Mendez recalls. 'I had seen him in San Francisco a few years back and knew he was very good. He DJs in Ibiza and has a radio show

on UK's Radio One, and he told me Funktion-One was the best sound system for a club. His fellow DJs agreed as well.

Mr Mendez got to hear the power and quality of a Funktion-One system for himself when he visited a club in Jakarta, and he was convinced. A Funktion One system quickly became Ascend's most significant and important investment.

For Stagecraft International, local distributor of Funktion-One products, the Ascend project was a dream come true. The company was eager to showcase the Funktion-One Dance Stack in the Philippines for the first time. 'Clean sound rarely figures in clubs in the Philippines,' Stagecraft International project assistant Frankie Leslie Zabala admits. 'Most clubs are heavy on the bass, so our main aim in the Ascend project was to provide a clean audio where the music and lyrics can be heard, without sacrificing the intensity and quality of the experience.'

The opportunity was so significant that when the order for Funktion-One Dance Stacks came in, Stagecraft's installation and design engineer, Rene Salvador, was ecstatic: 'We were so glad that a client in the Philippines wanted to make that huge investment in sound quality,' he enthuses.

With the delivery of the Dance Stacks from the UK to the Stagecraft office, it was all systems go – except that construction of Ascend took longer than expected. Nevertheless, the excitement was palpable as, during an overseas sortie, Frankie Zabala invited Funktion-One chief designer Tony Andrews to visit the Philippines for the project. He



Manila's 'must-see' Ascend club

accepted the invitation and came in during October 2007 to tweak the system and personally calibrate the loudspeaker systems. 'He recommended that we changed the amplifiers to a higher wattage,' Mr Salvador explains. 'He also got us to change the crossover units to two XTA crossovers, which he said were better suited to the product. He sent over the XTA units as soon as he got back to the UK – his purpose was really to showcase the Dance Stacks at their best. He was pretty excited about the project too.'

With most of the construction completed in November, Mr Salvador and his team took two-to-three days

to install the audio equipment, as the Dance Stack, with its all-in-one concept, just requires floor mounting. 'It was pretty straightforward,' agrees Mr Salvador. 'We just had to decide where to place the speakers, depending largely on the size and configuration of the room, the location of the bars and the three DJ booths.'

The Dance Stacks, each with an Infrabass 218 and two F218s with silver flares, flank The Club's DJ booth. They are supported by the XTA crossovers, three TC Electronic XO-24 two-input/four-output speaker management units, two MC2 E15 HF and mid power amplifiers, one MC2



The Club's dancefloor



DJ at work – in The Lounge

E25 upper bass power amplifier, and two MC2 E45 LF and sub power amplifiers.

Judge Jules had also recommended Pioneer for DJ mixing equipment, so Stagecraft fitted The Club's booth with two Pioneer CDJ1000 MkIII professional DJ CD players, an LA Audio EQ231GSP third-octave graphic equaliser, two TC Electronic C300 compressor-limiters, a Allen & Heath Xone92 8:2 DJ mixer, two Technics SL1200 MkII direct-drive turntables, two Turbosound TQ 308DP powered speaker monitors, Sennheiser HD25 stereo headphones and a Shure SM58 dynamic vocal microphone. All the rack equipment is installed in an SGI power amplifier rack assembly and two Gator sound processor racks.

Since the purpose of The Club is to provide dance music for a mature and sophisticated crowd, the Funktion-One sound system is an ideal choice. 'The Funktion-One system has worked very well for us,' Mr Mendez notes. 'You feel the power, but at the same time, it is comfortable – there is nothing in your face, nothing overwhelming.'

Mr Salvador agrees – in a recent visit to Ascend, he was pleased to see that the Dance Stacks were performing perfectly even at below optimum level. 'They are more than enough for The Club,' he says. 'They give ideal coverage to the whole room and there is a lot of headroom in the set-up – the amps are not even fully used. The beauty of the product is,

even if you stand right in front of the speakers, it is not uncomfortable at all. And it is self-contained; it comes with all the elements you need, except for the power amplifiers.'

In The Lounge, where upscale casual Pan-Asian cuisine whets appetites; the relaxed atmosphere is enhanced by two Funktion-One Res2A two-way active loudspeakers, two Funktion-One Res2 two-way passive speakers, two Funktion-One Minibass 21.2 dual 12-inch subwoofers and an MC2 E25 subwoofer amplifier. The Lounge's DJ plays the music from two Pioneer CDJ1000 MkIII professional CD players and an Allen & Heath Xone62 6:2 Club DJ mixer. Support equipment includes an LA Audio EQ231GSP graphic equaliser, a TC Electronic XO-24 speaker management unit, a TC Electronic C300 compressor-limiter, two Turbosound TQ-308DP DJ monitor speakers, Sennheiser HD25 headphones and a Shure SM58 vocal microphone.

For its part, The Skye is equipped with two Funktion-One Res2A loud speakers, two Minibass 21.2 subwoofers, a TC Electronics XO-24 speaker management unit, MC2 E25 power amplifier for the Minibass and a TC Electronic C300. The Skye's deejay booth has an LA Audio EQ231GSP equaliser, two Pioneer CDJ1000 MkIII DJ CD players, an A&H Xone62 6:2 club DJ mixer, Sennheiser HD25 stereo headphones, Turbosound TQ308DP DJ monitors and a Shure SM58 vocal microphone.

'This was really a dream project for us,' Mr Salvador concludes. 'We hope more clients in the Philippines will want to buy Dance Stacks – and Funktion-One has an even bigger unit with more subwoofers. It would be excellent if we could bring that here as well.'

'Ascend is the metro's next big thing,' agrees Ed Biado in the Manila Standard Today. It's the ideal venue for dinner, dancing, drinks or all of the above. It will soon be the destination of choice, comparable to some of the world's hottest nightspots. My two-cent: be there when it happens!'

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The Club's DJ booth and sound system control



Funktion One Dance Stacks installed in The Club



The Skye DJ booth