

Songs In The City

New York Restaurant Improves Live Sound System

by Joshua Michael Bachrach

New York City is hardly at a loss for quality restaurants. The city is teeming with dining establishments offering a wide variety of foods at a wide variety of prices in a wide variety of locations. All of which is to say that a New York City restaurant has to go above and beyond in order to set itself apart.

Chez Josephine—a stylish French restaurant named after the eccentric 20th century singer/dancer Josephine Baker by her close friend and adopted “son,” Jean-Claude Baker—recently enlisted Bernard Fox in an attempt to distinguish itself. Fox is an audio engineer whose next project is none other than the Museum for the History of Recorded Sound. Though he specializes in theatrical and museum sound design, Fox agreed to take on the task of Chez Josephine.

The restaurant, located near New York’s theater district, has cultivated a reputation in its 16 years of existence for its artsy décor and live music. But in order to thrive in a crowded marketplace, improvements are often necessary. Jean-Claude Baker asked Fox to design a sound system customized to the specific needs of his restaurant.

Baker’s most pressing requirements for his new audio system were individual zoning and invisibility. “Jean-Claude Baker is very concerned for his patrons,” Fox said. “He wants to be able to make the music louder or softer at any table.” With a piano player and vocalist on stage every night and a wide variety of clientele at his tables, Baker found this to be an especially important aspect of the system. Fox said that there was no problem individualizing the audio system. He installed 18 different speaker runs and an extensive control

panel at the bar that allows for different volume levels throughout the restaurant.

The invisibility factor proved to be more of a challenge. “The one thing that was difficult was that Jean-Claude didn’t want to see any of the speakers or wiring,” Fox noted. In a restaurant that spans two floors and is decorated with thick red velvet and a number of mirrors, this type of invisibility was not easy to come by.

Part of Fox’s solution was to place the speakers within the framework of the windows. Bob Bender of Hudson Marketing convinced Fox that TOA H-3 speakers would be perfect for this job. “I didn’t know TOA as a speaker manufacturer,” Fox said, “but their stuff is generally very reliable.” He said he ended up choosing the H-3s “because they have very wide dispersion. In order to get fidelity through the drapes, I tried to reflect the sound off of the window glass. If the dispersion wasn’t wide you’d get the sound bouncing off beams. The H-3s are the widest dispersion, highest fidelity speakers I could find.”

The result was excellent sound and effectively hidden speakers. But placing the speakers in the window caused other problems and was part of the reason Fox had to install what he jokingly referred to as “miles of wiring.”

Because Baker owns the entire building, Fox had a little more flexibility in hiding some of the other aspects of the system. He put the amp rack on another floor and hid the Sony 200 CD jukebox (utilized when the live acts take a break) behind the bar. Perhaps his most creative maneuver, however, involved the console. In need of an unobtrusive resting place for his Mackie console, Fox mounted it on a microphone stand and slid it under the piano.

Having completed the design for Chez Josephine that provides a high-quality sound



▲ New York’s Chez Josephine added TOA H-3 speakers to its entertainment system.

system that does not interfere with the restaurant’s decor, Fox acknowledged the team that helped him implement it. He credited Joe Castelon with engineering the distribution amp system and the duo of Dan Gaydas and Evan Yavne with installing all that wiring.

In retrospect, Fox feels that this was a very successful job. “Jean-Claude Baker has an incredible restaurant,” Fox said, “and he wants everything in the restaurant just so. It was a pleasure to work with someone who knows exactly what he wants.” There’s little doubt that Baker reciprocates the feeling of a positive working relationship between the two. Fox provided Baker with exactly what he was looking for—an audio system that will enhance the quality of the music in Chez Josephine without taking away from the décor. After all, it takes a little extra to get ahead in the New York City restaurant business.

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