



VITAL STATISTICS

The Arches
51-53 Southwark Street
London
SE1 1RU
Tel: 0207 403 9643
Owner: Mark Ames

Hours

Wed 10pm-3am // Thu 10pm-4am // Fri-Sun 10pm-6am

Key Contractors

Lighting Installation: Light Design Group // **Special Effects:** Rill Lasers // **Sound Installation:** Vibasound

Drinks

Pouring brands: Vladimir vodka, Captain Morgan rum, Gordon's gin, Bell's Whisky // **Premium draught lager:** £3.50 (Grolsch; pint) // **Standard draught lager:** £3.00 (Carling; pint) // **Lead PPL:** £3.50 (Stella Artois) // Lead PPS: £3.50 (Smirnoff Ice) // **Cocktail list:** No

Technology

Main Room lighting: 2 x Rill Aurora full colour 1500mw white light lasers, 1 x Pangolin laser show designer, 8 x Martin Mac 250 Krypton, 4 x Clay Paky HP3, 4 x Robe 250AT, 6 x Robe 575XT 4 x Martin 918, 1 x Martin Atomic 3000, 1 x Martin LightJockey, 24 x Instyle 3w truss up-lighter colour change LEDs, 100m x M254 trussing, 1 x 30inch mirror ball // **Arch 1 lighting:** Instyle LED strips // **Arch 3 lighting:** 1 x Martin Professional LightJockey, 4 x Martin Mac 250 Krypton, 4 x Clay Paky hp3, 2m inner diameter truss circle.

► whereas promoters want a look and a vibe. I wanted both. And with the previous owners there was this ceiling on what I could do.

“Taking the club over also gave us direction. With your own place, ideas can really take fruition.”

The club nights operate a £12 door charge for non members and £8 for members. With 15,000 members subscribed to the XXL night, and with each membership leased at £20 a year, Ames finds himself with a significant budget for reinvestment each year. The appeal of XXL relies on renewal of the club, argues Ames.

“I try to renew every year. Three years ago we upgraded the sound and lights to a degree, and added some décor. This year we went all out, sinking £300,000 in a new lighting system and upgraded sound. The membership has given us a secure foundation for investment. There is such a community around our clubbers that it feels only right we should return something to them in the form of investment. This year, we wanted something really special.”

The renewal involved a carefully thought out lighting installation from London based lighting and sound specialist Light Design Group. MD Terry Lucie commissioned 100m of bespoke curved Litetruss from Milos to be bolted flush to the natural curvature of the arch, with each cross-beam lit from each end by colour changing LEDs. The result is five glowing arches of polished aluminium lattice, from which the main entertainments

lighting is suspended.

“It always frustrated me that such a cool building was hidden behind our rig, you lost some of the sense of the architecture,” explains Ames. “Now there is an eerie glowing rib cage effect that nicely shows off the building’s structure.”

The rig features four Clay Paky Hp3 scanners suspended from each corner, with eight Martin Mac Kryptons and four Martin 918s distributed evenly across the space. Ten Robe units - four 250ATs and six 575XTs - create a layered pattern of effects to the floor, all controlled through XXL’s LD Scott working on a Martin Lightjockey. Integral to the XXL nights are two 1500mw Aurora white light lasers supplied by Rill - which serve to fill the cavern with stems of animated laser light - a trademark of the nights that is repeated in the New York and Birmingham nights.

“The useful thing about Light Design Group’s install is that it suits both the needs of the building and the brand. Part of the XXL brand is that no two nights are the same, and using an exposed rig means that Terry and the Light Design team can come down and easily change the fixtures around every so often - just to keep that sense of freshness. We get great after-sales value from those guys.”

Terry also devised a full range of architectural lighting for Arch 1 using 300, 600 and 1200mm LED strips to accent the exposed brick work and add colour to the bar. For the edgy Arch 3, a more traditional circular truss houses four Martin Mac

250 Kryptons and a further four Clay Paky HP3s arranged around a central cluster of four 12 inch mirror balls.

“The whole work was put up in time for our sixth birthday bash. There were a lot of people and a really positive vibe. I like to think the changes we’ve made have gone down really well,” concludes Ames. “The strength of the XXL brand is that it has a degree of uniformity, with the nights having the same atmosphere and sounds whether it’s held here or New York or in Europe, but can also accommodate a bit of tinkering so that we can surprise our customers. Operators tend to go for million pound overhauls every three years, whereas we prefer to change it around every month, and have a hundred little operational tricks to keep the nights fresh.”

The future of the venue will involve expansion into a three story building on O’Mera Street, with a restaurant and bar service pencilled in for 2008. Meanwhile Ames wants to repeat the success of XXL with the launch of a straight version of the night in 2007: “a night for all ages from 18 to 80, playing credible music designed to entertain rather than educate.”

Whether the multi generational appeal of the Arches has been exaggerated or not, the continued popularity of XXL has been ensured by the continual renewal of its home turf, giving Ames a secure footing from which to expand his business. ■