



CASTLES IN THE CLOUDS

They're bold, beautiful and guarantee a good time. Discover why nightclub designers are the life of a million-dollar party





PREVIOUS PAGE: Le Boutique Club by Parolio & Euphoria Lab.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Fashion in the Le Boutique Club; art at Club MUSÉE; Bigtime Design creates spaces where people can feel "a sense of community"; a Bigtime Design club entrance; Callin Fortis from Bigtime design; Le Marquis by Parolio & Euphoria Lab; Parolio himself; VIP area in Club MUSÉE.

THEY'RE LAVISH PALACES OF THE NIGHT; THE MUST-VISIT venues where it's cool to be seen and even cooler not to be. If your name's on the right list, they'll cater to your every whim. Welcome to the world of nightclub design, where only the latest and most outrageous will do.

"There are unique challenges involved in designing nightclubs," says Parolio, creative director at Spanish design firm Parolio & Euphoria Lab. "Clubs are spaces where large groups of people gather to have fun, dance and socialise. When people go out, they do so with certain expectations of what the night experience is going to deliver. They want entertainment, beauty, good music, quality service and lots of fun."

Ever since the tiny Spanish island of Ibiza built some of the most luxurious clubs the world had ever seen, nightclub design has become a thriving industry. Big money is spent outfitting spaces to attract an elite, big-spending clientele. Ibiza institution Privilege features an indoor swimming pool, a sprawling garden and counts Jean Paul Gaultier, Jade Jagger and Madonna as regulars. For designers and architects, the cost of outfitting a nightclub depends on the size and concept of the space.

"A medium-sized club at the level I design at costs around US\$300 per square foot," says Callin Fortis from Miami nightclub designers, Bigtime



Design. His UK nightclub Gatecrasher had a budget of GBP5.9 million for a space of 40,000 feet, while his New York club Crobar, now closed, spanned 30,000 feet and cost \$4 million. Yet a big budget doesn't necessarily guarantee the best outcome.

"While the budget influences the materials and technology used, a project is not necessarily defined by how much money you put into it, but how successful the design idea is," says Parolio. "Some medium-range budget projects can be extremely well-executed, but you need to be more creative in the design process."

Today, the general consensus in design circles is that nightclub design is moving towards smaller, more intimate venues.

"Clubs have gone from the glittering mirror covered walls of the seventies and eighties, to the mega-clubs of the nineties, where surprise and spectacle was of great importance, to more sophisticated and more conceptual projects," says Parolio.

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One of these is Madrid's Club MUSÉE. Designed by Parolio & Euphoria Lab, it's part art gallery, part nightclub. With bold colours, sculptural furniture and floor-to-ceiling art installations, Club MUSÉE represents a new model for the nightclub industry, giving groovers the chance to dance and dine in cosy, chic surroundings.

"The concept behind Club MUSÉE is the connection between the art world and night life," says Parolio, who cites art and cinema as his inspirations. "I wanted to add some cultural value to the [clubbing] experience."

"We are living in the age of specialisation, of the limited-edition product," he continues. "People have access to lots of visual information and find they relate more to a specific trend or music preference. Most want to follow their choice and it shows in the products and services they choose. That also extends to industries like nightlife venues, where many people are choosing to spend more time in smaller, more niche, conceptual and completed spaces, where there is a theme in the music, people or décor that they can relate to emotionally."

For Parolio, club design should evoke feelings within the audience, just as a piece of art or architecture would.

"I study emotional expectations in my design process," he says. "All senses are stimulated in the design of a club. First there has to be a clear concept, idea or golden thread that gives the club its signature elements. They will help it stand out in a very competitive and changing industry."

"In addition, the design of the space has to facilitate the dynamic transit of people," he continues. "Different areas,

for example, have multi-purpose uses. Furniture and structural design elements have to be not only visually appealing, but also extremely durable and resistant. Lighting must be perfect, as it has to help the visitor look good."

For others, the design of the club can be used to positively alter the behaviour of the people inside. "I will purposely compress people as they enter a venue to make them feel a sense of community, group energy and anticipation," says Bigtime Design's Callin Fortis.

"Once they are in, I like to create a moment where they are released, can take a deep breath and choose a direction. I usually create two routes, one directly to the centre of the mayhem, like the dance floor, and one around the outside. Entering an altered reality with 2,000 or twenty of your closest strangers has always been exciting for me."

TO JOIN TODAY'S NIGHTCLUB GLITTERATI DESIGN LIST, designers need to be multimedia, light and sound savvy. Some of New York's most creative and coolest lounges, including Glazz, Juliet Supperclub and Mr West were outfitted by New York architecture, interior and lighting studio Bluarch.

Since starting out in 2004, Bluarch has designed clubs, cafes and concert halls with their eco-friendly, high-tech interiors. In 2010, Bluarch's Juliet Supperclub won "Most Dramatic Space" at the Boutique Design Awards.

"We design the party, formulating scenarios of interactions amongst the guests," says Antonio Di Oronzo, architect at Bluarch. "In terms of design, the audience expects more and each venue looks to outdo the competition. Designers have great opportunities to research and invent spaces unimaginable just a few years ago... and technology is helping push the boundaries."

"Our clubs Glazz and Aura are more about the effect technology can offer to the guests. Whereas, the design of Juliet is based on the tales of *One Thousand and One*



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Nights. The restaurant is a shimmering space of gold-cladding materials and lacquered furnishings, a ‘flying carpet’ of gold, mirrored tile is laid over the entire main room and folds over the walls and the bar,” he says.

According to *Nightclub and Bar Magazine*, many US clubs are reporting steady growth in revenue. An inviting design and layout gets people talking – essential in an industry based on fickle-fashion fads.

“[In the nightclub industry] what is new is old in the blink of an eye,” says Fortis. “Technology and the fast pace of social media has raised the bar to entertain. Now, video masking [playing two videos simultaneously on a wall] and 3D can change an environment instantly.”

NIGHTCLUB DESIGNERS AND ARCHITECTS OFTEN WORK

across other fields like event organisation and hotel design. Having directed some of Spain’s major events including the musical *Mamma Mia!* and Italian businessman Flavio Briatore’s Formula 1 party, Parolio & Euphoria Lab count The Coca-Cola Company, Missoni, BMW and actress Paz Vega amongst their illustrious clientele.

The home city sets the tone for the club design. Because Parolio’s latest project, Le Boutique Club, sits beside Chanel and Prada on Madrid’s most exclusive avenue, it’s

been designed to look and feel like a fashion boutique. In doing so, the establishment has attracted the high-profile clientele it desired, including fashion photographer Mario Testino and Spanish model Luis Medina.

“There is a strong connection between clubs and the energy of the city where they are located,” says Parolio. “A city is a great source of inspiration, so cosmopolitan cities where art and design are very evolved and extended tend to have a great catalogue of venues. Clubs can also be very aspirational and try to deliver experiences that a city has yet to offer; you might find very sophisticated, conceptual and visually successful clubs in less-known locations around the world.”

One of these is the Josefine/Roxy club in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, which re-opened in 2011. Four years after he originally designed it, architect Fred Mafrá gave the club a fresh redesign, changing its identity and clientele in the process. The new Josefine/Roxy club has a futuristic feel, thanks to large VIP-only areas, intimate-vinyl padded booths and spectacular LED ceiling displays that give a criss-cross honeycomb effect.

Bright neon triangles and more than 100 flashing hexagons contrast with black-and-white floors, making a visit to the club an awe-inspiring, almost psychedelic experience. However, its real party trick is the large retractable roof covering the 955-sqm space, perfect for enjoying those warm Brazilian nights.

Mafrá says he enjoyed redesigning his earlier work, as it gave him the opportunity to experiment with light and form. “Reforming your own project brings you a special freedom that comes from mastering the space you are already working with, plus from the confidence of being the owner in your work,” he says.

As venues get smaller and budgets get higher, nightclubs equal big business. To satisfy a discerning and demanding public, designers must keep their establishments inviting and inspiring. After all, Saturday night keeps rolling around – and no one wants an empty dance floor. ☺

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Bluarch nightclub Aura; principle architect at Bluarch Antonio Di Oronzo; interior of the Juliet Supperclub.