



There was time when the idea of friends getting together to build a studio was a far more common occurrence. They always made for interesting facilities as they were often not driven by the same considerations and motivation as other more traditional studios. Often they came about as a result of economic realities but this was frequently combined with an apparent desire and belief that they could build a place of their own and do it for themselves. We can see the appeal and the attraction — well at least those who haven't done it can — but it also requires some serious dedication and perseverance as it's not an undertaking for the faint hearted. There is something driven and solid about the four-man team behind High Tide Studios near Cologne but you also get the impression that the experience of building their own studio has changed them; they've been on a voyage and no one has come back unmarked.

As anyone who has been involved with a building project will tell you — the easy bit is starting it; the hard bit is finishing it and that means really finishing it completely. High Tide was started in January 2014 and finished in time for its first session in October. They weren't entirely unadvised as they had German company MBakustik doing the acoustic design but they built it themselves using a range of complementary skills that they knew they had or had but just weren't aware of. The result is a two-control room facility with an Amek Hendrix with Dynaudio M3A monitoring for tracking and a Sony Oxford R3 with Eve Audio SC408 monitoring for mixing built around a large centrally positioned live room with a large booth off that. The facility reflects the combination of skills of its four owners and also draws on their individual talents and contacts for its business.

The story is a good one. Dominik Hartmann and Lennart Damann knew each other from school and both went to SAE. Dominik is a player and does composition and producing; Lennart is an engineer but also masters. Dominik's parents had Coconut Studios in Cologne and Dominik had a room there with Lennart, ownership of the studio changed and the new landlord wanted to raise the rent so the pair took all their gear — including the wiring — and as they knew the owner of a studio on a farm near Cologne (where High Tide studios is now) they got a spare room there. While it wasn't very pretty it served its purpose. Meanwhile, Florian Richter had worked with Dominik and Lennart

High Tide Studios

A self-build studio on a farm within easy reach of Cologne has caused a ripple of anticipation among its clients.

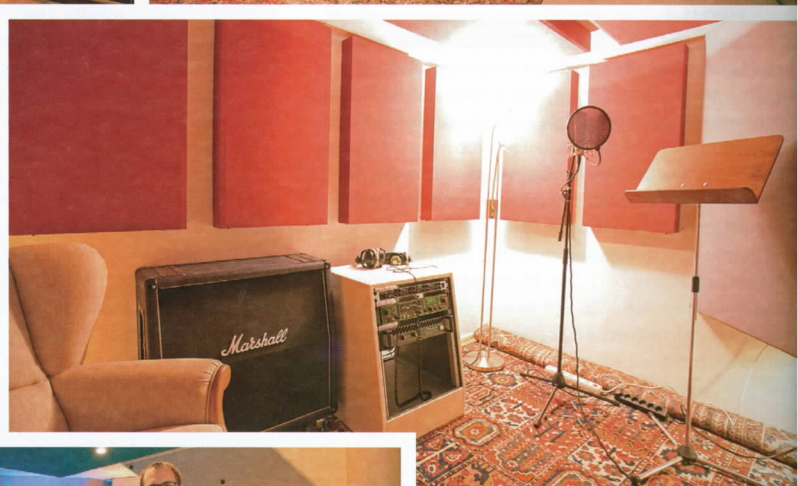
ZENON SCHOEPE enjoys the countryside.

at their room at Coconut and got an option to buy a Sony Oxford console but needed a room for it and Jeff Kater, who had a strong live sound background was enjoying studio work increasingly. They all became partners in High Tide Studios and took over the building; most importantly they all brought their clients and contacts with them ... but they had to build a studio to suit their combined needs first.

The existing studio rooms were stripped back to their naked state and then MBakustik was called in to measure the rooms, figured out where the listening positions ought to be and to come up with some plans. MBakustik's Markus Bertram analysed the rooms and found issues in both control rooms. Control Room A (now with the Hendrix) is bigger than B and while the former was only for stereo the latter also need multichannel capability; plus the rooms needed a degree of similarity in them as they would be worked across by the engineers. Markus says that the live room sounded good and only needed some diffusers and broadband absorbers.

Because the budget was tight it was clear from the beginning that the team wanted to build as much as possible themselves. Markus designed the acoustic treatment in a way that small variations in the build would not make a big difference to the final result and supplied prefabricated bass traps for the control rooms. Markus says that the team are quite talented craftsmen now.

They built the Lobby first because they needed somewhere to store and build stuff while the equipment, including the desks, was stacked in the live room which gives you some idea of the available space. It's a big area with a large booth off it that is plenty big enough for a big band. Florian points out that musicians sometimes have to be reminded that there is a magic that can happen when they all play in the same room at the same time.



(l-r) Dominik Hartmann; Jeff Kater; Florian Richter; Lennart Damann.

around to support if required but you don't have to book a session here with one of the team,' he says.

It's significant that the first client to use the studio when it opened in October had visited ten days before the session and had noted that the place was still a mess. He said he would be coming in with artists and a film crew to film the recording and that it all had to be right. To their credit it was all ready although Lennart was fixing the PSU on the Hendrix just before the session started. 'We thanked the client after the session for their trust in us,' says Florian. 'He told us that he was sure we would be

ready on time because he couldn't believe we would be crazy enough to show him the mess beforehand if we didn't believe we could sort it out.'

Lessons have been learnt from this endeavour. 'We've all learnt things about each other,' laughs Lennart. 'When you're working on a construction site you really get to know each other well. When that client saw the room ten days before it was finished we all looked at each other and believed we could do it. That's important; that we came together and did it. Maybe we could have organised things better, there were time management issues but it still worked out.'

Florian mixes mostly and deals with the client bookings, Lennart does the books. Lennart is the man for mastering and aside from dealing with the projects mixed in house he is doing increasing mastering business for outside projects. Jeff does a lot of tracking band work and song writing and producing is Dominik's domain and has been a mainstay in the partnership. Most acts that track at the studio also mix here.

Florian adds that they have all been freelance and they all know how important it is to sell yourself, to talk to clients, to understand their business and to deliver. This contributes to the energy of High Tide.

There are plans to smarten up the outside and redo the kitchen but the priorities are to keep the studio busy and buzzing.

Florian: 'I like to work in studios with a minimum of two control rooms because in the afternoon you can stick your head in the other control room and listen to what they're doing and you give feedback to each other. That's worth a lot.'

Contact

HIGH TIDE STUDIOS, GERMANY

Website: www.hightide-studio.com

'That's the main reason to have a studio like this,' he says. 'The results are different. Everyone can have a Mac but not everyone can have a live room like this. We had a kids' choir in here — you can't have twelve kids in your living room!'

They do a lot of live band work with jazz ensembles and while the studio is unmistakably in the countryside it's easy for musicians to get to by car or by train direct from the centre of Cologne. Florian adds that with musicians doing more live work again, many of them are excited about getting into a studio that can actually capture them playing live; for many that's not been their way of recording.

They agree that for all the exciting possibilities offered by working with analogue rack gear and a DAW you can't beat the sheer convenience, enjoyment and speed of working on a good analogue board like the 56-channel Hendrix particularly when working with bands. They run Logic and Pro Tools which reflects the music creation and recording and mixing personas of the place.

Lennart and Dominik had used the M3As at the Coconut studio and grew to like them and saw them as natural monitors for the Hendrix room when it was being designed. However, all of them wanted a different monitor for Studio B and fell in love with Eve Audio SC408s which they deemed ideal for the smaller room. They even got to try them out in the part-built room and were convinced it was the right speaker for the room. 'We already owned some smaller SC207s so we knew what Eve Audio speakers sound like and how precise they are,' says Lennart. 'I was very excited about doing my first mix on the Eves when the room was finally finished because they are so precise,' adds Florian. 'These are speakers that you can get the exact and correct amount of reverb on for a voice.'

The SC408s are flush-mounted and work very well in a nice sounding room with a comfortable controlled acoustic. The Oxford is a desk that Florian got very used to in his life previous to High Tide. He says it is a fast console to work on that has systems and processes that are well optimised to music production duties.

The facility runs MADI throughout and has the ability to route any output to any input. Florian points out that they have clients who come into the room and mix in-the-box enjoying the monitoring environment and some analogue gear — he says you have to be flexible these days. 'We wanted to create a place where people could work in the rooms without us — there's always someone