

Neverland Say Die!

After four years of battling to get approval for another Melbourne nightclub, it turns out that Neverland isn't just another club after all. Using all facets of its hexagonal design, and scores of technology to boot, Neverland has positioned itself as one of Melbourne's premiere events spaces.

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Neverland almost never happened. Over the last couple of years — while Victoria police was rolling out its fleet of tricked out Humvees to scare troublemakers off the streets, and 2am lockouts were banded about to curtail alcohol-fuelled violence — Warren Amster, Manny Sanchez and their partners were trying to get approval for the new 1500-pax South Melbourne nightclub. Bad timing you could say. Possibly the worst when you factor in then Premier Brumby going on record as being in opposition to it opening.

Sanchez explains: “We had the lease and applied for a town planning permit that took 18 months and various VCAT hearings to get, but we won. The next stage was to get the license, and that should have been a walk in the park. It was another two years of VCAT hearings and battling. It was very draining because something that should have taken two years took four years to open. It was possibly the worst time to open up a club. We even had the Premier saying he didn't want us to open!”

OPENING DRAMA

It wasn't the brightest of starts for Neverland. But it hasn't been an easy run for nightclubs in general. Media beat-up or not, the fact is, Melbourne's streets look a bloody mess in the TV and papers, and to anyone with a sense of self preservation, the message is to 'stay away from the clubs'. It's a sentiment that isn't held by everyone, but for a club as big as Neverland even a slight swing to the 'minor parties' and small bars is palpable.

“In today's environment, clubs are too difficult to run on a weekly basis. Over the last three or four years all the articles read with a lot of negativity

about going out to nightclubs,” said Sanchez. The sheer size of the space is a big factor too. At the start of the night, Sanchez closes off the extremities of the room with curtains, containing the action to the dance floor. But as the night progresses and more punters filter in, he unveils the remainder of the club. “If you've got 800 kids in here — a lot of people in most clubs' eyes — and open up the whole venue, it looks quiet. But if you keep them in one side it keeps the vibe. That's why we curtain various areas off.”

RAISING THE CURTAIN

Neverland's 1400sqm size and hexagonal form factor was inherited from a Saab dealership, and Mercedes before that. It's a concentric design emanating from the dancefloor surrounded by raised bar areas opening onto outdoor beer gardens. There are two glassed off areas that can be used as VIP rooms, or as separate function areas. The tough operating environment for clubs means these rooms are getting plenty of use. The club nights are still drawing crowds, but the venue has embraced the corporate market; with a few good reasons why. “The whole venue is mainly LED based. There's not much décor, it's basically glass and we decorate it with lighting,” said Sanchez. “It's very high-tech in here at night, and it's very effective. When we first built the space we never really considered the corporate side of it, but as we've gone on we've realised there's a huge, huge market for it. That's the beauty of the venue, you could run three or four different events at the one time because it's so large and has different entrances. It's very versatile.”

Versatility is the aim of the game with the corporate market. And Neverland is a blank canvas with

colour-changing LEDs. Neverland has already hosted a number of high-profile launches, and their car showroom heritage has paid off with the ability to drive cars in and out of the front door for auto demonstrations.

The three outdoor areas are generous: copious wood decking, water-tanks recommissioned as LED cube structures, and an abundance of foliage visible from indoors. It's a departure from the basement concrete vista typical of most clubs, and an aspect that sets Neverland apart, according to Sanchez. “Those who've travelled compare this venue to a lot of venues overseas because it's more outdoor based. If you stand in here at night you can see all the giant ferns lit up. You don't get that environment in most nightclubs. Most nightclubs are dark, you're trying to get through the crowd, smoke everywhere. We're trying to be slightly different with the internal environment, and it's working.”

PRO SOUND

Flexibility was built into the makeup of Neverland. And the lighting and AV systems play a major role in its chameleon-like adaptations.

The dancefloor stage is more than just a DJ cage. Although the decks are out most nights, Neverland caters for live acts too, with indie queen Megan Washington and band performing at a recent uni night. With little more than bringing in a couple of mics, the sound system can handle anything thrown at it. Jonathon Sinclair (Systems Designer) and Stavros Hatzipantelis (Projects Manager) of Pro Light & Sound — after careful consultation with Neverland's owners — collaborated with Paul Polito of Group Technologies to design the audio system.

Pro Light & Sound ended up buying and commissioning a predominantly Nexo system that includes six Geo 12 line array boxes and three S2 subs each side of the stage as well as two PS15 speakers as stage fills, and a further two as booth monitors. A big emphasis was placed on having an even level throughout the venue, so the Geo 12s were angled to disperse the sound accurately around the dancefloor. An additional six Nexo PS10 speakers were installed as delay speakers and stage fills to even out the pockets and maintain the balanced level throughout the venue.

The entire system is driven by two Camco Vortex 6, a QPower 10 and an NX-Amp 4x1 amplifier, with speaker management handled by NX242ES4s and a Drawmer SP2120 for a bit of extra speaker protection, and PowerWise units to provide steady juice to the entire machine. The VIP rooms were also fitted with Nexo PS8 and PS10 speakers as well as Nexo LS400s, LS500s with Techton amplification. The VIP rooms were considerably smaller and their requirements were much simpler to meet. For the three outdoor sections, the club opted for four Quest MS801 speakers providing 240W of power, wall mounted and completely weather proof, driven by a QA-3004 amplifier in each of the three sections. According to Hatzipantelis, Pro Light & Sound couldn't be happier with their choice of audio system, and are “proud to incorporate it into their already extensive inventory.”

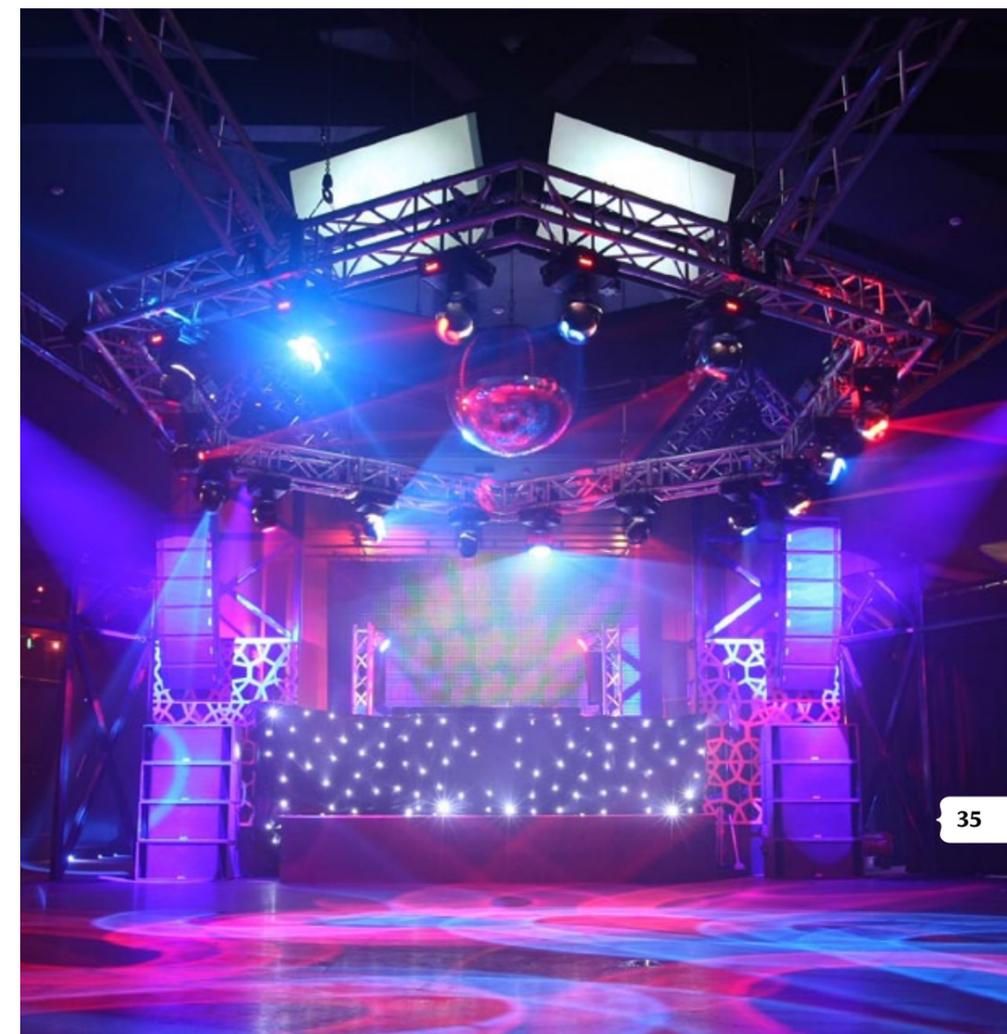
LIGHT WORK

Pro Light & Sound also dipped in and helped with the lighting and visuals. Sanchez already had a strong relationship with Pioneer, and commissioned commercial panels to be installed behind the bars and throughout the venue. Neverland director Phil Silverii also struck a deal with Show Technology for the LC Panels behind the stage. Pro Light & Sound had the job of taking what was already provided, and working out a lighting system that would suit the change between live band, nightclub and presentation modes. To that end, LED strips from the Pro Shop range were used for mood and bar lighting, and Martin DMX splitters were placed on the truss structure, with plenty of extra DMX points around the venue for maximum flexibility.

Pro Light & Sound worked extensively with Paul Nicolou of Show Technology to work out how to integrate the LC panels with the Arkaos video mixing and lighting software, as well as the Pioneer panels. This combined with Martin Entour moving light fixtures, LED Vbars and Studio Due Shark 150 lights provides a comprehensive and impressive lighting system that covers all of Neverland's bases from nightclub to corporate events. And Pro Light & Sound hired the main truss lighting to Neverland so it can take advantage of the latest lighting technology advances. [venue](http://www.venue.com.au)

CONTACTS

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Making the Cut: Thanks to a flexible layout and AV system, Neverland is an ideal corporate events space.

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