



The Velvet Rooms, Sligo

New standards for nightclubbing in Ireland's North West

With a population of 20,000 Sligo, situated in Northwest Ireland, is one of the country's largest conurbations. An increasingly busy airport - with regular flights from the UK and Ireland - has fuelled tourist and business traffic into the town in recent years. And over the past 18 months Sligo has seen an unprecedented level of investment, with EURO500 million committed to development of various aspects of infrastructure - both roads and telecommunications, as well as tourism, accommodation, leisure amenities, retail, administration and education. All of which bodes well for the city's newest and most glamorous nightclub, The Velvet Room: itself representing a significant investment from an operator looking to establish his venue as a landmark on the Irish club scene.

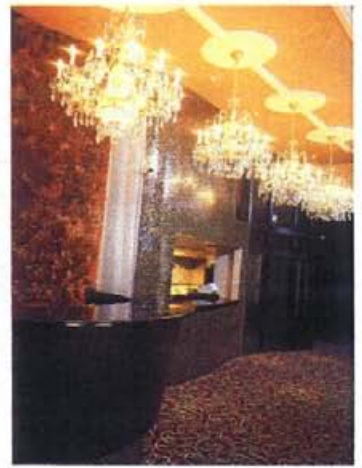
A reincarnation of a 200-year-old derelict stone brewery on the banks of the Garavogue river, Philip McGarry's 1500 capacity, EURO2.2 million venture shows every sign of fulfilling its owner's aim.

An experienced operator with another club already operating in the town, McGarry knew that the input of capable contractors would be crucial in achieving his goal. To create the right aesthetic, he turned to Dublin-based interior designers John Duffy Design - whose high-profile projects include Ten Square and Stiff Kitten in Belfast - asking that they contrast the rugged industrialism of the reconditioned shell with a modern sense of opulence that would appeal to an older audience.

He also drafted in installers Reynolds of Rephoe - with whom he had a ten year relationship

through their work at his other Sligo nightclub - to supply a heavyweight sound, light and video installation utilising an arsenal of cutting edge entertainment technology. Rather than create a plush lounge bar, McGarry also wanted his venue to have the capacity to function as a full-on nightclub. Working in tandem, these key contractors would help him achieve his goal. Explains principal designer Jayne Underhill, who submitted the first plans in August 2005 and saw the project through to completion in April: "We set out with the intention of creating something that hadn't been seen before - instilling a real sense of hotel standard luxury. When we arrived on site the shell had already been conditioned and it was up to us to plan and create the interior. The initial idea was to mix the old with the new, and to add modern

technology to create a great atmosphere. We began with a lot of space planning to locate the toilets, cloakroom, dancefloor, office areas, et cetera. We then worked within the repaired stone walls, adding decorative metal panels to highlight the original openings in the warehouse." These hard details are softened by classical plaster cornices, luxurious plush velvets and heavily patterned wallpapers - which feature contemporary interpretations of traditional, period prints. The expansive use of polished stone on nearly every available new surface contrasts with the original fabric of the building; backlit onyx panels highlight beautiful patterns in the stone which form the sleek bars. Seemingly limitless lighting effects add warmth and depth. The natural stone from which the club was built acted as a canvas onto



which the changing colour of Pulsar ChromaRange fixtures provided subtle, complementary effects. Owner, designers and installers worked together to make the most of LED lighting on the various glass features and, in particular, in the smoking area – where ChromaScapes in the fountain are very dramatic. The potential of the sense of scale in the cavernous warehouse has also been fully exploited. Oversized decorative chandeliers hang from the ceiling, and in the centre of a huge void interconnecting the two floors acrobats perform suspended above the dancefloor on ribbons strung from the rafters. As impressive as the chandeliers – and much more conducive to dancing – is an unmissable array of JBL speakers designed to deliver devastatingly loud, crisp audio to enthused clubbers on the dancefloor below. "The initial brief was to create the best venue in the North West," recalls Declan Reynolds, when NIGHT asks him to explain his selection of products. With 25 years experience in the club

installation business Reynolds of Rephoe were confident they could meet this brief. "Phillip wanted to create a landmark venue – something that would eclipse local and regional competition. We considered using various brands of sound and light equipment but in the end, to meet the owner's requirements, we developed systems based on the best quality equipment: JBL speakers, Clay Paky effects lighting and BSS control." Alongside the speakers, at various levels up into the high ceiling void, Clay Paky effects lighting are situated on bespoke trussing: producing great effects around the dancefloor and helping set the scene for late night revellers as they continue on into the night. "Having supplied Phillip with Clay Paky for his other club we've experienced how reliable it is first hand, and so it was the natural choice," says Reynolds. As well as sound and light, video plays a significant role - used throughout the club to add interest and energy. In the typically hands-on style that characterised his management of

the project, McGarry encouraged Reynolds of Rephoe to develop the video specification from a few video screens to include ten 42" Samsung plasmas, numerous screens and a 10ft by 6ft feature wall in the lobby – made from a series of small, white-sprayed wooden squares – onto which the resident VJ feeds images through a high resolution InFocus 3500 short throw projector. What is most impressive about The Velvet Rooms is that, as well as juxtaposing old and new, it also manages to offer something for everyone. Those who want a high energy club experience will be delighted by the dancefloor. Those looking for more of an exclusive, VIP-style experience will find they are provided for elsewhere. "We created the dancefloor at ground floor level and the idea was that the upstairs – the balcony area – would provide a bit of a respite," says Underhill. "There we created a very luxurious facility using extravagant fabrics, plush furnishings and decorative, mosaic walls, which has a really exclusive feel. The idea was that

customers up here – in what we called the West Wing – had a real five star sense of luxury. They could book a table by buying a bottle of spirits, would have table service, that kind of thing. The people who use this part of the club can have a very different experience from those downstairs." In creating the Velvet Rooms, McGarry et al have breathed life back into a stunning venue to offer discerning revellers a complete change from the norm.

CREDITS

The Velvet Room
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 T : +353 71 914 4721
 Owner : Phillip McGarry
 Interior Design : John Duffy Design
 Furniture : Plush Interiors
 Fire Consultants : Jeremy Gardner Associates
 Main Contractors : TBC
 Lighting Installation : LED Group
 Entry & Cloakroom Systems : Q Systems