

AIR Studios Opens Two New Mastering Suites in London



Alchemy Mastering at AIR has relocated from Hammersmith to AIR Studio's iconic Lyndhurst premises in London where two new mastering suites have been built to accommodate the business, now known as AIR Mastering. When the AIR Studios acquired Bary Grint and Phil Kinrade's Alchemy mastering house in 2020, it stated that its long-term aim was to house the entire mastering business under one roof. The completion of two new suites, along with an upgrade of AIR's existing mastering facility at its Lyndhurst premises, has brought this plan to fruition and given AIR's international client base access to state of the art studios operated by a team of exceptionally talented mastering engineers.

"Mastering is an important part of AIR's business and therefore it makes good commercial sense to invest in facilities and equipment that give AIR Mastering a competitive edge," says Nikki Affleck, manager of AIR Mastering. "Our new studios are specifically built for this purpose. As well as incorporating the best equipment on the market, they are also acoustically accurate, aesthetically pleasing and very comfortable places for staff and customers to spend time in."

Veteran mastering engineer Barry Grint, who has more than 30 years' experience of building and operating world class mastering facilities, took charge of studio design using a modular system supplied by custom-build specialists CIPOD.

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“CIPOD panels consist of a metal back plate and mesh front plate with rockwool filler between them,” Barry Grint explains, “This ensures high levels of soundproofing and exceptional acoustics, which is important for mastering as you need to hear every detail of the track you are working on. As the panels slot together easily, we were also able to reduce the amount of time it took to build each room.”

Richard Gibbs, CIPOD director, says: “CIPOD is delighted that its collaboration with AIR Studios has resulted in two outstanding Mastering rooms. These rooms will make a superb addition to AIR Studios’ services and allow the facility to build on the exceptional services it provides to its clients.”

Barry Grint adds that a thoroughly modern feel has been achieved by installing less intrusive bespoke consoles and equipment racks that have minimal impact on the soundfield. “We have worked hard to ensure that each room meets the same high standard so that projects can be easily transferred between them. This is why we have chosen the same monitoring for each room. All three rooms are equipped with ATC SCM150 monitor speakers and use Sequoia mastering software with an extensive array of plugins.”

With vinyl cutting accounting for nearly 70% of AIR Mastering’s business, Grint has specified Neumann VMS80 lathes for all three studios, and these have been modified so that they can make half speed cuts.

“Alchemy and AIR have always had a strong reputation for cutting vinyl and given the current resurgence in this format it is important that Air Mastering’s equipment is of the highest standard,” he says. “Having the ability to cut at half speed is attracting a lot of interest because labels understand that this gives them a quality product, which in turn can be retailed at a higher price point.” Grint adds that for cutting from analogue tape, AIR Mastering also has a Studer A80 preview machine, which has been modified to use Ampex ATR100 playback electronics.

Mastering 1, AIR’s existing studio that was originally opened in 2006 and was home to Ray Staff for many years, is now the domain of Phil Kinrade. A specialist in catalogue, mainstream, compilations, and restoration, Kinrade has worked with iconic artists such as Elton John, Blondie, The Specials, Fun Lovin’ Criminals and Donna Summer. More recently he has mastered Grammy Award-winning Amy Wadge’s EP *When Did you Get That Old* and remastered Ultravox’s *Vienna 40th Anniversary Delux Edition*.

Mastering 2 houses engineers John Webber and Jasper Ward. Located opposite Mastering 1, this studio has an extensive range of outboard equipment from manufacturers such as Sontec, Manley, API, Thermionic Culture, Crane Song, Chandler and Dangerous Music. John Webber’s credit list includes extensive work with David Bowie, and artists such as Benjamin Clementine, George Michael, Clean Bandit, MF DOOM, Duran Duran, Primal Scream, Rodrigo Y Gabriela, Echo & The Bunnymen, Clint Mansell and Anna Meredith. Jasper Ward’s credit list includes

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artists such as Yard Act, David Bowie. Purple Disco Machine, M Huncho, and Olivia Dean.

Mastering 3 is centered around a Maselec control system with outboard equipment from Sontec, Elysia, Dangerous Music and Whitestone. This studio is home to Barry Grint and Cicely Balston. Grint's extensive credit list includes George Ezra, King Krule, Kamasi Washington, Simply Red, Madonna, Van Halen, Aha!, Soft Cell, R.E.M, INXS and Guns N' Roses, to name just a few. Cicely Balston, currently shortlisted for the 2023 MPG Mastering Award, has worked with artists such as Nubya Garcia, Witch Fever, Soweto Kinch and Sam Ryder. Balston also worked on the vinyl masters for Simply Red, David Bowie, Funeral for a Friend and Porcupine Tree.

Alchemy's formidable reputation in the mastering field, combined with AIR's iconic status as the studio founded by legendary Beatles producer and composer Sir George Martin, adds kudos to any project mastered at the Lyndhurst premises.

AIR Studios director Kamila Serkebaeva says: "Now that our goal of gathering a leading team, of mastering engineers under one roof at AIR has been achieved, we can't wait to welcome new and existing clients in the brand new rooms."

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