

Influential operator Larry Seymour of The Mint Group talks to Rachel Esson about the challenge of entertaining a city crowd round the clock, why he is the man with everything and what the company's expansion plans really entail.

Seducing the square mile

Larry Seymour, Operations Director of The Mint Group, smiled proudly at the luxurious surroundings when NIGHT asked him about the company's latest venue Mary Janes. Looking at home in one of the venue's secluded booths, he says: "I think we've done a very good job of the design with Paul Daly. It's textured, there's lots of different levels of detail, it's a stunning environment and we've received very positive

those in sync and blend them together without being too far in one direction, that's how you create interest."

INTERVIEW



Benchmark's pewter bar is a striking feature as you enter Mary Janes; its mirrored, curved surface adds texture and elegance to the bar on the ground floor

music venues. No two venues in the seven-strong estate are the same. Each boasts its own unique personality and style; Mary Janes is "feminine (obviously) and homely in feel", a true "lady of leisure". When NIGHT met Larry during the day at Mary Janes the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly. Although humble about his personal achievements and career, Larry was keen to discuss the acquisitional nature of The Mint Group, which was founded by Alex Rutherford and

and a party-led atmosphere. Key features in both are pre-bookable booths and areas to appeal to both the corporate and leisure market, whilst in the Bison & Bird Sky Sports will be broadcast.

Larry joined The Mint Group when they owned just one venue, Infernos, and he's now into his fifth year with the company. "I guess what's nice about us is that we have a very varied estate and a very successful business in terms of turnover," he states. Infernos is one

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Olly Bengough in 2001. "The Mint Group is a forward-thinking company; we've got a great team, some great products, great vision, huge amounts of energy and a collection of like minded people, which is a pretty strong force," he enthused.

Mary Janes is one of two recent additions to Mint Group, which also includes Bison & Bird on Clapham High Street, south west London, and follows on from Infernos in Clapham, Elk Bar in Fulham, acclaimed music venue and events space KOKO in Camden, together with The Ranch bars in Twickenham and Bristol. Previously Fine Line bars, both new venues provide an informal setting for all-day casual dining, a strong range of drinks, late licence

of the capital's last surviving 70s discotheques and remains a nightlife institution with over 3,500 guests passing through its doors every weekend. It was formerly owned by Charlie Chaplain in its day and it has a huge amount of character, with period fittings and features.

However, the biggest milestone for The Mint Group was the acquisition of the former Victorian Theatre, Camden Palace in 2005. Larry explained: "KOKO was a building that in its life had always enjoyed a great deal of success. The challenge was to find a format for that for 2004 and beyond, bringing it up to date, and making the investment which it needed, putting the right technical spec in there and having the business model to

deliver a five-seven day operation." KOKO is a multi-faceted venue and one of the city's best live music destinations, showcasing acts, as well as worldwide superstars, including Madonna, Coldplay and Prince. KOKO also hosts high profile corporate events such as the Elton John Aids Foundation, successful club nights such as Club NME and The A Chart Show for Channel 4. Larry was keen to stress the importance of KOKO and the live music sector for the company going forward. "Increasingly live performance is a big part of an artist's activity and we'd love to develop our presence with KOKO - that will be a careful move in terms of the brand and brand monetar. We don't want to have one in town, but we do want to develop here and abroad," he said.

In addition to The Mint Group's bars and music venues, the company has diversified by staging the first ever festival event on Clap Common in 2002, bringing artists such as Paul Oakenfold, Moloko and Jamiroquai to South London for 60,000-strong audiences and by launching TMG Properties in 2005, an arm of the company dedicated toward urban development.

Mary Janes marks the company's first foray into the City, where Larry says, there's "ready market" if you create the right offer. The 7,000 square feet, all-day bar has a 40 capacity and is spread across two floors. Following a 12 week build and major structural work the venue now features an open plan and frosted glass-floored mezzanine balcony. "For me it's a very interesting shape," said Larry. "It's not a little bit of ground floor trading with a basement, it's very open plan so there's lots of light flowing through the building. Design wise we've played with the light via the glass floor." The light glass floor contrasts with the ruby red drapes across front windows, and together with a program of the music leading up to DJ sets into the late night, allows the ambience to evolve throughout the day.

The building's shape presented challenges for Turbosound Ltd, who designed the sound system to give an even coverage across the venue with more energy focused on the lower level dance floor. "The NuQ series was chosen for this installation for its superior sound quality and small and un-obtrusive format, which were high on our client's list priorities," said Turbosound's Paul McManus.

Vintage chic sweeps through the venue, with stylish Jacobean oak detailing and floor handmade iron balustrade gracing the two feature staircases. Traditional lighting, elegant chandeliers and lampshades, supplied by Kensington Lighting, add to the ornate style whilst an aquarium adds VIP interest. Larry commented: "We work very closely with



BELOW: The red back-bar emphasises Mary Janes' extensive drinks offering. BELOW RIGHT: The elaborately crafted Jacobean staircase in full view

VITAL STATISTICS

Mary Janes
124-127 Minories
London
EC3N 1NT
Tel: 020 7481 8195
Owner: The Mint Group

Hours

Mon-Wed 12pm-12am // Thu-Fri 12pm-2am // Sat-Sun 11am-11pm

Key Contractors

Sound Installation: Turbosound Ltd // Main Contractor: [unclear]
Interior Designer: Mint Group and Daly Design // Sound System Design: Turbosound Ltd // Sound Installation: Rag [unclear]
// Light Installation: TEE // Decorative Lighting: Kensington Lighting // Preter Bars: Benchmark // Refrigeration: [unclear] Bars and Refrigeration // TAV Systems: Zonal

Drinks

Pouring Spirits: Vahalla Vodka, Bombay Sapphire, Jack Daniels, Bacardi Superior, Sauza Tequila, Luxardo Sambuca, Whisky // Premium draught lager: £3.20 (San Miguel), // Standard draught lager: £3.10 (Fosters), pint // Lead £3.30 (Carona) // Lead RTD: £3.40 (Smirnoff Ice) // Co list: Yes

Technology

Sound system: 12 x Turbosound Impact 50, 3 x TS subwoofers, 10 x NuQ-8, 2 x NuQ-815, 2 x Technics turntable SL210, 2 x Pioneer CDT 100 CD players, Pioneer DMP600, PC Pentium Duo Core 2mb2 512m RAM compact 800 H Powering and Control: Soundweb BSS 9088 x, 3 x 15 amp, 3 x Crown Amps CTS 1200, 12 x Impact 50 speakers

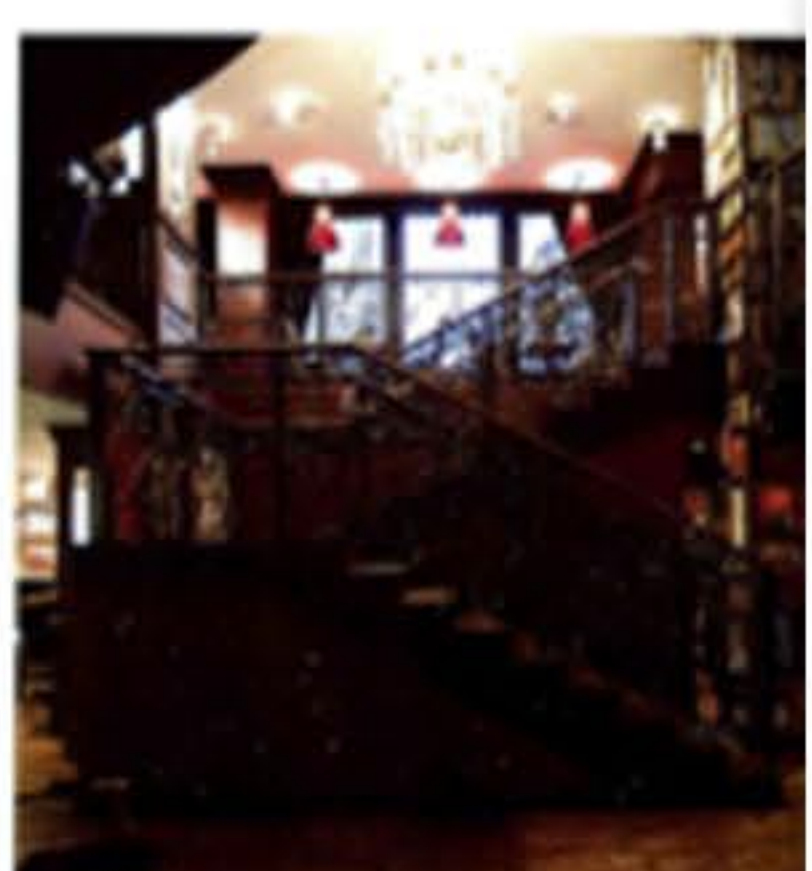
Paul of Daly Design: we've got strong ideas and we know where we want to go so what we need is a creative partner who can bring bits of excellence and magnificence, but also allow us to see our points and have our points accommodated so the end product fits our vision." And what is this vision? "Exactly what you see," he replied. "Mary Janes is really special."

Venture through to the back of the bar and you'll find yourself facing a stunning scarlet-lit, floor to ceiling alchemist's collection of bottles showcasing an extensive range of drinks. The drinks and cocktail menu, which includes over 30 types of wine, homemade confectionary-inspired Sweet Shop Shooters and other "premium and obscure drinks", caters for daytime trading, after work drinks and evening visitors. Exclusive to Mary Janes in the UK is the Frida Kahlo range of tequila, a trio of super premium tequilas inspired by the famous Mexican female artist. The offer came about after Larry met the owner of the brand in Miami. "It's ultra premium, quite niche, and comes in a handcrafted bottle; it's a perfect signature for Mary Janes alongside our

other tequila brands," said Larry.

A Champagne Club has been tailored for Square Mile drinkers who can indulge in a range of fine Champagnes by the glass from 5-7pm. But the main challenge, says Larry, was to create a suitable food offering. "There was an opportunity for food sales at lunch, early evening and late night, so from a design point of view the challenge was how to exploit these opportunities without compromising its status as a late night destination, by making it too much like a restaurant," he mused. Mary Janes' all-day menu of informal dishes is about having all your heart desires. With 'make your own' burgers, salads and old-fashioned ice cream sundaes, customers can pick and choose toppings.

The horizon is dotted with future projects for the Mint Group. They recently announced plans for expansion, hoping to open a further four bars across London and the south east over the next year. More specifically they aim to increase their presence in the City following the success of Mary Janes. Larry claims they have daring and ambitious plans for 2008. "We've got the expertise, management



platform, business model, huge brand value and a very loyal customer base; all that's left to contend with is finding the right location. We'd love to do something overseas, and that's very tempting," he revealed.

Larry sees an opportunity with both KOKO and Infernos to create like business. "We'll do something in 2009 with them, not necessarily in London, but certainly in the UK. Everywhere we look we see opportunity," he enthused. ■