

Production lines

For the acoustic design and building of a voiceover studio in Ambassadors studios' new Amsterdam Herengracht facility, the company assigned studio builders KBIMF to lead the project. **Marc Maes** took a look around and sent back this report...



Baay watch: Marco Baay

Ambassadors is a creative production studio and a market-leading caterer for film creation and production, visual effects, post production, sound design, music composition and recording. An international crew of some 60 staffers all work under the same umbrella serving the film, video and advertising market. Its main production headquarters (comprising five audio studios, a grading suite and seven online and offline image/video studios) are located in the Zeeburg East Amsterdam area.

In June 2017, Ambassadors decided to open a new studio. Located in the historical centre of Amsterdam, the Herengracht studio multiplex is currently targeting the international creative industry. "The Amsterdam canal district is becoming an international creative

cluster where advertising agencies and related business find each other," explains Ed Meijaard, managing director and founding partner of Ambassadors.

In addition to video editing, video post production suites and a grading room, Ambassadors also incorporated a new audio post production and voiceover studio in the building. Marco Baay, who joined Ambassadors as sound designer and partner in 2016, and the studio management team, carried out extensive market research and decided to appoint KBIMF for the acoustic design, furniture and integration of the voiceover studio in a vast living room space on the first floor at the Herengracht location.

The fact that the studio had to be constructed in a such a large building, taking into account parameters such as the stability and acoustic characteristics of the

walls, floor, ceiling and the neighbouring properties, proved to be quite a challenge for KBIMF.

"After we went through the architecture of the building we decided to adapt the original plans for the location of the studio," comments Okke Van Bergen, managing director of KBIMF. "It turned out that on the initial position, the floor would collapse under the weight of the voiceover booth and equipment. Bearing in mind the architectural and monumental regulations, we had to safeguard the original building and had to move the voiceover set-up to another position in the same room.

He continued: "The floors had to be levelled and the whole set-up was built as a demountable concept because, eventually, the room must be brought back in its original state if and when Ambassadors should decide to leave the premises."



“

**WE PLAY IN THE CHAMPIONS
LEAGUE OF OUR INDUSTRY.
EVERY DETAIL MUST BE PERFECT,
FROM THE INITIAL RECORDINGS
TO THE FINAL MIX**
MARCO BAAY

”

“The initial idea of the new studio was to make people feel at home in a spacious but cosy living room looking out over Herengracht canal.

“We wanted to integrate the voiceover studio and control section without changing the original interior of the room. We put the engineer’s position on a stage offering better visibility to the recording booth and improving communication with the clients.”

“The studio had to sound as dry as possible, without any sound leakage from the outside to the inside,” Baay elaborates. “A recording may never be disturbed by a call or a director who is giving some remarks in the background. We play in the Champions League of our industry. Every detail must be perfect, from the initial recordings to the final mix. I have known Okke van Bergen for many years. He has designed and decorated several studios for me. After years of cooperation, Okke knows exactly what a studio needs, both in equipment and acoustics.”

The voiceover booth was constructed as a box-in-box room, guaranteeing optimal insulation values. “After we carried out the acoustic design and calculated the absorption and diffusion we put in place several test-configurations,” says Van Bergen. “With Marco testing the set-up, we adjusted the acoustic elements to get the sound he wanted to have in the booth. As for the engineer’s position in the living room, the combination of a pair of PSI A17-M active monitor nearfields and acoustic panels on the backwall worked out well.”

A large television display with a soundbar is placed under the voiceover studio window to demonstrate how the audio content sounds ‘at home’.

Loyal to the company’s adage that all of Ambassadors studios had to be fully compatible offering maximal flexibility, the new voiceover studio was equipped with a basic set of equipment: an Avid Pro Tools HD12 system with plugins like Waves, Altiverb reverb, Speakerphone 2, Oxford Sonnox Oxford V3 plugins, a Source Connect AoIP plugin, the PSI A17-M monitors with an SPL MTC Monitor & Talkback Controller monitor controller, a high quality Brauner VM1 microphone and TC Electronics Clarity M loudness metering. “The studio also uses a Neve 5012 Portico Duo pre-amp and a 5043 Duo compressor/limiter,” says Van Bergen. “Marco Baay liked the combination of the pre-amp with this specific configuration.”

The studio is connected with the Ambassadors servers at the East Amsterdam headquarters via a dark fibre link, virtually establishing one huge obstacle-free studio landscape. “The big advantage is that we concentrate our servers in Zeeburg – all of our image and sound studios are connected in the Dynamic Drive Pool (DDP) network supplied by Ardis Technologies,” concludes Meijaard. “Our business requires the swift and quick transfer of audio content and large image files for production and grading, and that’s where the DDP comes in. Our clients have the option to work either from our Zeeburg HQ or at the central hub at the Herengracht.” ■