

NETHERLANDS

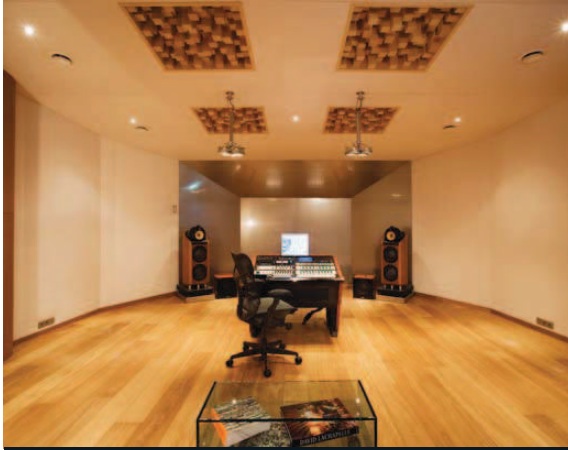
Masters of their art

Darius van Helfteren's new facility is up and running, and he's confident of success. **Jim Evans** reports

The premier league of European mastering houses has a new player. Recently opened, Amsterdam Mastering is owned and operated by the familiar face of Darius van Helfteren. Formerly with Wisseloord Studios, he was born and raised in London, UK, to a Dutch father and Iranian mother and has been living in the Netherlands for about 13 years.

"I've been mastering for about 12 years, the last eight of them as chief mastering engineer at Wisseloord Studios in Hilversum," says van Helfteren. "I work on all genres from hip-hop to jazz, musicals to metal, and pride myself on my versatility and ability to master in different styles – let's face it, a metal album needs a very different approach to an audiophile jazz project.

"My music background ranges from classical training as a child to playing jazz and pop later. I have also been a professional club DJ and producer as well as having done the SAE in London. My interest in mastering started from my experience of playing my own productions in clubs. Sometimes the results were very disappointing sound-wise, and this led me on a quest to find out



Hand-picked kit from the likes of Bowers & Wilkins and RME feature in the facility

The studio is a cockpit design, floating bunker construction, isolated down to 10Hz, and features some interesting technical innovations in acoustic design and construction.

Although the interior of the studio is a spacious 42sqm, the 12" thick floating concrete base actually covers

room ever built in Europe. Although there has probably been a five-fold increase in mastering studios in the past 10 years, there are very few that have invested in a great room – a room like this costs at least 10 times what a decent mastering rig costs – so this is what will keep Amsterdam Mastering ahead of the pack. Apart from the studio, I believe I have the skills and experience to make full use of the room's potential and Amsterdam is ideally located for the European market."

And what's special, different about Amsterdam Mastering? "Apart from the amazing room, it's the attitude. No ivory tower approach here, customer is king, and I focus on giving clients a mastering that will play well in real-world situations, not just on great systems in a great room. To me, music is about communication, and great mastering is about helping the artist to communicate to the world in the best way possible."

After just a few months in business, the bookings are coming in steadily, with around 50% of clients from the Netherlands and 50% international. "Our customers range from major Dutch artists like Bertolf and Miss Montreal, and international artists such as Akon and Judas Priest, to independent artists and labels and even some amateur home recordists," says van Helfteren. "Everyone is welcome here."

Is he happy with the way the facility has turned out? "I'm extremely happy. The reactions of everyone have been nothing short of amazing. But the biggest benefit is simply how easy it is to work in the room. The guesswork has been removed, now it's simply a case of listening and making decisions, no more wondering what the room is contributing to what I'm hearing."

And confident for the future? "Very confident. Our online mastering service is booming. It seems like, with so many online services available that only boast a great rack full of gear, a great room is an important factor in people choosing a studio."

www.amsterdammastering.com

"Amsterdam Mastering will succeed because it's probably the most high-end mastering room ever built in Europe"

how to make music communicate as intended on various playback systems."

The idea to build his own studio started in late 2007 when he began talking to the bank, and acousticians, and looking at potential properties. In January 2008 he purchased the building, and appointed Northward Acoustics, whose recent projects include Euphonic Masters in Memphis, Split Second Sound, Amsterdam and Focal Pro's new test room. Building started in August 2008 and was completed in January this year.

At the heart of Amsterdam Mastering is one of the most high-end mastering rooms to be found anywhere in the world. It was designed by Thomas Jouanjean of Northward Acoustics and built by a team of specialist craftsmen.

72sqm, testament to the fact that in terms of isolation and absorption, this is a no-compromise design.

Gear is "hand-picked from the best analogue and digital equipment available", and includes technology from API, Cranesong, Thermionic Culture, Weiss, Bowers & Wilkins, Velodyne, Z-Sys, RME and Hypex, with custom studio furniture from Sterling Modular.

"We are offering only stereo mastering – not surround at this point," emphasises van Helfteren. "We specialise only in mastering, not mixing or production."

There's no shortage of mastering facilities, so why does he believe his project will succeed? "Amsterdam Mastering will succeed because it's probably the most high-end mastering



Darius van Helfteren in his 'no-compromise design' studio



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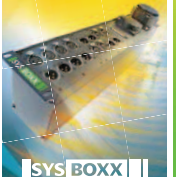
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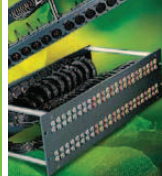
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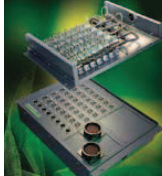


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