

# The sound doctor

Some men compile mixtapes for their mates. For Rob Wood, it's what he does for a living.

Stay at any five-star hotel in the world from Dubai to Dallas, and the chances are your ears will be fed an instantly forgettable diet of what is commonly referred to as “chill-out music”. You know the kind: lo-fi beats, a synth sound, maybe some soothing dolphin noises thrown in for good measure.

Unobtrusive it may be, but it brings a drab aural uniformity to a place that should be striving for individuality in every possible way. Londoner Rob Wood, a former DJ and music journalist, realised this and formed Music Concierge, a consultancy service that creates bespoke soundtracks for luxury brands, boutique hotels and high-end retail and lifestyle spaces. A vinyl junky since he was nine, Rob has managed to combine his passion with his career – a career that takes him to hotels and boutiques around the world. As well as quizzing Rob about his rather enviable job, we asked him to compile a soundtrack for Dubai.

## What gave you the idea to form such a company?

Nineteen years' music industry experience as a DJ, music magazine editor, music consultant, and programme director for Groove Armada's Lovebox festival means I have always acted as a filter – matching the right music to a specific audience. I was asked by the boutique hotel experts Mr & Mrs Smith to collate the tracklistings for their CD albums. I was then invited to DJ in some amazing hotels. It was there that I realised that most hotels spent lots of time and money thinking about how they looked, but not about how they sounded. They were either all sounding the same by playing Café-Del-Buddha-Bar-by-numbers, or allowing the venue manager to put on his favourite DJ mix. Staying in a destination hotel is all about giving each guest an incredible sensory experience. Music should

be a key part of this. Hearing is the second most important human sense after all. So in 2007 I set up Music Concierge to offer hotels, luxury brands and high-end retailers a service that bought together extensive music expertise with a seamless method of delivering regularly updated playlists.

## Are you the only company doing this?

There are other companies but they all offer mass-market generic music to mainstream hotels and chains like McDonalds. Music Concierge is the only company

offering credible, high-quality content within the context of a completely bespoke service. Our service is also the only one run by music industry professionals, all of whom are passionate and knowledgeable music fans. We go to great lengths to find new and unusual tracks. I go record shopping all over the world – from Manhattan to the street markets of Bangkok.

## Have you worked with any Dubai hotels/brands yet?

Yes. We work with brands that want to create extraordinary sensory experiences.

**How receptive were people to the idea of bespoke soundtracks in the beginning? Did it take time for them to grasp the concept?** Savvy brands got it very quickly. The concept of sensory branding has now come to the foreground where brands realise that a printed logo is no longer enough to resonate with an audience. How your brand 'feels' and sounds is now seen as crucial to creating an engaging customer experience.

## Do you spend a lot of your time in the various hotels and venues for which you compile the soundtracks?

Yes, I get asked to travel to some incredible places and consult on the music – from luxury stores in Paris to the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

## Are the licensing problems easy to overcome, and have any artists refused to have their music featured on one of your soundtracks?

Music licensing is expensive and complicated. There is nothing easy about it, but it's important to get it right so that musicians and record labels are supported. Artists have never refused to be playlisted. Most artists and labels are very keen for us to give them exposure.

## DUBAI TRACKLISTING

1. Dub Pistols – *Back To Daylight*  
This track always reminds me of seeing the city's skyline at dawn whilst flying in to the airport.
2. Gorillaz – *Stylo* (Alex Metric mix)  
One of the strongest pop tracks of the year made over for the dance floor.
3. Hurts – *Wonderful Life*  
An Eighties' sound, this could work as the Dubai tourist office's theme tune.
4. Aloe Blacc – *I Need A Dollar*  
A pertinent song full of soul.
5. King Roc – *The Beginning*  
Perfect soundtrack for night-time driving through the neon-lit city.

[www.musicconcierge.co.uk](http://www.musicconcierge.co.uk)

