

# SUPPER

GLOBAL HOTEL F&B

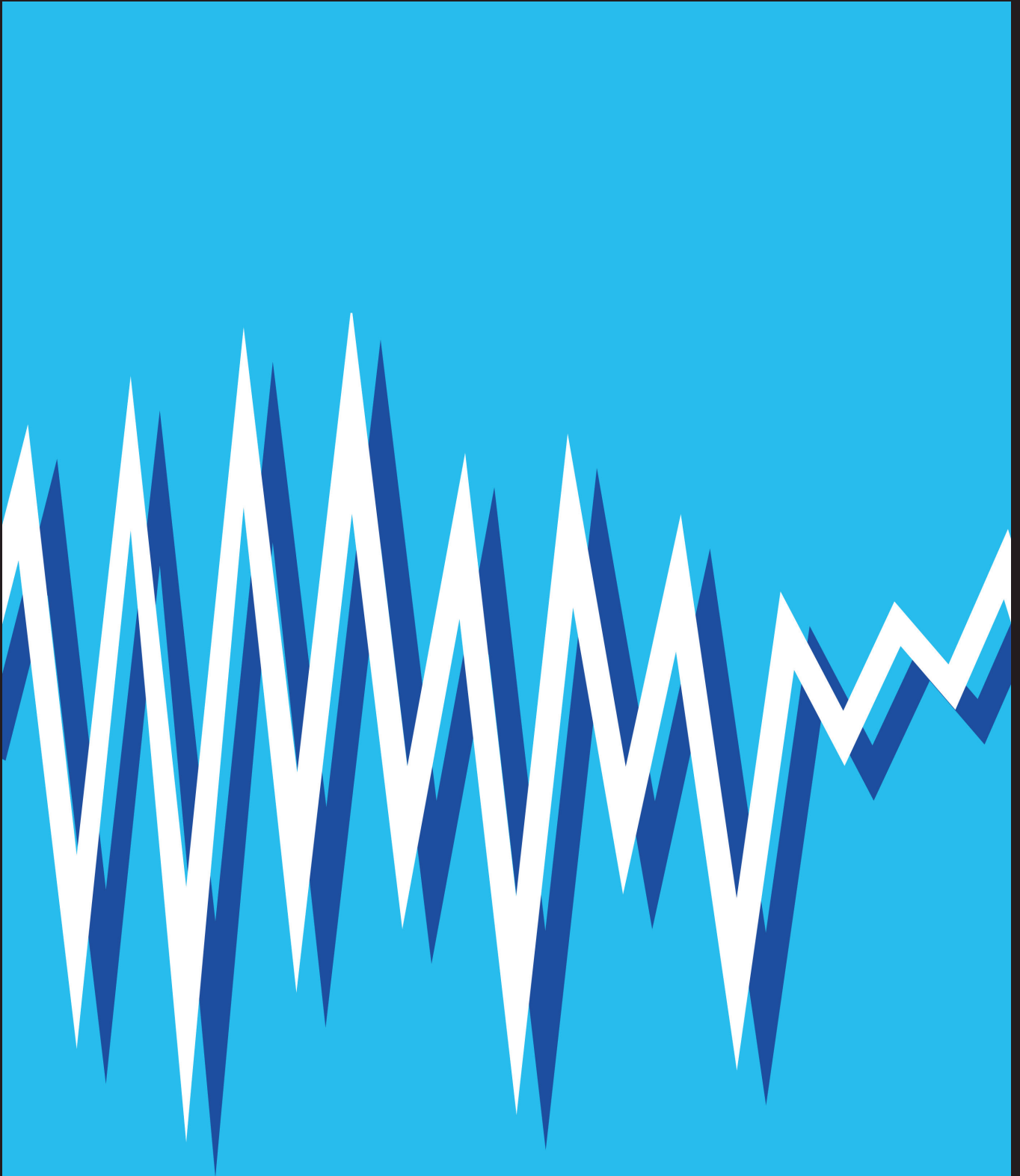
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# Music To The Ears

Words: Lauren Ho

An often-unconsidered afterthought, background music is getting its moment in the limelight as brands recognise its value.

**D**o you know your Paul Desmond from your Desmond Dekker? Chances are you probably don't. If you do, then you could be just the person Rob Wood is looking to recruit. But not before you pass a series of rigorous written tests and interviews - details of which are kept tightly under wraps for fear of revealing his 'trade secret'. All we can disclose is that a CV is not a priority.

No, this isn't the application process for a job at the secret service. It is however, Wood's sure-fire method of employing just the right person to join his team of gurus at Music Concierge, a company that, in short, delves deep into the psyche of a brand to hand pick the right tunes to help it perform better.

## DRINKS

Wood, who describes himself as a 'bit of a music fanatic' – the kid whose task at school was to provide the mix tapes for parties – is the product of the club scene that exploded across the UK in the early 1990s. Acknowledging he was in the right place at the right time, his informal path into DJing kick-started his career as a music journalist – most notably as the editor of cult magazine *Jockey Slut* – before he met a certain James Lohan, better known as the founder of the boutique hotel booking website, Mr & Mrs Smith.

Side-lining as a hotel reviewer for the company, Wood started to notice an obvious lack of considered music at the properties he was visiting, thus Music

As a result, Music Concierge has a substantial portfolio of upscale clients that includes retail, such as the British luxury goods brand Mulberry, and – perhaps unsurprisingly – an impressive line up of hospitality companies such as London's Connaught and Rosewood properties, Como Hotels and Resorts, The Upper House in Hong Kong and also restaurant groups such as The Ivy and Corbin and King in London. Jaime Faus, general manager at the Pullman in Jakarta, who worked with Wood at the group's St Pancras property, says: "Music is essential. It's a way of emotionally connecting with people. If the music is great, people will enjoy themselves more,

Concierge was born. "A great hotel is about escapism and appealing to the human senses," he explains. "Sight, taste and touch – be it via the interior decoration, the food or the quality of the linen – are always thought of but, for me, it was clear that sound was very much an afterthought, often left to the bar manager to put on some awful techno music at breakfast or something."

Of course Wood isn't exactly chartering new territory here. Mega high street retailers such as Boots the chemist or McDonald's have always used the services of background music suppliers, but as large corporate companies, Wood wanted to move away from their 'generic and poorly conceived' offerings to supply luxury companies a brand-focused solution. "I wanted to come up with something from a real music-train spotter-passion culture. The key thing for me was the understanding of the brand."

they will likely feel a synergy with the brand and they will repeat visit."

So, assuming it's not as simple as creating a mix tape, how detailed is the exact process behind the scenes? Wood, for one, does not authorise new recruits to engage with a client for at least a year, if



not two. During this time, they are learning how to follow briefs, gaining playlist design experience and navigating their way around Music Concierge's extensive library - where over 270 styles of music are maintained. Following this, both companies place a lot of emphasis on the initial consultancy phase, with detailed client interviews, property assessments and generally spending time at the venue, to evaluate any difficulties, while gaining a thorough understanding of the brand. "Once we have done all of this research, we will have a very good grasp of the property and work out how we can create an atmosphere that's more engaging and therefore increase dwell time in that space," Wood says.

In fact, upping this 'dwell time' is one of the most common briefs and a very simple tactic: the longer guests hang out, the more inclined they are to eat and drink. And as everyone knows, focusing only on hotel room sales these days is rarely a winning strategy anymore. "When music is poor or annoying, it lets the whole experience down," explains Faus. "But where we have made it right - such as at the Pullman St Pancras in London - it engages people,

which contributes to better F&B revenue."

But what exactly is 'right'? While it might seem obvious that playing upbeat music might encourage people to eat faster - or vice versa - you can't help but wonder why you would need a dedicated bunch of people to work this out. In reality, it is much more nuanced, with Music Concierge sussing out the room layout, gauging the quality of the speakers, educating staff on the volume level and even going as far as installing their own hardware system from which they can remotely control an entire timetable of music that is specially selected according to the time of day, and also refreshed every three months. As Wood reasons: "Because everyone loves music, people think any member of staff can do it. I very much disagree with that. Just because we all eat food doesn't mean anyone can conceive a menu - that should be left to a chef."

As calculating as this whole business might seem, Wood is keen to highlight that a curated selection of music can also go a long way to enhancing a customer's personal experience and resulting memories. "Rather than focusing on how music might change the taste of a banana, I think what music really does is affect how you enjoy that moment, which is what is most important," emphasises Wood. ●