

# IN HOUSE

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— LISTEN —





# A Different Beat

**Music** Concierge Creative Director and founder Rob Wood has been passionate about music since he was nine years old. In school he was the go-to guy for new tracks and he has slowly turned his life long hobby into an innovative enterprise. Wood's flair for creating soundtracks for stellar locations worldwide from his extensive database is legendary and his ability to portray a brand through music is unbeatable. The once upon a time DJ, journalist and all around melodic mastermind reveals the secrets behind synchronising business with beats and hitting all the right notes.

**IH: Have you always been passionate about music and how did Music Concierge come to life?**

**RW:** I've been a vinyl junkie since I was nine and I was always that guy at school who people would ask about new music or borrow tapes from. I was a DJ and a music journalist in the late 1980's and by the late 1990's I was playing at clubs and festivals on an international level. In addition I became the editor of a respected music magazine called 'Jockey Slut' which gave early front covers to artists such as Daft Punk, Air and The Beta Band. The magazine was known for being ahead of the curve and as a DJ, I was known for finding eclectic music that was away from the mainstream.

Brands such as romantic escape specialists Mr & Mrs Smith began asking me to help choose music that fitted their personality. I was also working as a DJ in boutique hotels at the time and I realised they all looked great and were full of character, but their music was often an afterthought; it all sounded generic or the hotels allowed their staff to play inappropriate or even annoying music.

I founded Music Concierge in 2007, as I knew there was a whole world of amazing music that could be carefully selected to give brands a bespoke signature music identity. Everyone at Music Concierge is passionate about finding great music. It's the level of music expertise and passion that makes us different. I'm pleased to say many of the world's best hospitality and luxury retail brands jump at the chance to work with us. We love getting into the DNA of the brands and helping them sound as relevant and inspirational as possible.

**IH: What are the aims and goals of Music Concierge?**

**RW:** Music Concierge's mission is to make the best brands in the world sound amazing and unique so that their customers connect with them. Personally I'm also very driven to introduce people to music they might love but may not have been aware of. That penetrates through the company. We're on the front line fighting against the clichéd and the banal in order to make the world sound more interesting and inspiring. It's a big battle, but someone has to do it!

**IH: Music was once an afterthought in the hospitality industry. Can you tell us about the evolution of music in this sector?**

**RW:** Music has often been an afterthought in hotels. Establishments frequently use solo pianists or CDs like Café Del Mar as the default choice of music in their Restaurant and Bar areas, to the extent that such music has become somewhat of a cliché. However music consultants are now being used to provide a more focused approach. At Music Concierge we use in-depth music expertise to design bespoke music identities for each hotel brand and each area of the hotel. In the same way they use specialist chefs or lighting designers, hotels have realised they need to consult with a music expert.

There are two main reasons for this development. Firstly, with the proliferation of iPod culture, guests are far more music savvy than ever before. Hearing generic or predictable music in a hotel is not inspiring to today's audience, especially in a boutique or luxury hotel environment where the guest experience is all about escaping the norm and being stimulated through the senses. Secondly, hoteliers have realised that restaurants and bars are successful because of the atmosphere as much as the food and service. We understand how to enhance and build atmosphere through the design of well-executed playlists. Lighting, sound quality, music and people are the key components of a great atmosphere.

**IH: How does music enhance guest experience during their stay at Swire Hotels' properties?**

**RW:** Your hearing is a key primary sense that is never turned off, even when you are asleep. That's why you wake up when you hear a bang in the night. Guests within Swire Hotels are experiencing sound in all forms all the time from the lobby through to the hustle and bustle of the restaurant. Presenting music that is right for each area and for every moment ensures a pleasurable, uplifting, and hopefully inspiring sensory experience for guests.







**IH: Does music have mood-enhancing abilities and can you name some particular examples?**

**RW:** Music affects people in a number of ways. It has an impact on us physiologically – it can relax us or stimulate us. Music in gyms for instance is energetic and up tempo which stimulates people as they are working out. Music also has an emotional impact on us. We emotionally connect to music that we love. It can build a powerful, memorable bond between the listener and the artist, or indeed the place that is playing that music. On the negative side, inappropriate or dull music can be irritating.

**IH: As a UK based firm, what are the most challenging aspects of creating music for international clients?**

**RW:** As a team we are largely based in London, but we are very much a global business. On a creative level we have in-house expertise on music from all over the world. We design playlists for audiences in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and beyond. We also usually send our music consultants to visit the places we work in to give us a real insight into each property and audience. During such trips we investigate the local music scene and music shops to give us further knowledge of that location and people's tastes. Technically we also have our own clever digital solution for delivering music to any country. We can completely manage and update our client's music remotely wherever they might be.

**IH: How important is it for the music you play to be on trend and up to date?**

**RW:** It really depends on each client. We work with iconic hotels like The Savoy where we evoke the glamour of the past through music. Then we also have cutting-edge clients such as NIYAMA in The Maldives which is a resort with the world's first underwater nightclub. It's essential that brands like that sound completely finger-on-the-pulse. Similarly some of the fashion brands we work with, such as Mulberry, always want to expose new breakthrough artists alongside the more established acts that are a part of the brand's musical DNA.

**IH: Music Concierge is renowned for its detailed research into a brand and its clientele. Can you tell us about how you match music to clients?**

**RW:** We start with a thorough consultancy process where we get under the skin of the brand. This usually means visiting the hotel and seeing each space. We look at the interior design, brand, audience and the various Restaurant and Bar concepts. We monitor how guests use each area in the hotel and look at what kind of people they might be. From that research we design and tailor music concepts to the hotel and its guests. At The Upper House in Hong Kong for example, the music style needed to fit with designer André Fu's interiors, as well as a demographic of people who enjoy life, pleasure and luxury, but who also seek a unique and different experience. The music choices therefore must satisfy all these factors.

**“The great Louie Armstrong said that there are only two types of music: good and bad. He was right. It's the bad stuff that should be avoided!”**

**IH: What are the biggest challenges and obstacles that you encounter on a daily basis?**

**RW:** Bad sound quality is a regular problem because people often underinvest in their sound system to the extent that they have lifeless or flat sound quality from their speakers. Our carefully selected playlists sound optimum on quality sound systems, creating a perfect atmosphere.

**IH: How large and varied is your music database?**

**RW:** Our library has well over 200 styles of music. From the 18th Century to today's cutting edge sounds, we are passionate about music's incredible ongoing history. Whether it's a rare 1960s northern soul track or the very latest electronica, we are natural music hounds who dig deep to find new or forgotten musical gems. We also collect music from across the world whether it's Malian blues, Scandinavian jazz, or the latest guitar bands from Los Angeles. We go to ridiculous lengths to find music. For example, I once flew to New York when I heard that a second hand record shop on the Lower East Side had been flooded. I knew I could pick up rare disco and new wave 12-inches at cut price because the sleeves were flood damaged. I spent over US\$1000! On a personal level, the people I live with patiently put up with walls covered in vinyl and CDs. It's an addiction!

**IH: Is there a genre of music that should never be played in public spaces?**

**RW:** Over blown, pompous genres such as heavy metal or trance would naturally never sound right in a hotel. But I'd also suggest avoiding musical clichés, or blatantly commercial music. High-end, lifestyle-conscious brands, such as the various Swire Hotels, need to be positioned away from the mainstream so that they don't sound like the high street and are unique as soon as guests arrive. The great Louie Armstrong said that there are only two types of music: good and bad. He was right. It's the bad stuff that should be avoided!