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GQ Magazine - July 2016

TASTE

Bombay mixtape: The lively décor of Dishoom's Carnaby Street restaurant requires music to match

MUSIC CONCIERGE'S GREATEST HITS

Rob Wood on soundtrack-savvy venues with tunes that fit the food

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DISHOOM

Inspired by the Irani cafés of colonial India, Dishoom needed its music "to suggest Mumbai cafés past with a Bollywood twist. For the new Carnaby Street venue, we added a *Mad Men*-meets-Mumbai soundtrack that works perfectly with the Fifties/Sixties design." 22 Kingly Street, London W1. dishoom.com



2

MERCHANTS TAVERN

Angela Hartnett's Shoreditch restaurant has a great bar. "The brief was for an eclectic collection of tracks that would appeal to local creatives, while sidestepping the predictable. Hence anything from dub to Afrobeat and beyond." 36 Charlotte Road, London EC2. merchants-tavern.co.uk



3

MR FOGG'S RESIDENCE

This themed bar contains artefacts from Phileas Fogg's global adventures. "The music needed to evoke his travels and his Victorian world." The playlist combines Gilbert and Sullivan, world music and remixes of prewar songs. 15 Bruton Lane, London W1. mr-foggs.com

THE ATMOSPHERE

Music Concierge

Coming to a restaurant near you, tastemaker Rob Wood's playlists provide a feast for the ears



THE fifth floor café at London's Royal Festival Hall doesn't play music, but if it needed a soundtrack, Rob Wood would be the man to ask. Wood, a lean, bespectacled 46-year-old, looks around the cavernous room like he's casing the joint. "Lots of glass," he says. "Lots of hard surfaces. We're lucky there's a carpet." He thinks for a moment. "I wouldn't suggest anything spiky or overly mainstream. It needs to sound as unique as the building while being accessible. Something relaxed but creative and inspiring."

Nine years ago, Wood founded the music consultancy service Music Concierge in his south London shed. Now the service and its sister company, Kaleidovision, employ 40 people worldwide, curating playlists for high-end restaurants, bars, hotels and spas. Clients include Claridge's, Heston Blumenthal and a bar in Dubai's Burj Khalifa. "As we're speaking, probably in 800 places around the world, from Bhutan to the Caribbean, they're playing our music," Wood says.

When Wood, a former DJ and music journalist, started Music Concierge in 2007, he found the default soundtracks in bars and hotels uninspiring. "I realised they'd spent all this money appealing to different senses in terms of art and food but sound was either left to the bar manager or chill-out-by-numbers," he says. "I'd say, 'You actually need to be thinking

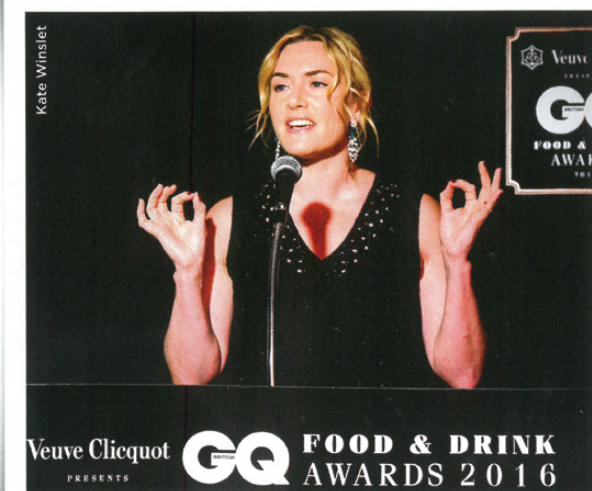
about music.' And they'd say, 'Why?' Now lots of people we work with realise that."

Music Concierge has a huge library of categorised tracks from which it curates playlists, installs them on the venue's hardware and then tweaks them remotely via broadband. It uses individual expertise rather than algorithms, and choosing the right tunes is more difficult than it sounds. New recruits train for two years before they become fully fledged consultants. "Loads of people know lots about music but that doesn't mean you understand atmosphere and how music influences it," says Wood.

Wood's team starts by talking to each client about their desired mood and brand identity. "We don't want them to talk about genres or styles. We want to understand their business." Consultants then spend time in the venue to monitor the myriad factors that influence what music will be effective: the spectacular night-time vista from the Burj Khalifa, for example, inspired a *Blade Runner*-influenced soundscape.

Once a client's signature sound has been established, it needs to evolve with the time of day, week and year. Many upscale clients use music purely for ambience, which rules out jarring elements such as guitar solos. But even subtle music needs personality, and Wood seeks out tracks that hit that sweet spot. "Knowing where to find good music that might be hidden away from the mainstream is a key part of the job," he says.

Wood spends so much time on his choices that he says it's hard to switch off. If he hears something inappropriate, he's annoyed; if he hears something he loves, he's Shazaming it; if he's somewhere with a Music Concierge playlist and it's not working, he's emailing his staff. Perhaps this is why he likes working at the Royal Festival Hall. Here, for once, there's no music to think about. Dorian Lynskey musicconciierge.co.uk



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THE PARTY CIRCUIT

FLAVOUR OF THE MONTH

WHEN Kate Winslet took to the stage to surprise her friend Giorgio Locatelli with his Lifetime Achievement trophy, it capped a fabulous second annual GQ Food & Drink Awards, in association with Veve Clicquot. Claudia Winkleman hosted the evening at 100 Wardour St with her trademark candour (happily telling guests how she drunkenly mounted chef Tom Kerridge the year before) and, once the new kings and queens of the hospitality world were toasted with cocktails by Belvedere, sponsors of our Best Bar award, BMW whisked them off into the night. Special thanks to Waterford Crystal for providing the awards and to Music Concierge for soundtracking the evening.



GQ Magazine - July 2016