

Studio Wish List

Richard Buskin digs deep into his pockets and provides a producer or engineer with a (sometimes) generous wad of cash to spend on a dream sound setup.



Cash Recipient: Mick Glossop.

The budget: \$90,000.
The setup: a project studio for his own use.

The producer/engineer of artists ranging from Frank Zappa, Van Morrison, Tangerine Dream and Flesh For Lulu to Queen, Mott The Hoople, Mike Oldfield, Sinéad O'Connor, The Skids, The Waterboys, The Wonder Stuff and The Men They Couldn't Hang, Mick Glossop knows a thing or two about cutting-edge technology.

He played an integral role in the re-design of The Manor in Oxfordshire and The Townhouse in London when serving as chief engineer there during the 1970s, and he also gained plenty of good on-staff experience at London facilities such as Wessex and Nova, as well as at Studio Son Quebec in Montreal. Freelance since 1980, Mick Glossop has spent the past two decades keeping abreast of technological advancement, be it Midi programming, digital sampling or computer-based mixing.

Now, however, with just \$90,000 to spend on 'a project studio that doesn't compromise in terms of sound quality, but, more than just demos, is capable of handling top-quality professional work,' he faces the ultimate challenge...

The Gear

ProTools Mix System	\$14,959
SampleCell (32MB RAM) + TDM board	\$3,155
882/20 interface	\$2,331
Apogee PSX-100 converter	\$6,195
Apple Mac G4/400, 256MB RAM, SCSI card	\$4,500
17-inch monitor	\$600
2 x Glyph Cheetah 9GB HD	\$1,800



'With \$90,000 to spend on a professional-standard room – unless I'm going to get something like a second-hand A880, which would probably cost around \$15,000 – I have to go digital. What's more, you get so much with ProTools in terms of production values, it would be silly not to use it. I mean, I've been using my ProTools setup for about five years, and it's proved itself to me as a recording system, aside from anything else. So, that's what I'm opting for, because there's no point opting for an ADAT; there's not much you can do with it.

'Having said that, in trying to keep the cost down the best thing is to get the Mix rather than the Mix Plus system because you save about \$6,000, and while you get less DSP, with a Macintosh G4 you've only got three PCI slots. One of them is going to be taken up with a SCSI adaptor card, so that means you've only got one slot left for SampleCell, and I think a sampler is important. I have used SampleCell and I find it really convenient, because

“whatever room you’ve got, **it’s worth investing** some money **to improve** [the acoustics], **even just** a little bit”

everything is there on the Mac, and with TDM you’re going digitally into the system, which is great. Therefore, given that, if you want SampleCell and a Mix Plus system you’ll need an expansion chassis, and that’s complicated and expensive.

‘In terms of interfaces, given that, subjectively speaking, the Apogee converters are better – and the Prism converters are better still, but more expensive – I wouldn’t feel happy using an 888/24. That’s partly because of the A/D conversion, but even more importantly, if you’re basing a project studio around ProTools then ProTools is everything, and that means the D/A conversion is an essential part of your monitoring system. So the quality of the two channels of D/A is almost more important than the A/D converter, because you’re making all of your decisions based on the way you’re listening to that stereo. That’s why I’ve gone for the Apogee PSX-100, and I can interface it with the dead cheap 882/20 which carries 24-bit. It’s a slightly funny hybrid way of getting top quality in and out in terms of analogue. Meanwhile, a big assumption, which I think is quite valid, is you only need two top-quality D/As and two top-quality A/Ds, because you’re in one room, you’re going to be recording everything in there, and you’ll be very unlikely to need more than two recording channels.

‘The G4 seems to be what you buy these days, and I couldn’t believe how cheap a 17-inch monitor now is. As for the hard drive, I’ve put two 9GB drives in there instead of one 18GB drive, because, although that’s more expensive, two drives give you a higher track count with ProTools. Technically you get 64 instead of 32, although realistically it’s not as much as that, depending on how much editing there is.’

Plug-ins

Serato Pitch ‘n’ Time	\$2,116
Auto-tune	\$1,699
Waves Pro-FX	\$2,408
Amp Farm	\$1,121
McDSP Compressor Bank	\$1,554
McDSP Filter Bank	\$1,554
Sound Replacer	\$736

‘Quality-wise, I think the Serato is the best pitch-shifting and time-stretching device around, while Autotune is a necessity and the Waves Pro-FX has a nice collection of flangers and things like that. The Amp Farm is also nice to have. The Compressor Bank and Filter Bank have a definite character about the way they compress and filter, and I always prefer equipment that has a signature to it. In fact, the Compressor Bank must have about 50 factory presets that you can dial up, and the range of sounds is fantastic. You see, Focusrite plug-ins sound pretty much the same no matter how you use it, whereas the variations you get with the Compressor Bank are amazing, so it’s really good value in that sense. So is the Filter Bank, which gives you a lot of control, and the Sound Replacer is pretty essential – it’s a really, really good plug-in for replacing kick and snare sounds and all kinds of things.’



Fader Controller

CM Automation Motor Mix \$1,995

‘I’ve got four of these, and for the price they’re tremendous value. In this case I’ve opted for one, just to have some kind of hardware fader control over what you’re doing. It would be nicer to have 32 faders, but I think it’s worth at least having one bank of eight.’



Midi Interface

MOTU Micro Express [4 in, 6 out] \$699

‘I need a Midi interface and this is one of the cheapest.’

Software

SampleSearch \$1,062

‘A really good database with all of the functions. If you’re using samples at all, or just files that have names, then it’s just great to be able to file them. I tend to stash all of my samples on a 230MB MO drive. It stands up pretty well and is fairly cheap, so I’ve got loads and loads and loads of stuff and it’s very easy to search through.’

Backup

DDS-3 DAT drive/Retrospect	\$2,295
Yamaha 8424 CD writer	\$750

'You can use CDs for backup but you'll tend to use up quite a lot of them, so it's worth having a tape system. The DDS-4 is the latest means of getting the highest and fastest storage in the DAT format, but it's more expensive, and the DDS-3 is good enough for my purposes.'

Microphones

Neumann M147	\$3,100
Shure Beta 58	\$550
Audio Technica 3525	\$689



'I only need a few microphones, given the limited range of things I'll be recording. Still, I think it's important to have one really good quality, general purpose, record-everything mic, and that's the M147, which is great for lots and lots of things.'

Then I also need a good dynamic mic, and the Beta 58 fits that bill, while the Audio Technica is dead cheap and sounds really good on certain things like acoustic guitars.'

Outboard

Focusrite ISA215 dual channel	\$9,058
Focusrite Compounder	\$1,749
HHB Fatman valve compressor	\$1,249
Alesis 3630 compressor	\$429
Lexicon MPX-1	\$1,400
Quadraverb GT [2nd hand]	\$400
Lexicon ALEX [2nd hand]	\$400
DeltaLab DL-4 [2nd hand]	\$400
Hughes & Kettner Red Box Pro	\$150
Line 6 POD	\$1,100

'Again, going back to the point about quality, I just thought that there was a need for two really good mic preamps and two really good equalisers. The dual channel ISA215 is expensive but it is really good for pretty much everything, so I thought it was worth putting that in. I suppose that and the ProTools system represent the quality end of things. I mean, even though I've only got NS10s to work with, when I'm in a regular studio I listen to NS10s 90% of the time anyway, and I'm okay with that. You see, even if it means I'm perhaps not appreciating the full quality of what I'm putting down, by listening to those speakers in a less than acoustically-perfect environment, I still gain confidence from knowing

that I'm using the best quality chain to put it through.

'The Compounder is a very good value, very versatile stereo compressor, and I've just discovered the Fatman and I think it's great. Within the context of discussions about analogue valve warmth compensating for digital harshness, I think the Fatman does go some way towards dealing with that issue. It does add some warmth, it is clear, and, again, for the price it's great – it's simple to use and it's got a couple of DIs on the front which sound pretty good too.'

'I've built into the list some dead cheap stuff that I think is really good, and the Alesis 3630 fits right into that category. It's a very comprehensive, basic, flexible compressor, and just something to put across a mix if you're doing rough mixes very quickly. The MPX-1, on the other hand, is a nice quality multieffects unit, with flanging, reverb, etc. I mean, I like virtually anything that Lexicon does – their reverbs are just richer and more solid sounding than a lot of other stuff, particularly Japanese stuff.'

'The Quadraverb is not hi-fi, it's not high-end audiophile, but while the GT is noisy, it's great for distorting things such as congas and drums, and it's a multieffects unit as well. The Lexicon ALEX I've had for about ten years now, and again it's got some great programs. There's a program called 'Gold Plate' – number 9 – and for a general purpose monitor reverb I use that all the time, wherever I am. Then again, I've always liked Delta Lab delays but I haven't got one, so, if you know anyone who's got a DL-4, put them in touch with me... The Hughes & Kettner Red Box Pro is a dead cheap sort of DI, and it's pretty good for guitars, while the Line 6 POD is fantastic for DI guitar processing.'



FX Pedals

Lovetone Meatball [mail order]	\$750
Lovetone RingStinger [mail order]	\$900
Vox Valvetone distortion	\$159
Boss AW-2 Auto-Wah	\$299
Sansamp	\$900
Sherman Filterbank	\$1,738

'These are all modulators that I use as part of the analogue end of recording something. The whole Lovetone series is really good; they're very clean. I mean, all filters seem to have a different character about them, and the Meatball and Ring Stinger are full of character. In fact, all of their pedals have an external control input, where you just put in a variable resistor like a keyboard volume pedal and it allows you to tweak one parameter

or another. With the Ring Stinger they give you this jack plug which has a photocell near the end of it, and you can just wave your

hand around on top of it. So, that's a nice little touch.

'The Valvetone distortion pedal is transistor-based but it just sounds really good for guitars, while the Boss Auto-Wah is also a nice device which has an envelope as well as an oscillator. The Sansamp is another classic distortion colour-shaping device, and the Sherman is a great filter with a character all of its own.'



Monitoring

Yamaha NS10s	\$1,024
Auratones	\$400
Quad 405 power amp	\$500



'I suppose this looks a bit out of balance compared to all of the other gear and given the budget, but to go beyond it is a question of getting big monitors and, in terms of small bookshelf-type nearfields, I'm quite happy with NS10s. I use them all the time like most people do. I've tried lots of different small monitors of that size – like the Alesis and Genelecs – but the NS10s and Auratones do it for me. Of course, you can't buy the horrible-looking, brown little cube Auratones anymore, so if you know somebody who's got a pair of those that they want to sell...'

Headphones

2 x Beyer DT150	\$698
Behringer Powerplay Pro amp	\$499

'The Quad 405 forms a reasonably good combination with NS10s, while in terms of the headphones I'm not a huge fan of Behringer stuff in general, but this amp is really cheap, it's got lots of different outputs, some auxiliary inputs – it's quite versatile and it sounds pretty good with the normal headphones.'

Acoustic Design

White Mark [David Bell]	\$4,000
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'For my own room at home I've got some RPG panels – a series of panels that you just hang on the wall for defracting, absorbing, whatever – and in the process of experimenting I've come into contact with David Bell of White Mark who's been quite happy to give advice at this sort of level with regard to a project studio environment. I think that, whatever room you've got, it's worth investing some money to improve things even just a little bit, and David has been great at taking a look at my place and recommending a selection of panels. He's quite keen on de-mystifying the whole process.'

Extras

Custom Consoles Isomac	\$3,000
Speaker stands	\$300
Cables/adaptors	\$1,000
Speaker switch box	\$120
19-inch racking	\$400

'Custom Consoles are based in Nashville and have got no UK distribution, so you've got to order their stuff directly, which is a bit of a risk. However, having mulled things over for the past nine months or so and after a couple of chats with them, I've just ordered an Isomac because it seems like a really good piece of kit. I mean, if you speak to any of the UK suppliers of ProTools about noise problems – and I've got the Mac with about five removable drives, all of which are noisy – the only answer you get is to bung it all in a rack and put it in the machine room in whichever studio you're working. Well, aside from the fact that in this case there is no machine room, it's not a good option anyway, because you can't get to your drives and put a CD in, you need long cables and, because of them, you can't shut the door to the machine room properly. So, when I stumbled upon the Isomac, I thought it was fantastic – the idea of actually designing a box which has a hinged glass front door, acoustic foam inside and two big fans that are completely silent. With just one room you've got to have something like that, otherwise there's just too much ambient noise... although, of course, I'm ignoring the fact that I might be dealing with a domestic bedroom on a busy main street.'

The Balance Sheet

Total expenditure:	\$88,740
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Not bad going, and that's without the inevitable retail discount after a little haggling. This means that Mick Glossop has a little of one thousand bucks to tuck into his back pocket to spend on whatever his heart desires... (a virtual holiday perhaps).

