

For every studio that has its grand opening, sticks with it for a few years or more, maybe even hangs a few Platinum records on the wall, there's plenty to be proud of—and then there's the eventual need to gut everything and start all over again.

As the last quarter of 2009 rolled around, the owners of Kaleidoscope Sound (www.kaleidoscopesound.com) in Union City, N.J., knew their time for a renovation was at hand. Although founders Randy and Amy Crafton had built up a strong local following and a steady stream of business since opening the two-room facility in 2001, with a client list that includes Richie Havens, Bill Frisell, Mingus Big Band and others, the studio was starting to look and feel long in the tooth.

Spacious Control Room A was dominated by a home-brewed, API-flavored "Frankenconsole" that doubled as a producer's desk and faced away from the action in the live room. Studio B was de-

expert craftsmen like carpenter Jeff Baker, always had the necessary materials waiting for them.

"It's essential to keep the supplies ahead of the demand because that's where the construction [schedule] really falls apart," Neal says. "If the contractor shows up ready to start installing the insulation, and it's not there, boom! You're a week down. We ordered everything at least a week in advance because there's the assumption that everything won't be readily available."

Along the way, Neal kept an eye on costs by following Manzella's recommendations on a case-by-case basis. "Rightfully, Fran's job was not to save us a buck here and there," Crafton says. "His job was to say, 'If you follow this recipe, it will work. If not, it might fall apart down the line.' So you're not only thinking about the way it will look the day it's done, but how it will look in five years."

"We didn't cut corners, but for a lot of things that Fran put in the specs, we found an equivalent that was less expensive," adds Neal. "Most of the time he was recommending the Rolls Royce. We tended to get the Mercedes."

Step 3: A Timeline Sans Down Time

Even though Studio A was the top priority, the Craftons made their flagship room the second step. Studio B was first to be addressed, starting with an 8-inch drop for the ceiling, a reorientation of the furniture and the addition of two 10-space API Lunch Boxes, an API 2500 compressor and an API 8200 mixer, along with a Lynx I/O for the 16 API 550 EQs.

"The thinking was to keep the studio up and running so we could continue to meet our clients' needs," Neal explains. "We pulled everything up a notch and turned this into another API room."

With Studio B seriously upgraded, Crafton knew they would be able to accept mix jobs that previously could only have happened in Studio A. "We figured, 'This is costing a lot—if there's any chance we could be making money while we're losing a lot of money, why not?'"

Step 4: Apply the API

The centerpiece of the renovation commenced, with Studio A being reconfigured to comfortably accommodate a spectacular addition to the East Coast recording scene: a 48-channel API Legacy Plus console. Obtained from the Goo Goo Dolls' studio, Inner Machine in Buffalo, N.Y., it's the type of board worth building a room around.

Kaleidoscope's in-house tech/engineer Sal Mormando, a long-time API enthusiast, used his vast experience to wire and commission the console, while engineer Karli Maloney took care of wiring the new patchbays and gear racks. They had the room completely wired in just 11 days. "This is no small feat," notes Neal.

First, however, they had to get it up the stairs and inside the door—time to round up the whole Kaleidoscope crew. "You'd be surprised," says Neal, "how much help you can get from 12 guys on a cold night with pizza and beer."

Step 5: Thrive

The Kaleidoscope team has created a newly elite studio for the New York City area. "Producers and engineers do projects in rooms that make a lot of sense, equipped with great consoles," Randy Crafton says. "Now we're one of those rooms." ■■■

Send news for "Metro" to david@dwords.com.



PHOTO: KYLE CASSEL



Studio co-owner Randy Crafton in Kaleidoscope's remodeled control room "A," featuring an API Legacy Plus.

cently equipped, but lacked the necessary trappings to stand in for world-class mix duties when Studio A was booked. "The old control room was not a traditional setup," Randy Crafton explains. "Established guys' basic take would be, 'Great gear, great room, but it's too weird for me to wrap my head around.'"

Knowing that it was time to update Kaleidoscope, and also aware that a change in tax law would make acquiring a large-format console more advantageous in 2009 than 2010 or later, Crafton and his dedicated crew began the project in earnest in October. The goal: minimize mistakes, down time and cost overruns as much as possible, and emerge with a studio that would be more inviting and acoustically precise.

Step One: Bring In the Pros

The Kaleidoscope crew looked to the experience of architect Fran Manzella (www.fmdesign.com) to get things started—and finished—on the right foot. "I've done it with a consultant, and I've done it without; it's a lot better with!" Crafton says with a laugh. "The fact that he's done it hundreds of times is important. It's the same as someone coming in to record: They do it once a year, but we do it every day.

"Fran listened to what we asked for, he didn't expand the scope—he got it. The project started with Fran, but the same staff that helps us with the running of the studio helped us with the renovation: We have a really good staff and our roles are well-defined."

Step Two: Keep Ahead

Throughout the renovation, studio manager Carey Neal held weekly meetings with contractor John Ambrosi of Ambrosi Construction Inc., determined at all times to ensure that work crews, as well as