



**Special Print  
Manger Sound Transducer**



Manger in Berlin

# LIGHT IN THE UNDERGROUND

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Stefan Schulwitz



We want to savor music – in the highest quality, but in unusual locations. In the invisible recording studio. In a shabby backyard. On the dance floor of a club. Then Berlin is the place to be, says Daniela Manger. The CEO of Manger Audio becomes my personal tour guide in the capital, introduces me to people like Mark Ernestus (photo) and opens doors to sonic treasure chambers in the audiophile underground of Berlin.

— First stop: the invisible recording studio. It is situated in a completely innocuous neighbourhood and, in fact, there are absolutely no outside hints concerning its purpose. In this old building even immediate neighbours don't suspect who or what is hiding behind the nameplate "apartment door" and the sound-insulating opal glass panes. It's here that Mark Ernestus cultivates a kind of cheerful paradise for audiophile creatives – including himself. To get in, we had to call Mark on the phone via an unlisted number and make an appointment for a visit. There is no door bell. Mark Ernestus carefully opens the heavy doors and lets us enter the first room, which is a mixture of Asian serenity and well-assorted music supplies store. To the left and right of the integrated kitchenette numerous instruments pile up on floor-to-ceiling shelves. The collection is completed by vintage synthesizers, a guitar and various percussion instruments. The actual highlight, however, is the sound studio next-door. Mark Ernestus, who's worldwide in demand as a DJ and music producer, has made his dream of a high-end studio come true in the presumably

unsuspicious neighbourhood of central Berlin. Willsingh Wilson combined two rooms the size of 215 sq. ft. each and designed a control room that's really one of a kind. The renowned instructor of acoustical engineering uncompromisingly nested a sound-insulated room into the existing premises of the old Berlin building. The windowless studio is entirely decoupled from the rest of the house. Any sound transmission from the outside to the inside and vice versa is categorically eliminated. These enormous efforts result in complete silence and delicately balanced acoustics. All measures concerning sonic optimization are virtually invisible and perfectly executed: sound absorbers, diffusors and reflectors are hidden behind or – to be precise – in dark-grey sound-permeable fabric walls. The ventilation system is completely noiseless and contributes to a great extent to the relaxed atmosphere of the room. The 323 sq. ft. net area leave ample room for a mixing console, a laptop, an old studio turntable from Sony and two Manger MSM-C1. Interestingly enough, this studio doesn't deal with classical music, jazz productions or scientific sound experiments

– the typical Manger domains. Far from it, Mark Ernestus is successful in musical genres which sometimes belong to the lo-fi division, including sensual bass orgies and swirling art sound excursions. As a DJ he exclusively plays Dub and Reggae during his live concerts, but his roots are in House, HipHop and electronic music – especially in a style, which starts with a "t" and which he rarely mentions: techno. Although currently concentrating on a musical project from Senegal with heavy focus on rhythm, Mark Ernestus is one of the most influential promoters of the techno movement. In 1989 he founded the Hard Wax record store, which soon became a central meeting place for fans of independent record labels, he contributed decisively to the musical generation change and established itself even in international fan communities thanks to the long-lasting success of the t-word and its carefully selected repertoire. Dub, Reggae, HipHop, House, Techno – but why Manger Sound Transducers of all things, Mark? The low-key and sophisticated label boss, music producer and studio owner explains that he never listens to

Crossing frontiers: The transition from adjoining room to recording studio is marked by a heavy double door and a changeover from tiles to industrial parquet.

The studio is perfectly soundproofed against the rest of the house, a dream room within a room optimized from 20 – 20000 Hz.



Alternative: The Sony PS-X9 with matching cartridge was Japan's response to the dominance of the heavy EMT studio drives. Mark Ernestus sometimes uses a slightly modified model in a fixed installation.

Optimum: The already excellent transparency and balance of the active Manger MSM-C1 in a studio environment can be further improved by installing so-called "Holoprofiles." These sound wave guides, developed by Josef W. Manger, are made of acrylic and must be attached precisely in front of the famous Manger Sound Transducer to optimize its radiation characteristics.



music as a sideline. A punchy bass sound may be indispensable under live conditions, but personally he likes to focus on "the amount of information, the resolution and transparency" of a recording. So it goes without saying that he uses a pair of Manger C1 in his high-end studio and a pair of 109 at home. For our extensive listening test we played an Mbalax track (music from Senegal) through the mixing console and the results were absolutely convincing. Everything sounded totally clear and transparent, not at all embellished or "larger than life," but marvellously subsumable and authentic in the best sense. That's how high-end must sound in a recording studio!

— Second stop: the shabby backyard. Welcome to Hard Wax. The legendary

record store still exists. In Kreuzberg, third floor, former factory building, no elevator, at least not for passenger transportation. The staircase is covered with graffiti. A slightly dilapidated industrial atmosphere ... In the long run things like that can only survive in Berlin. It's somehow exhilarant to be back. The lighting at Hard Wax is surprisingly bright. But we didn't come to browse through the vinyl records. We rather wanted to marvel at the sound reinforcement system of the monitoring station above the counter. Two large monitors are installed below the ceiling. They have been precisely aligned and secured with bright red lashing straps and are equipped with – you guessed it! – one Manger transducer and two stiffly suspended bass drivers for support. Yes,



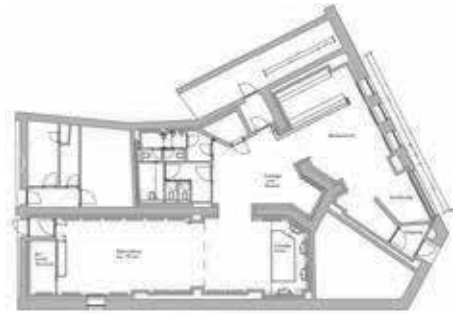
Counter power: Hard Wax, the legendary record store, still exists – in Kreuzberg, backyard, third floor, former factory building, no elevator. The two monitors, which have been fixed with lashing straps below the ceiling and aligned to the counter, are an unexpected audiophile highlight.

Mark Ernestus was here. The people at the counter offer audiophile full-service – but only upon request. The majority of customers doesn't really care for the high-end sound reinforcement, but I get excited about details like this. And about the fact that I managed to descend to the backyard without accident after our visit. It was getting dark outside and the lighting in the staircase didn't work on two floors.

— Third stop: a dance floor in an empty club. The party location goes by the name of "Raumklang" and is situated at the corner of a row of houses in the Friedrichshain district. The name says it all, although you cannot expect to hear the spatial sound of your well-adjusted hi-fi system in such an environment – a dance floor can't be compared with your sofa at home. Ralf Stucki,

the good-humored club owner, nonetheless frequently sets up his deckchair in the middle of the dance floor to enjoy music undisturbed. Why? Because years ago Stucki had been the owner of the "Tresor" and was simply blown away by the sound system of the Raumklang when he played a recording of Wladimir Horowitz and "it sounded so much better than at home." So he decided to manage the Raumklang which is definitely a unique location. Especially the acoustics and the sound reinforcement system are one of a kind. The sound system differs completely from what you're used to – it doesn't boom, or clang, or distort at all. And you can turn it up to the max without straining your ears. The music simply gets louder and physically more palpable, but without the usual distortion and muddiness. The sound stays clean and clear even at the highest volume

Right in the middle and in full swing: No less than 6000 (!) springs decouple the entire venue from the corner building, which is situated in the heart of a housing area. A closer look at the groundplan gives you a first impression of the efforts necessary to install double walls, floors and ceilings in the entire club. At that time the Raumklang was still called "Trafo" and specialized in Dark Wave.



**Power Pack:** Three MSWs in each of the six spring-mounted units cover the dance floor comprehensively – without failure since 2001. The metal sandwich cabinets also accommodate 12" Eminence drivers which take care of the bass range below 500 Hertz. 18" JBL subwoofers in floating concrete enclosures deliver the ultimate bass punch.



levels. And the neighbours are not affected at all by this high-end high power project. For Willsingh Wilson, whose ideas and skills we already admired in Mark Ernestus' studio, took care of the Raumklang acoustics as well. The acoustician managed to completely separate the rooms full of nooks and crannies from the rest of the building in an almost invisible way. No less than 6000 springs make for the perfect acoustic isolation of the entire nightclub from the rest of the housing area. The massive subwoofer units at the edge of the dancefloor, which are equipped with 18" drivers from JBL Professional, have been decoupled separately. The acoustic star role in this installation from the year 2001 is played by six loudspeaker units, which seem to stem from a science fiction movie. Each of the custom steel sandwich enclosures is equipped with a 12" Eminence driver, which takes care of the frequency range from 80 to 500 Hz, as well as three Manger Sound Transducers (MSW), which distribute the sound very evenly across the dance floor thanks to the sophisticated geometry of the cabinets. The transparency of the soundstage is phenomenal, as our tests confirmed. We sent several tried and tested uncompressed demo tracks

via smartphone to the small mixer and from there to a six-foot rack packed with professional power amps by BGW and Crown. The sound produced by the six sound transducer units was so awesome, that our short listening test turned into an extensive private listening session. It simply sounded fantastic, the ears didn't feel any pressure and each new track made us turn up the music a little louder. And when, appropriately enough, "Dickes B" from Seed flooded the club with heavy bass, the (inner) walls started to shake. What a spooky experience: You are alone on this deep black dance floor which lights up in many colors, the music reproduction is excellent, you turn up the volume as loud as you want and drift away. Then you step out the door and glare into the sunlight. Nobody knows about your joy. And not a single neighbour looks at you suspiciously. No wonder that Ralf Stucki regularly rents his Raumklang to DJs from the hood who want to test their productions, live sets or just single tracks at high volumes. Mark Ernestus, however, never drops in. Willsingh Wilson, on the other hand, does. And now we know in both cases why.



The CEO: Daniela Manger is happy that the excellent sound makes us continue on and on. Sometimes the club owner enjoys a listening session in his spare time – alone in a deckchair in the middle of the dancefloor ...