

[HOME](#) > [FEATURE](#) > [INTERVIEW](#)

## INTERVIEW: Eddie Veale on the evolution of studio design

Audio and acoustics pioneer speaks exclusively to API about the changing role of the studio over the past 40-plus years.

ADAM SAVAGE · DEC 7, 2012

There aren't many individuals out there that have done more for the audio industry than Eddie Veale.

The principal of [Veale Associates](#) and [recent recipient of the APRS Sound Fellowship](#) possesses a hugely impressive list of achievements, such as [the first professional home recording studio – built for John Lennon](#) – and the first presenter-driven radio station. The master acoustician is also one of the best possible people to ask about how the recording studio has developed over the past 40-plus years, which is just what we did when given the opportunity to catch up with him at [Dean Street Studios](#) – one of his many previous projects.

Naturally, Veale feels that the implementation of good acoustics has been key in the development of the studio. Acoustics are now essential for creating a quality recording space, but that wasn't always the case.

"In my early days acoustics was very much a black art and misunderstood – or not understood at all even – and hence little attention was paid to them, as little more than egg boxes were required, whereas now over the years we've developed knowledge and understanding of acoustics and how to apply them," says Veale.

"While acoustics is not a new subject, it is still fairly new in terms of studios. There has been little opportunity to do very much in the way of research, although these days, with colleges providing acoustic courses, there is more opportunity for research directly relevant to studios.

"In home and semi-pro studios acoustics are important because you must be able to hear and create sounds in a way that sounds similar to when you get them outside. In pro studios, appearance becomes more significant. The first impression is important, as when a client first walks into a studio, its potential is measured by the 'wow factor.' Producers in the earlier days would walk out before even hearing anything if the vibe wasn't right."

Veale is keen to credit another renowned studio designer for changing the perception of the studio as being simply a necessary recording space to an all-encompassing hub for artists and musicians.

He adds: "It was because of Tom Hidley that the 'wow factor' became really significant and it certainly helped us raise the profile of studios and helped owners recognise that it was essential to have a good looking studio. Today we sculpt the interior as well as the sound."

Of course, one of the biggest changes in audio has been the introduction of digital technology. Although it clearly has its advantages, Veale believes that the benefits of analog must not be forgotten, and that too much of a reliance on digital can be detrimental for the future of the industry.

"There's this mythology that digital will do it all for you, which of course is not quite right," comments Veale. "Digital is simply another tool in the box. There are things you can do with digital that are more difficult to do with analogue – editing etc – but equally there are things you can do with analog that you can't with digital."

"The good studio has a balance and in that I think the SSL Duality (like the one at Dean Street studios) is one of the ideal beasts because you have complete choice of how you work – part in digital, part in analog. There's evidence that the niceties and benefits of analog are now being discovered and recognised and I think there is a need for both analog and digital equipment in the studio. At the end of the day what is the product being produced for? It's produced for us and we all have two ears, which happen to be analog."

Dean Street is actually the perfect case study of how studio design has moved forward over time. It had seen better days when Suzanne Lee-Barnes gained ownership of the facility – artists such as David Bowie, T. Rex and The Moody Blues have all been previous users of the studios – but thanks to the work of Veale Associates it developed into a major recording attraction for big-name musicians again.

"Dean Street goes back to the '60s and was originally created for Tony Visconti. When Suzanne was looking for a premises, the studios were in a dilapidated state," Veale reveals. "It would have been easy to gut them and redo them as a modern studio but that defeated the ideas that Suzanne had about recreating a '60s feel. We wanted to keep the essence of the original studio, hence anything that didn't need replacing, wasn't."

"Really it was just a refurbishment, but we did have to tweak the acoustics and tidy up some of the little problems that we had at the time. Acoustics in the '60s were a little strange and control rooms seemed to have a significant hump in the low end, so we tamed that a bit in here, but left a bit in to maintain that '60s feel. The biggest challenge was doing it at a sensible budget."

Cost has also remained a key issue in the broadcast studio sector, which Veale Associates has become increasingly involved in over the years. Radio technology may have moved forward significantly since Veale first started off, but the price of putting together a studio is no longer the financial nightmare it once was.

"We've done a lot of radio and entry into that came through Beacon Radio in Wolverhampton, which was the last of the first phase of licenses to be awarded," Veale recalls. "Our aim there was to create the first presenter-driven radio station. In the next phase we became very popular. People were asking 'who can help us?' and only one name was mentioned, so that was pretty good for business. It wasn't really by intention that we developed into radio; it was by default."

"Today you're looking at putting together a two-studio station together for between £300,000 and £400,000. If you step back to the '80s, you'd probably spend more than that and if you inflate that up, what we spend today is probably about a tenth of what it was spent back then. It's achievable now because of advances in technology, understanding of materials and how they work, and acoustics are less expensive."

So where does he see the studio market going in the next ten years? The rise of the home studio has clearly had a big impact on the sector, along with artists having more of a say in the recording process, and Veale can only see these trends continuing.

"At the beginning of the current decade studios were in decline. There were perceived to be too many studios, a lot of the majors are no longer and there are certainly more small studios today, which is a reflection of the trend in home studios and more involvement from the artists," Veale says. "They're looking for engineers and producers to work with who have their own studio. These producers operate small because they don't want to be business people; their objective is the art of recording."

"We've moved now to the home studio being the experimental base pad and there's been a rise in popularity of the small personal studio of the engineer/producer, but there's still a marketplace for the bigger studio. In most cases there will external engineers who come in and work with artists, so the studio now provides a facility rather than a recording enterprise and I think that will continue and refine a bit."

"Our business has never been about profit; it's about helping the industry move forward. I've spent more than 40 years in the industry and I find it fascinating because it's always in a state of change and I've found embracing new ideas fascinating, challenging and rewarding."

For more information on Veale Associates, contact Deborah Skeldon on 01438 747666 or [deborah.skeldon@vealea.com](mailto:deborah.skeldon@vealea.com).

**Keep up to date with the latest developments from the world of pro audio by registering for our [free daily newsletter](#).**