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## Zen

July / August 2008

**After three years of operation, Zen has the ground-in confidence of a Trinidad clubbing institution.**

When Johnny Soong first opened the venue, his no-holds-barred attitude to technology was a direct attempt to blow the competition out of the water – and it worked. Up until then, the market leader in the Trinidadian capital, Port-of-Spain, was the hugely popular Base. But Base could not keep up with Zen's sound and lighting smorgasbord and the crowd were quickly drawn to the new kid in town.

The venue was originally built as a cinema and so follows the usual stage-replacing-screen, balcony-as-VIP-area layout. Guests first enter the main room, where the focus is split between the stage and an elliptical bar at its heart.

For added exclusivity, guests with the cash (or the contacts) can rise above the throng to the mezzanine (formerly the cinema balcony). Here, six 'sky boxes' – curtained-off booths – allow punters a base from which to look down on the action below. On this first floor, two bars, the Moroccan room and the cigar room provide a change of style and an alternative set of sounds.

Climbing once more, the former projection room has become a VVIP Champagne Bar, which links on to an outdoor terrace - complete with zen garden motif.

For the audio system, Soong wanted to match the best international venues. He looked to Ministry of Sound in London - which at that time had an entirely Harman Pro set-up - and had it's sound technology translated into Zen. Thus VerTec line arrays hang either side of the main stage, powered by Crown amps and connected by a BSS Soundweb.

The lighting design too got the star treatment. No less than Steve Lieberman's SJ Lighting was drafted in to create a predominantly Martin Pro rig controlled by a GrandMA console. The whole rig – which is dotted with Color Kinetics Color Blasts fixtures - can be raised and lowered by CM Loadstar hoists.

The club selectively buys in to the Zen principals of mindful acceptance of the present and letting go of self-conscious and judgmental thinking (indeed it was a little too much of the latter which led rapper Akon to infamously bump-and-grind himself into hot water when visiting the club last year). It is a winning formula. A consistently packed house is proof of Zen's status as de facto number-one destination for the Trinidadian capital's clubbers.

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