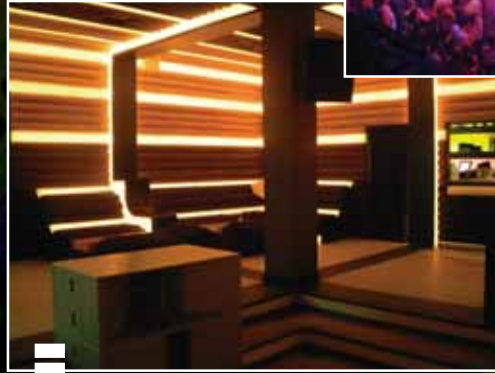


BEST NEW CLUB



AVALON, HOLLYWOOD

A lot of clubs designers work to make a new club feel austere and special, but Serge Becker didn't need to try with the space that is now called Avalon. The large, unassuming façade has welcomed the fashionable and talented since 1927, and the venue itself has played host to thousands of personalities, been home to dozens of television shows and films, and undergone massive transformations. Today, as the newest entry into Steve Adelman and John Lyons' successful Avalon chain, it features a huge stage, large open dancefloor, two balconies, lounges, a bistro, sumptuous extras like a retractable ceiling over the Moroccan-themed upstairs lounge, and all the authentic jazz age trims that give a multi-functional, 21st century performance space a tie to history. Add Dave Dean's GIANT party to the nearly one million dollar sound system (all EAW Avalon Series speakers, of course), long awaited by Hollywood dance enthusiasts sick of second tier audio; and a lighting rig that includes four High End Systems DL1's, and you've got an old-school yet future-forward super-party spot. —DC



CIELO, NEW YORK

Spatially the smallest entry in this category, Cielo is big and bold in ambition and execution. With its long logs of blinking LED light, powerfully warm sound system (featuring Funktion-One speakers), and sunken dancefloor that dominates the small room, the 300-cap space manages to marry the elegance of lounging with the sweat of serious dancing. "You could say we fall somewhere between the stylish ambience of [celebrity hangout] Lotus, and the fierce musical vibe of [legendary Sunday afternoon party] Body & Soul," co-owner Nicolas Matar recently told a UK magazine. Creating that overall musicality is their schedule of carefully selected, independently promoted parties (solid weeklies like Francois K's Deepspace; special monthlies like Frankie Knuckle's Better Days) and the influence of Matar himself, a working Ibiza DJ who also plays at the club regularly. All the elements together make the Cielo experience a singular one, not only in New York, but across the world's clubbing landscape. —KLM



HUSH, HOUSTON

It's not often that a city welcomes a new superclub with open arms, but Houston, Texas is fully behind Hush, the mall-sized dance club that debuted with a flourish this summer. Maybe it's because that even while Hush is a fully equipped, up-for-it dance spot, with the super-sized systems (four-level Martin Professional lighting and subwoofing Mach sound by Justin Jenkins; a Knox switcher-equipped video system by Martin' Dave Chesal and Ediro's John Humphries) to prove it, it also maintains a level of modern class on all of its four levels. See the PlayStation-stocked VIP lounge with its bird's-eye view of the dancefloor; the elegant bathroom area with its full doors and flirty one-way glass; the LED-lit back lounge with its posh chaises; the entryway sporting lounge seating for those waiting on their valet-parked rides. But Hush's best feature is its crowd, a multi-racial, good-natured, age-inclusive crew that shows up to seriously party to the DJ's carefully rotated mix of hip-hop, Top 40, and classics...but with true respect for their lavish host venue. —KLM



ICE, LAS VEGAS

Think a club only needs a single unique element to make a name for itself? At Ice, an S&M theme room, Brazilian walnut flooring, and outdoor video screen are only the tip of the...well, you know. Then there's the only Funktion-One speaker system (by Sound Investment) and Kryogenifex nitrogen blast system in Vegas, the mutable furniture, the VJ-centered video set-up (by Vello Virhaus), the "smart-card" VIP access, and the mixed-bag lighting rig (Coemar, Martin Professional, conventionals) on ground-supported truss (by SJ Lighting). But the 17,000-square-foot, six-room venue is more than the sum of its parts, championing a vibe that modulates between the inherent fabulousness of Vegas and the grittier, music-centered, black box clubs of other clubbing capital cities, like New York and Chicago. Both extremes play off each other in a total package that owner Ed Williams calls "a constant metamorphosis." —KLM