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# Making Music

*The Sound Kitchen: Great music lives here*

BY ZOE HYAMS

As I drove up to the Sound Kitchen Studio to meet managing partner Ira Blonder, I was excited. Here I was, a music nerd, with the opportunity to visit the internationally known, biggest recording studio in Tennessee. I embraced my inner fan and hopped on the interstate to Franklin jamming out to the Taylor Swift record. I arrived at my destination and was immediately greeted by the ever-so-friendly Chad, the Sound Kitchen “ambassador” at the front desk.

I have to admit I was expecting a somewhat huge building in the Cool Springs area of Franklin. Instead, despite its immense 19,000 square feet, The Sound Kitchen is an intimate and relaxing escape, hidden away from the craziness of downtown Nashville. From the moment you step through the courtyard, the Kitchen exudes a campus environment and surges with a synergy amongst all those in the building. The sign above the door reads “Great Music Lives Here,” and so I was instantly absorbed into the house of family “Sound Kitchen.”

While touring the building, Blonder explained the dynamics of the building and how the Kitchen has changed since he purchased it three years ago. “There’s now a completely different dynamic here: everything from paint color, to philosophy of business, to working with clients, maintenance of facility, hiring the best staff

and more ... We keep building on the reputation that we’ve created, and we take great care of that and nurture it.”

This take on its change was emphasized when I spoke to Christine Winslow (Kent Wells’ partner at Kent Wells Productions). She described the place perfectly: “You come here, you gather, you eat, you talk and make music. It’s a creative womb here. We work collectively as a group. It takes this community as a collective to make it happen.”

I certainly gravitated to the aesthetics of the building, specifically the dinner plates that line the inside walls and corridors. When Blonder came to the Sound Kitchen, he wanted it to have a family feel and not just line the walls with platinum discs from the various music companies. The Sound Kitchen cooks up some phenomenal music, and so alongside the idea of “kitchen” plates were the perfect fit.

In order to get a plate on the wall, the song has to have been recorded at the Sound Kitchen as well as be a top 10 hit. Blonder explained the order in which this process occurs: “We’ll have them sign their plate as they finish their session, and then we’ll reserve it in a drawer. When the song hits, we’re honored to have their plate up on our walls. I feel the artists are very honored to have a plate on

our wall also.”

The Kitchen has seven recording studios on its campus, as well as luxurious green rooms for each of the studios. Speaking with Blonder, it’s evident that those at the Sound Kitchen strive to push boundaries and better themselves in their craft. Thus, it was no surprise to be shown the newest addition that sets the facility apart from any other studio in Nashville: a mastering studio—and with it, an in-house mastering engineer.

The mastering studio ensures that the Kitchen is the only place in town you can truly track (record live in the rooms), mix (post-recording to final mix) and then master a track. Essentially, the new mastering studio is the cherry on top of the icing on the cake.

The Kitchen has a whole array of independent engineers and producers aligned with it so that they can draw from a sizable pool based upon the project. Even if an artist brings his or her own engineer, the Sound Kitchen always provides a second engineer, as well as the full-time chief tech.

They also have an aggressive internship program—they solicit from the best universities, have a rigid interview process and from the group they select, eight sound engineering interns are chosen every quarter. The Sound Kitchen is a nurturing ground, and they genuinely want to train the best out there; they align successful people together.

Another facet is the studio’s place in the community and their desire to benefit it. When Ira Blonder bought the facility three years ago, he co-founded a non-profit organization called We Are Building Lives, with the goal of resolving the homeless veteran problem in Nashville. So far, 110 veterans and their families have been rescued off the streets. Events are held at the Sound

“Thanks for the studio ... made some magic. I’m here for the party.”

— Jordin Sparks,  
American Idol finalist on  
her Sound Kitchen plate

Sound Kitchen photos by woottonphotography.com



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TOP: William Lee Golden (Oak Ridge Boys), Ira Blonder (Sound Kitchen) and Rusty Golden (Grammy nominated performer/songwriter of 2010, uber producer).

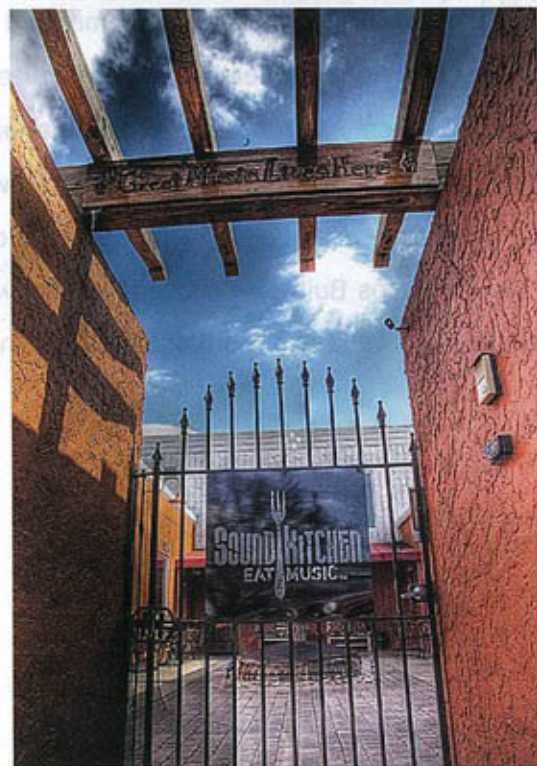
ABOVE: Mark Slaughter (Slaughter), Kenny Olson (Kid Rock), Rudy Sarzo (Whitesnake, Quiet Riot, Blue Oyster Cult) and Ira Blonder (Sound Kitchen).

Photos by Anthony Scarlati

Kitchen and organized through them, too. Examples include the "Rock Your Country Soul" event, at which Saving Abel headlined and, coming up on Oct. 30, the Third Annual We Are Building Lives in-studio live concert.

Somewhat naively, people think just because Nashville is the home of country music, country is the only thing that lives here. This is simply not the case. We're blessed in this town to have wonderful musicians from all veins of music, and the Sound Kitchen is a testament we're about great music—and it's the place said music is cooked up. There's a hugely diverse group of artists stepping through their doors—on any given day you could have anyone from Taylor Swift to Saving Abel to Chicago to Alice In Chains recording in one of the studios.

Ultimately, my visit to the Kitchen made me feel part of something special. Ira Blonder's created a family feel to the studios, and as he so eloquently puts it, "We encourage community. It is something we live."



"Always something cookin' at the Kitchen. I love working with all of you. Thanks for it all!"  
 — Dolly Parton, country music legend  
 on her Sound Kitchen plate