

Reinventing Razzle's

A Florida club gets a whole new style with the latest in lighting gear

By: David Barbour Photos: Courtesy of Razzle's

The shelf life of most clubs is not long; some of the hottest venues burn brightly for a year or two, then vanish, to be replaced by the next novelty. Much rarer is the case of a club that is successfully reinvented after a long and profitable run. Such a case is Razzle's, based in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Razzle's is something of a fixture in that resort town; it's now in its 21st year, making it quite the neighborhood fixture. (It's owned by two brothers, Peter and Kyriakos Drymonis; their father ran it before them.) It's located in what you might call the city's club district, a beachside strip that is home to a variety of night spots—Irish pubs, adult clubs, and country-western bars, among them. Razzle's, which is a bit dressier than most of its competition, has been redesigned from time to time, most recently about seven years ago—a veritable eternity in club years. Therefore, the owners decided it was time to reinvent Razzle's.

The first step took place about a year ago, when the Connecticut-based company Sound Stage Systems supplied a custom sound rig to the club, a changeover that went very smoothly. (The sound package includes a set of the company's custom dual 15" five way enclosures, plus Mach dual-18" subwoofers, and, around the perimeter of the club, EV FRI 2082 units. The sound gear list also includes two

Pioneer CDJ-1000 CD players and a Rane control system.) When the owners looked at the lighting system, however, they faced a complex set of challenges having to do with the club's identity.

Razzle's' existing lighting rig consisted of a fairly standard package of club gear. According to David Chesal, of Robe Lighting Inc., the rig was located "underneath a lot of electrical pipe, HVAC, unistrut, wires, and cabling, which had accumulated over 20 years. It was a real rat's nest." Karl Kieslich, of Sound Stage Systems, evaluated the club's lighting and proposed an updated package of moving heads, scanners, and effects and smoke units. He also suggested bringing in Chesal as a design consultant on the project. "They had a club that was working just fine," says Kieslich, "but they wanted to make it better—more contemporary. They really trusted us—they simply asked us what we needed to do. I told them, 'You can do one of two things. You can hire an architect, which will be time-consuming and expensive, or you can hire Dave Chesal, because this is what he does.'"

"I assessed the situation and told them I felt the typical lighting plot that they were about to purchase didn't do justice to the space," says Chesal. "I also felt that, with some new interior treatments, we could do an extreme makeover. Without changing the overall club, we decided what we needed



to do in order to make a difference for the regular clubgoer who has been going there year after year.” This last point was crucial, adds Chesal.

“Razzle’s does rely on tourist business—people attending the Daytona 500, the college reunions, and the kids on spring break—but they’re also dependent on the local clientele.”

Rethinking the dance floor

The first issue to be dealt with was the dance floor area. With a low ceiling, and all of the accumulated infrastructure mentioned above, “I really felt that that light show was on top of your head,” says Chesal. “The biggest item on our to-do list was to remove all the mechanical and electrical, right down to the concrete ceiling. In doing so, we recaptured well over 3.5’ of lost space. Once all the electrical and HVAC was removed, we took drywall and a high-gloss laminate and created vertical walls, which made the illusion of a higher ceiling. We also blacked out the concrete and placed Robe’s Stage Qube 324s and ColorSpot 575E ATs within the concrete ribs. By doing this, we were able to raise the bar and the entire light show into the concrete structure.

And, with the help of the new vertical walls, we have a projection surface that we didn’t have before.”

The Stage Qube 324 is Robe’s LED panel. It was useful in this context, because it’s a plug-and-play unit that doesn’t require any external power supply or control box. (Also, with its integrated rigging system, you can put up a big system fairly quickly.) The unit’s resolution is 18 x18p at a size of 80 x 80cm, with a pixel pitch of 4.44cm. It uses a VGA connected to a StageQube server. The Colorspot 575E AT is the electronic ballast version of Robe’s ColorSpot 575 AT. Combined, they make a solid system of moving lights and LED video display for the dance-floor area.

With this gear, says Chesal, “We went from using 250W light sources to the 575W, with the complement of the LEDs.” There are no wash fixtures in the rig, he notes, and that’s for a reason: “With one StageQube 324 just above your head, you have all the ambient light you need. The LED panels do double-duty, providing a light wash and graphical representation. It would be almost criminal to ask the owner to install wash lights when you have all these LED

products.” It’s yet another testament to the incredible speed with which LEDs have gone from being a nice accent fixture to a major light source.

The overall effect of the redesign, plus the new lighting gear, has been to transform the dance floor, says Chesal. “People have come in and said, ‘You must have literally raised the roof when you did the remodel. But really, we just cleaned up the space up there.’”

Adjacent to the dance floor is an expansive DJ booth. “We wanted to tie it to the dance floor,” says Chesal, “so we built a new back wall in the booth, and laced it with Anolis ArcLinks.” Anolis is Robe’s architectural division. The ArcLink 3 is a 140mm LED strip, with Luxeon RGB LED units lined up with a Cat5 connection and a heat sink. It can be used for cove lighting or built into furniture. In this application, says Chesal, “we made a beautiful color palette behind the DJ and lighting technicians, creating a magnificent silhouette effect, as the staff does its thing. You get a kind of moving art, with the people in the booth, moving in front of all that color.”

The next step was to rework the bar area. There, 36 Anolis ArcQube 144 LED panels were embedded between columns in sections of six—the columns had also been treated in a high-gloss laminate. Designed for permanent installations, The ArcQube panels come in the standard size of 60 x 60cm and are designed for easy installation, even on uneven walls. Each panel contains a matrix of 12 x 12 RGB LEDs. Four LEDs are combined to one pixel, giving a pixel resolution of 6 x 6. The pixel pitch is 10cm, so the LED pitch is 5cm. One panel uses up to 108 DMX channels; four occupy one DMX universe.

Besides the addition of the panels, “The liquor tree remained in white, so we could get a clean architectural look behind the bar,” says Chesal. “We were very careful to remove all



A mix of Robe Stage Qube 324s and ColorSpot 575E ATs are seen over the dance floor.



The VIP bar features pearlescent white Italian tile, lit with 40 pieces of ArcSource 1 ten-degree LED units.

the typical stuff you find in a back bar that can make it look a little seedy—we dressed it up to give it a kind of retail appearance. In addition to the ArcQube LED panels on the columns, we placed 50" LG LCD panels, making for a contrast of high and low-res video. It's cool to mix them up; you can appreciate the high-res content and also the lower-res graphics."

A new VIP room

Probably the most important change was the reconfiguration of the VIP room, which is located next to the dance floor—they're separated by the bar—on a slightly higher level. "We put in a number of metal bead curtains, supplied by entaLeis, along with a texture wall," says Chesal. "The paneling, which is in a matte white finish, is illuminated from the top edge using Anolis' ArcLine Optic 36 25 x 6°." This LED unit "allows us to scallop just the wall, keeping the light to the wall and blending color right at the diodes," says Chesal. "That way, you don't see little shards of RGB colors right at the top. The unit's elliptical lens has full color development at the source, which

makes a beautiful backdrop in each area, each of which is segmented with the metal beaded curtains." The latter, he adds, "becomes a projection surface for the RecessedSpot 170 AT unit, which had to be used because of the extremely low ceiling height in the VIP room. We could never put a moving head in there, unless it was a recessed fixture."

In the center of the VIP room, Chesal and the owners went with an all-white furniture plot, with upholstered ottomans, and cube-shaped tables, in an arrangement that, he says, is reminiscent of the video game Tetris. "This was done because, in the acoustical ceiling above this concourse of white furniture, we put ArcSource 12 RGB fixtures in the ceiling, creating a wonderful color-changing furniture plot. We added a white acrylic dance floor in this area as well." He adds, "No secondary dance floor in a VIP room is complete without an LED color-changing acrylic bubble pole; again, this was supplied by entaLeis; its light source is the ArcSource 6 RGB 25° unit. The VIP bar face is tiled in a pearlescent white Italian tile, and is uplit using 40 pieces

of ArcSource 1 ten-degree LED units."

The lighting is controlled by a Martin LightJockey. There is a separate Media Fusion control software each for the ArcQube and StageQube; also used is a Knox video switcher and a PC.

There were other changes, as well. Originally, one entered into a small domed lobby, which featured paintings of mermaids on the ceiling; these were lit in black light. Chesal took it all out, painted the dome white, and installed more ArcLink units as cove lighting. This initial look makes a big difference, sending a signal to customers the club has undergone a sea-change, says Kyriakos Drymonis. "We've had a great response," he notes. "We've had people who haven't been to the club in a while, and they're really impressed by the difference."

Chesal thinks the new look gives Razzle's more of a timeless quality, which keeps it poised to remain on the cutting edge for some time to come. Clearly, however, when the time to upgrade comes along, the Drymonis brothers won't hesitate to go for the next big design idea. 