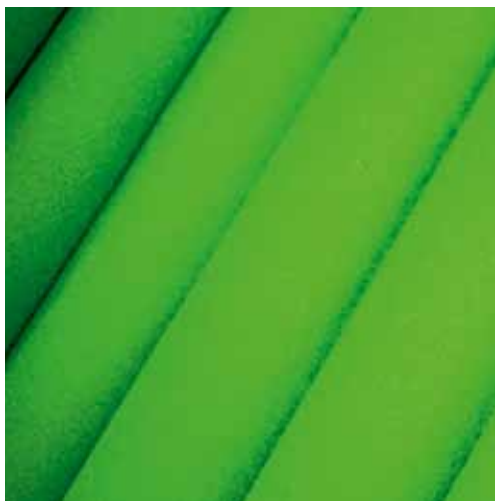


GRAMERCY PARK STUDIOS



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Vittorio Giannini, md, GPS



SOHO'S
NEW
CREATIVE
SPACE

GRAMERCY PARK STUDIOS



redefining post production



Vittorio Giannini

A new kind of post house

Opening a new, decidedly ambitious, high-end post house in the heart of a recession-torn Soho may appear a foolhardy move, but the ultra chic Gramercy Park Studios, which has just opened up on Great Pulteney Street, is no run-of-the-mill post production house.

It's arguably not even a post house, or if it is one, it's most definitely one for the future, having been built from a completely clean canvas with the desire to fashion an environment for advertising agencies and production companies to feel at home and express their creative visions.

GPS is a space for creative thinking. It facilitates not only end-to-end post production but encourages, with the support of its technical and creative services, close collaboration between director, creative and producer.

When asked to describe the role Gramercy Park Studios (GPS) sees for itself in the production process, Managing Director Vittorio Giannini says: "The term post house seems almost outdated as a

description of what we do. We are a creative studio - we facilitate offline editing, sound design, visual effects, cgi, compositing and colour grading; but we also have designers and creative directors within our team, so there's a definite crossover. We want to get closer to the creative process."

GPS's parent company is marketing communications giant WPP and the facility has been set up by the team behind WPP's global 'marketing implementation agency' Hogarth. The new offering (GPS) sets itself apart as a high-end creative post production studio.

Drop in and share ideas

GPS Network Creative Director, Ben Raven says GPS is there to assist advertising agencies and their creatives: "Inside an agency people are working on multiple projects, thinking about multiple concepts simultaneously. Clients are asking for a multitude of content - you've got print, you've got design, experiential, PR and events. I've got to be on a call to the client whilst on my way to Soho, and so on - it's become a big salad of multiple formats and different communications across brands and products", he says.

"You need to understand how and why this salad has come about, and provide somewhere that can respond to this. Somewhere that is calm, relaxing and creatively stimulating for our clients." At GPS there are design books littering the walls, with people that understand creative problems and issues the agency faces. GPS provides an area to have these conversations and be productive, pushing projects further: At GPS you can talk to the cg department whilst at the same time finishing your script and have a TV producer giving you a cost on how to achieve this."

Giannini is similarly keen to emphasise the inventive attributes of GPS: "We want this to be a creative space for people to feel comfortable to drop

in and share ideas and thoughts with our creatives, to help find solutions at an early stage. By getting involved in the early stages of a project we can help create better and more efficient ways of working. The sooner we can get involved in a large scale vfx project, the more value we can add," he says.

An investment for the future

"Our ambition is to be part of the team from the beginning and to be at the table advising and supporting the creative process. It can be quite common for post houses to be involved in fairly large projects at a late stage and this can be a missed opportunity for all involved."

"It's really tough times out there - we can see post houses struggling and closing, and, in that context, GPS might appear quite extravagant. But I think we represent how the industry is changing - it's an investment for the future," adds Giannini.

A changing landscape

"I think we can see this year and probably next year will be important ones for commercials post production. Never has moving image and sound needed post production more than it has now, but it's how we cope with the changing landscape, how we adapt and work in different ways. In this way GPS is extremely well placed."

The key to GPS's untethered ambitions is in the design of the facility, which has been created to provide efficiencies through the different disciplines it offers. These efficiencies mean its well-appointed, plush surroundings are something of a smokescreen hiding a very resourcefully run, commercially driven facility.

"It's nice to have a blank sheet of paper and a relatively open brief that's unconstrained by platforms or preferred software. Funnily enough, when you do it like that, you get what feels like a

very light, airy environment where there's not a lot of technology and it's actually very cost effective," says Hogarth/GPS's Group CTO Mark Keller.

"We built this for a sound business reason. Because of the levelling out of the playing field in the cost of technology and the fact that platforms don't matter too much anymore - whether you're on OS X or Windows or Linux - you can cope with it, they can all talk together, so you can spread the applications across rooms as much as you like. Which lends itself to creating this kind of environment."

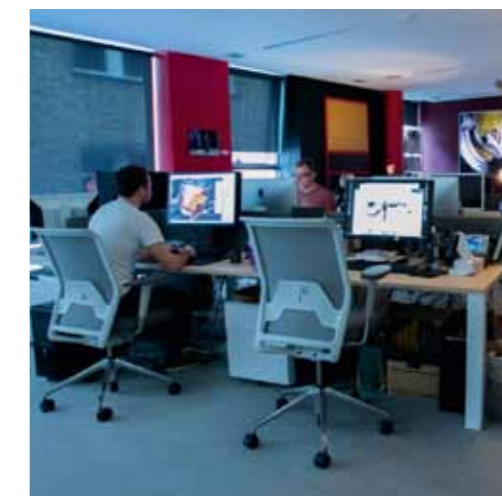
Joined up post production

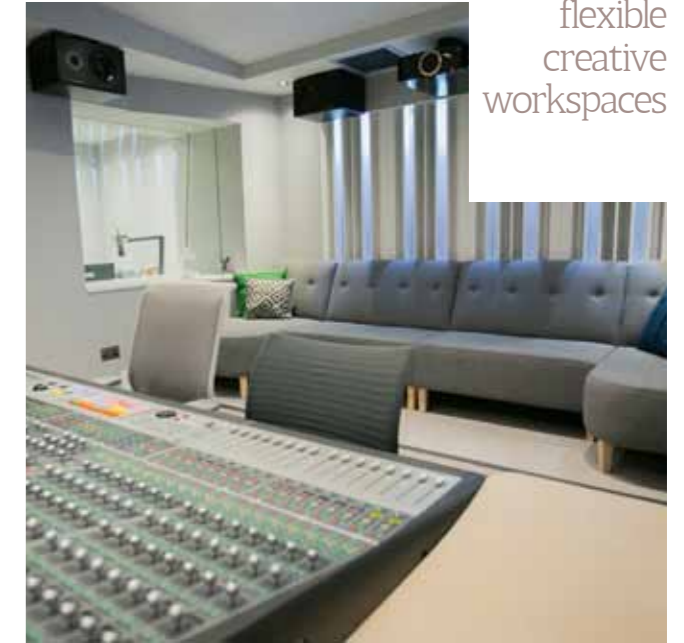
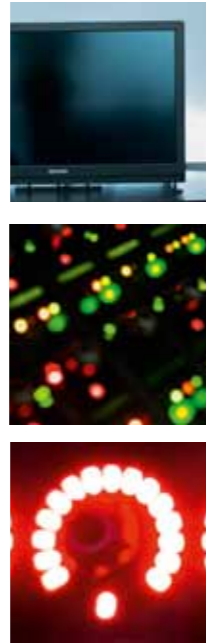
Giannini adds, simply: "We're trying to find efficiencies in a world where it's very challenging out there. We want to create a post production pipeline that's truly joined up, and that's where we're going to find our efficiencies."

"With all this in mind we are putting in place a high performance creative team with a shared vision to take GPS forward."



Ben Raven





Mark Keller

Evolving functionality

The facilities offered by GPS cover all areas of audio and picture post, centred on picture editing, 7.1 audio, compositing, cgi, motion graphics and colour grading. The difference between the set up at GPS and your average facility burdened by legacy kit, is it's been built from scratch to be an entirely flexible environment. The functionality of most of the rooms really is able to evolve and adapt to the client's needs.

"As much as possible, we tried not to make boundaries in the room design by saying, 'That's the room you do cgi in,' 'That's the room you do colour grading in,' and so on" says Keller. "There's obviously some restrictions because of the environment but that was the general idea."

This approach extends to the distinction between audio and picture post production and the different rooms you'd expect to do this kind of work in. Put simply, GPS destroys the barrier between audio and picture post: "We have an audio-ish area, the centrepiece of which is a room that's actually used

for picture post with a Flame but just so happens to be built to 7.1 audio post specifications. So that gives you an environment where you can playback cinema level sound at absolutely the right quality while you're finishing the picture."

"I think that's unique and exciting - normally you're in an audio suite that's got fantastic sound and there's a rather rubbish proxy picture, or the other way round. So it's nice to do that and have audio and picture post talent talking and working together."

Switch, swap and change

There are a further two Flame suites within GPS, and these are supplemented in the immediate vicinity by a sprinkling of Nuke seats. "These Flame suites have Nuke seats inside them - so the hero seat is Flame, which is surrounded by Nuke support. And there's a Nuke section in the middle, in between the rooms, too. If you want, you can open up this whole area to provide one big, open vfx wing. So you can have all the compositing and prep work take up that whole space if you really need to push a big job through at speed," says Keller.

Even labelling a particular suite a 'Flame suite' is a mentality that doesn't sit particularly comfortably with GPS. In reality, says Keller, "The Flame could be in video 1 or it could be in video 3 or it could be in video 4, which is the finishing cinema. In fact, the finishing tool could be a Flame, it could be Smoke on the Mac, it could be Premiere or it could be FCP if that's the kind of tool you want to finish off on."

"Or you could put a Resolve in there if you wanted to. We have a bespoke grading room as well, but really the only difference with that room is it has a really nice calibrated Dolby monitor and the grey background."

One of the overriding reasons there's so much reluctance to pin a particular function on any of the

creative suites in GPS is the aspiration to be able to straightforwardly cope with whatever demands are placed on it by its clients. By building options into the very core of the facility's functioning, it's truly able to adapt to changing circumstances and remain supple and agile to its clients' needs.

"When we were specifying this facility we had an idea for the type of work that needed to get done here, but we didn't know for sure so we had to design it with flexibility in mind," explains Technical Operations Director, Alex Buchanan. "And so what we've done is put in fibre throughout the facility and put all the CPUs in the machine room rack. So whatever software needs to be in the room, it can be easily swapped in and out as the room is just the other end of whatever is in the rack. The facility is designed so we can switch, swap and change all over the place."

A truly integrated experience

"We've created a truly integrated experience," he adds. "We're going straight into the agencies' creative department with this concept, getting across the message that, rather than going to two or three shops, you can get everything done here."

The grading platform for GPS's dedicated grading room (one of the few rooms that isn't built to be flexible in operation) has yet to be decided while the facility waits to confirm which of the colour grading artists it has earmarked will take up the post.

"One of the plans is to offer our grading artist here to any of our other facilities remotely - we're putting in a Resolve system in our New York facility [Hogarth has offices in Hong Kong, New York, Mexico, Singapore and London] so it would be great if we could employ a Resolve grading artist here too as that would give us a great opportunity to be able to offer remote grading 24/7," says Buchanan.

The well-honed technical ability and extensive knowledge of the GPS technical management team means they didn't have to bring in any external companies to design and implement their vision for the facility. They did, however, bring in the leading provider of hardware, software and networking solutions Trams to source a good proportion of the kit within GPS.

A great partner

"We've worked alongside Trams for a few years now and they are our go-to vendor of choice. With this project we put the sale of the hardware and software out to tender and Trams came back as the best option for us. Trams sorted out all our Macs, all our Quantum kit, some of the infrastructure items and most of the software. It's great working with them as they really know what they are talking about. They appreciate where we're coming from and what we're trying to achieve, and they are super-fast at responding; they are a great partner," says Buchanan.



Alex Buchanan





Why we chose Trams

"We have a long-standing relationship with Trams. They've always given us the best deals and the best service. If we say, 'Look, this is what we're going



to build, these are the rooms we need and this is the equipment we have to have' they understand the configurations and there's no time wasted. They are professionals in the area of creative workstations and the creative desktop and the applications that go along with that. They've got an extremely good supply chain so we get equipment straight away. And their service and backup is extremely good."

Mark Keller,
Group CTO, Hogarth/GPS

Minimalist machine room

It only takes a few moments in the machine room of GPS to see another clear benefit of being able to start from scratch with the design of the facility. The room is a minimalist delight; it's spotless, uncluttered and completely free of old, clunky legacy equipment.

And, says Keller: "We've installed a dark fibre connection to our major sites in London as well as our data centres. Our servers, transcoders and main backup storage is in our data centres, so the storage you can see here is the day-to-day production storage. This makes it more secure and means we don't have to have so much hardware on site."

A Quantum shift

At the centre of GPS's technical infrastructure sits a number of Quantum products. Quantum, which prides itself on being 'the global expert in data protection and big data management solutions', has a reputation for reliability and robustness for its range of specialised storage products.

Trams worked with GPS to facilitate the

specification and installation of the Quantum kit at the facility. "Trams put us in touch directly with Quantum - they had really good contacts at Quantum so we spent time talking directly with Quantum about what we wanted to do and what we wanted to achieve with our storage. They were really fruitful meetings," says Buchanan.

Quantum was already a tried and tested brand for GPS, with Hogarth having relatively recently successfully completed a move over to Quantum kit: "We have Quantum elsewhere - in our head office in Shaftsbury Avenue we replaced our Xsan just over a year ago with Quantum M330. When the renewal came up for the support, a year after the installation, we realised we hadn't switched it off in that time and it had caused us absolutely no bother whatsoever," says Buchanan.

"So really going for Quantum here wasn't really a choice between it and something else; we knew we were going to do it anyway. It was really just a case of spec'ing out the disc. The nice thing about Quantum is we're familiar with it and it's just a much more robust enterprise product than Xsan was. So migrating to it was really an easy decision for us."

Ultra-fast access to media

Keller adds: "We've standardised on one kind of storage that can support all media types, which is actually quite hard to do. We managed to do that with Quantum StorNext. Quantum provides storage that's really, really fast and capable of handling all different kinds of creative assets - very large HD or 4K or 2K video files as well as very, very high res visual sequences for the Flames, which is a completely different kind of media from a technical point of view."

Trams' IT Consultant Jonathan Wilding, along with GPS's Production Systems Director John Oag, installed a Quantum M330 StorNext 'Metadata

"We have a long-standing relationship with Trams. They are professionals in the area of creative workstations and the creative desktop. They've got an extremely good supply chain so we get equipment straight away. And their service and backup is extremely good too,"

Mark Keller, Group CTO, Hogarth/GPS

Appliance' at GPS - it provides ultra-fast concurrent access to centrally stored media by multiple users, eliminating the need for multiple copies of the same file, reducing storage space, simplifying production workflows, and enabling faster project completion.

And, crucially for the setup at GPS, StorNext permits assorted operating systems - including Windows, Linux and Mac - to have direct access to high capacity, high performance discs, ensuring the facility can run pretty much any variation of software setup throughout and still flawlessly access the same project data.

Added to this, "Quantum StorNext scales massively to enable seamless access to video however many workstations you have," says Wilding. "It's very flexible - your facility may currently be able to handle 1GB/sec access to video data with 50TB of storage but, for whatever reason, you may shortly need 4GB/sec and 500TB of storage, in which case StorNext provides the ability to scale up quite easily."

Rock solid reliability

"When Hogarth opened up it had Xsan - it began using Quantum when Apple came out of the server marketplace," adds Wilding. "It needed a professional, mainstream, enterprise manufacturer and chose Quantum, which is justifiably known for its reliability. It's rock solid. StorNext really does allow you to file it and forget it. You don't need to keep tinkering with it - you have to go back to it when

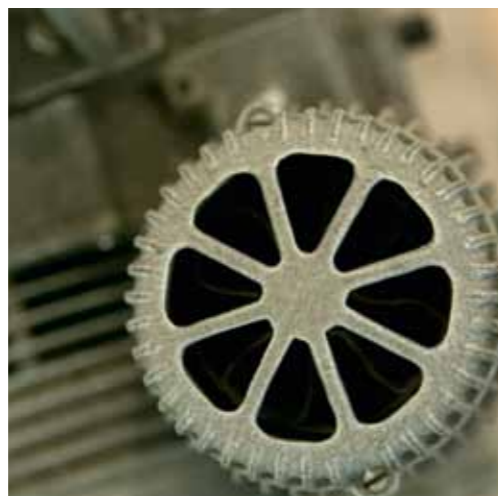
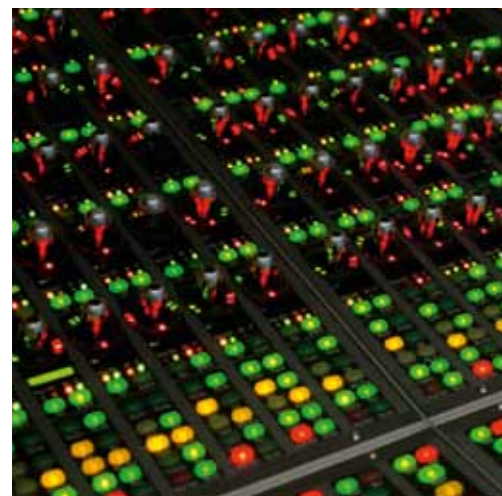
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most of the software. It's great working with them as they know what they are talking about and appreciate where we're coming from and what we're trying to achieve. They are super-fast at responding and turning round and getting equipment out to us. Added to this, they are really knowledgeable and interested in what they are doing."

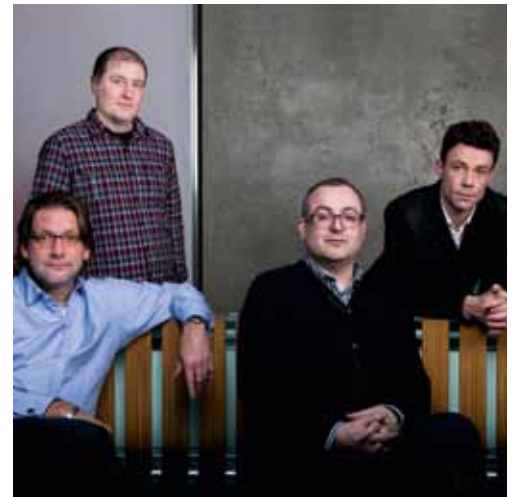
Alex Buchanan,
Technical Operations Director, Hogarth/GPS



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“We provide somewhere calm and relaxing for the client. You can come in and have conversations and be productive about generating something. You can talk to a cg department while, at the same time, talking to someone about a script and have a TV producer run off and talk to someone else about vfx and have that immediacy of a response while the idea is still being formulated.”

Ben Raven, Network Creative Director, Hogarth/GPS



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Trams

Trams is Quantum's Big Data VAR of the Year Winner 2012 and proud of its association with Quantum and assisting customers like Hogarth to achieve flexible, robust and scalable workflows. Trams is a London-based IT VAR established in 1990, specialising in best-of-breed hardware, software and high-speed, high-capacity shared workflow solutions. Let us help you manage exponential data growth and achieve cost efficiencies. It's what we do.

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