

CASE STUDY: HOSPITALITY INSTALL

When a South Mumbai nightclub owner returned from Europe with a radical idea, he turned to acoustic designer **Milind Raorane** of **Soundframe** to build something India had never seen before, a space where sound comes first, and everything else follows. **PALM Expo Magazine** sits down for an exclusive tour of Mumbai's first ever vinyl-only listening bar.

The turntable console sits at the heart of Baroke's listening geometry, flanked by floor-to-ceiling vinyl shelves housing a curation of over 250+ records with perforated ceiling tiles above, for enhanced acoustics



BAROQUE TO BAROKE:

INSIDE MUMBAI'S FIRST VINYL LISTENING BAR

There is a moment, between when the stylus drops on the spinning vinyl and the first note fills the room, when **Baroke** declares its intent. Sans the sub-bass thumps, elevated DJ booths and strobing lights. Two **Klipschorn** horn-loaded loudspeakers and the warm, unmistakable character of vinyl seep into the atmosphere as audiophiles sip on bespoke cocktails and look forward to a night of great conversation. For a city that has long equated nightlife with volume, this is Baroke's radical proposition. As India's only dedicated vinyl listening bar, Baroke is the result of a painstaking collaboration between owner **Saurabh Shetty** and **Milind Raorane**, founder of **Soundframe**, who led the acoustic design and system integration.

A Brief With Unusual Priorities

The project began when Shetty returned from travels across Europe and the States, having spent time in listening bars and speaking with DJ's who introduced him to the Japanese *kisabar* concept, intimate rooms built entirely around serious music listening. The first call he made was to Raorane, with

whom he had worked on earlier ventures at the same venue, then a nightclub.

"The first decision was to find a designer who understood that speakers and sound would dictate the architecture — not the other way around," Raorane recalls. "Most bars and nightclubs are built around lighting, glamour and bar placement. Here, the space had to be built around sound." Enter **Rohit Bohite**.

This reorientation of priorities had immediate and significant implications for everything that followed, layout, seating geometry, material choices, signal routing, and acoustic treatment. Where a conventional nightlife project begins with a floor plan and fits the sound system around it, Baroke required the opposite logic.

The non-negotiables were clear from the outset: vinyl-only playback as the primary format, SPLs that allowed conversation throughout the evening, vintage loudspeakers as the sonic core, and the capacity to support small live formats, duos, trios, jazz, acoustic performances — without compromising

the listening system's integrity.

Getting the Tools Right

Raorane spent close to eight months evaluating loudspeaker options, including custom-built systems from speaker builders in Poland and the United States, and visited listening bars in Barcelona to assess how comparable spaces approached the same challenge.

The eventual decision, **KLIPSCH Heritage LA SCALA AL5** horn-loaded loudspeakers, was driven by both sonic and philosophical reasoning. Klipsch's corner-loaded horn design offers exceptional efficiency, allowing the system to deliver dynamic, textured playback at moderate SPLs without strain. At listening levels, where most large-format systems compress and lose resolution, the Klipschorn remains coherent and alive.

Raorane's explanation of the selection process reveals the depth of thinking applied to what might, from the outside, appear to be a simple product choice. The Klipschorn represents a specific moment in that trajectory, the end of the horn-loaded era and the beginning of the modern loudspeaker period. "What we have chosen is that last iteration of this initial loudspeaker journey, the end of the vintage era and the beginning of the modern era. After this point, loudspeaker formats changed completely." It is a choice designed to feel resonant without feeling antiquarian.

Historically, the Klipschorn is one of the longest continuously manufactured loudspeaker designs in the world, originating in the 1940's and still handcrafted in the United States. Each pair is signed by the craftsman who built it, a detail that aligns neatly with Baroke's ethos of intentional, human-made experience.

The Signal Chain

The analogue signal path at Baroke was designed for transparency and minimal interference. From turntable through cartridge, phono stage, line stage, amplification, and finally to the loudspeakers, every stage was selected and arranged to preserve the inherent character of vinyl playback. No digital correction or processing is inserted into the chain. Noise management was a particular concern. Careful grounding topology was employed to avoid the ground loops common in hospitality environments, where multiple audio, lighting, and catering systems share infrastructure. Turntables were physically isolated from structure-borne vibration, and power routing was separated from lighting and bar equipment wherever possible.

Amplification uses tube-based designs, chosen for their warmth and their natural pairing with the efficiency of horn-loaded loudspeakers. Playback employs Audio-Technica turntables — a deliberate choice over more exotic audiophile equipment. "When it came to vinyl equipment, we could have gone for very exotic vinyl gear," Raorane notes. "But since we needed a DJ setup, we had to select commercial vinyl equipment, not residential gear." **Audio-Technica's** commercial-grade turntables offer the reliability, consistency, and serviceability that a hospitality environment demands, without the fragility of high-end residential gear. The mixer, notably, remains vinyl-only — a deliberate choice to keep the entire playback chain within the analogue format. Only the turntables are commercial-grade; everything upstream stays true to the vinyl-first brief.

Cabling throughout is audiophile-grade, with cables from **QUADRAX 4x2.0 Bi-Wire Combicon** by SUPRA (Made in Sweden), and rack interconnects supplied by ProMedia.

SPL Discipline and the 90 dB Ceiling

One of the most distinctive operational features of Baroke is its self-enforced volume ceiling. The system is deliberately capped at 90 dB SPL, maintained through a physical decibel metre with no local volume override for DJs. Evening levels ramp gradually, building atmosphere without crossing into nightclub territory.

The target is a room in which micro-dynamics remain audible, vinyl surface noise, cymbal decay, the breath in a vocal take, while conversation is always possible. "The objective is conversation-level listening that gradually builds through the evening without ever turning into a club environment," Raorane explains.

This approach reflects a broader philosophical position: that the value of vinyl lies precisely in those details that high SPLs and heavy compression erase. At 90 dB, the Klipschorns operate well within their dynamic range, and



A hand-crafted Klipschorn corner-loaded loudspeaker anchors the prime listening zone, where stereo imaging and tonal balance converge

the room rewards attentive listening rather than passive exposure.

Acoustics: Liveliness Over Deadness

The acoustic design at Baroke was calibrated for controlled liveliness rather than the treated neutrality of a studio or critical listening room. The target was a space that felt alive, warm, present, textured, while managing early reflections and preventing excessive decay that would smear transient detail.

Perforated absorption panels address mid-to-high reflections, while low-frequency behaviour is controlled primarily through speaker placement, boundary interaction, and the inherent horn loading of the Klipschorns rather than conventional bass trapping. The room was also designed with the natural acoustic contribution of its furnishings, deep upholstery, rugs, draped surfaces, as an integral part of the treatment strategy.

"Apart from ceiling tiles, no dedicated acoustic treatment was added," Raorane says. "We relied on the natural tapestry of the space, upholstery, seating, soft finishes and angles. We deliberately avoided making it look like a studio or auditorium."

The intention was a listening-room aesthetic, not a production environment. The result is a space that reads, visually, as a thoughtfully designed hospitality venue, and reveals its acoustic intent only when experienced from the prime listening positions.

Listening Geometry and the Headphone Corner

Seating layout at Baroke was driven by acoustic geometry. Two front sofas anchor a listening triangle, creating an optimal seating zone for coherent stereo imaging from the Klipschorns. "If you notice, the front two sofas are the prime listening positions," Raorane notes. "For those who understand listening geometry, those are the ideal seats. Everyone else still experiences the sound, but that central area is critical."

Secondary and social seating was positioned and treated for tonal consistency rather than imaging precision. Minor architectural asymmetry was addressed through speaker angle, seating offset, and absorption placement rather than corrective EQ, preserving the purity of the analogue chain.

A separate headphone listening zone was introduced mid-project, fed the same programme material but acoustically isolated. It functions as a parallel private listening experience, for the guest who wants to hear the same record with complete intimacy, without influencing the main room's behaviour. Guests can enjoy an individual listening session, on premium Audio-Technica headphones.

Dual Design for Live and Vinyl Sessions

For live performances, Baroke operates an entirely separate system — a refurbished **d&b E-series** rig, retained from the venue's previous configuration as a nightclub. Critically, bands and performers never play through the vintage Klipschorn system. The two systems are physically and electrically iso-

lated from one another, with separate subwoofer handling for live use only.

This separation was essential for maintaining phase integrity in the vinyl system and avoiding the low-frequency smear that subwoofer bleed would introduce during playback. The live rig supports duos, trios, and acoustic formats at appropriate SPLs without compromising the listening system's tuning.

A Benchmark in the Making

Baroke opened in early 2024. Initial response was measured, as the concept required time to find its audience. But sustained ownership commitment, and the absence of commercial pressure to pivot back to more conventional formats, allowed the space to build its identity at its own pace.

"This space isn't about trends or social media hype," Raorane reflects. "It's about creating a sustainable listening culture. That takes patience, commitment, and belief in the idea."

By the time Baroke opened, the concept had already been attempted

elsewhere in India a bar in Goa and one in Bengaluru had both started as vinyl-first spaces before eventually reverting to digital formats, unable to sustain a dedicated audience. Baroke's insistence on holding the line makes it, at present, the only space in the country to have stayed the course.

The space now holds a collection of approximately 250+ handpicked records spanning the golden eras of jazz, funk, soul, and rock vinyl records sourced from Europe, by their in-house vinyl specialist **DJ Wilbur**, with a rotating programme and regular bring-your-own-vinyl sessions. The bar programme, the seating, the lighting, and the architecture all serve a single ambition: to create the conditions in which music, listened to properly, becomes the reason to be there.

Baroke was born Baroque, all drama, grandeur, and nightlife spectacle. What it has evolved to is something far more considered. For the Indian hospitality and pro audio industries alike, Baroke conveys that there is an audience willing to sit still, lean in, and listen.