

THE DEFINING POINT

*Giving better reference to sound and video at
Sakura Shabu-Shabu*

- by Gregory A. DeTogne

In the movie *Lost in Translation*, Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson's characters eat lunch at a shabu-shabu restaurant in Tokyo, prompting Murray to wonder rhetorically, "What kind of restaurant makes you cook your own food?"

Sakura Shabu-Shabu in Huntington Beach, California is one such place, and despite the cinematic opinion just cited, the trendy West Coast eatery regularly fills its tables with patrons eager to create meals right at their own tables. Prepared by submerging thinly sliced beef and a savory blend of vegetables in a pot of boiling water, traditional shabu-shabu often ends up served alongside tofu, nori (edible seaweed), Chinese cabbage, chrysanthemum leaves, onions, carrots, and shiitake mushrooms. Giving diversity to its menu, Sakura Shabu-Shabu also tempts patrons with yakitori, an entree made with bite-size pieces of chicken cooked on a bamboo skewer.

Taking great and mindful care to enrich every aspect of the dining experience at his restaurant, Sakura Shabu-Shabu owner Andy Dang called upon Northridge, California-based Rutherford Design to develop the room's audio and video ambience.

"What intrigued me about this space is that it was small, yet well-defined," Rutherford Design owner and founder Richard Rutherford recalls of his initial impressions upon entering Sakura Shabu-Shabu's main dining room. "There are tall, vaulted ceilings in some sections, and low ceilings in others. The entire area is only 2,000 square feet, but it feels like much more."

Faced with both designing and implementing a comprehensive AV blueprint that would meet his client's needs, Rutherford took to the audio portion of the task at hand armed with a philosophy that the assignment wasn't so much about volume as it was about how the patrons would reference sound.

"In applications like this, I like to take loudspeakers and place them at the right distance to the listeners in a fashion that gets the dynamics of each speaker working up to its potential," he explains. "My end goal was to have everyone hearing and referencing the same thing no matter where they were seated. I wanted the sound to be like putting headphones on every customer."

Using program material derived from satellite radio, a pair of satellite TV receivers, a DVD player, and a live DJ, Rutherford's audio formula was executed with loudspeakers from QSC's AcousticDesign Series. A total of 14 compact, surface-mount model AD-S52T enclosures were spread throughout the environment, along with three ceiling-mount AD-C152T's and a half-dozen AD-C81Tw ceiling-mount subwoofers. Powered by a single four-channel, 70V CX204V amplifier, this main distributed portion of the system was buttressed by one of QSC's MD-L115 subwoofers built into the front of the dining room's DJ booth. Power for the latter arrived at eight-ohms from a single QSC CX404 amp.

As per a request specifically made by the client, the system is stereo. An unusual move within the context of a 70V design like this, Rutherford reports that the decision was nonetheless a good one.

"Because we had so many speakers in such a small space, it worked," he notes. "It helps some of the lower ceiling spaces steal a little more dynamic. "The ceiling subs are great, they really warm the room up at lower volumes around 60-78 dB. This isn't a dance club, but there is a restaurant/lounge kind of vibe. They play pretty loud--over 95 dB at times. That's loud for an establishment like this. The QSC components came in with good performance for the price, and

are very consistent across the board. Real world performance is the same as the specs listed."

A ZonePRO 640 processor from dbx serves as the guiding element for audio signals, which, when used in conjunction with a ZC-3 remote preset selector and ZC-1 volume control also supplied by dbx, provides a user interface that is both highly functional, accessible, and simple to use.

On the video end of the system spectrum, five 46-inch LCD displays from Sony were deployed throughout the space in numbers leaving two at the bar, two in the dining room, and one in a custom-built enclosure on an outdoor patio. With input monitored via a Numark VM03-MKII video monitor, a Rolls RM67 audio mixer serves simply as an audio-from-video sub-mixer working in conjunction with a 4x4 Kramer VS-44HC video matrix switcher that allows system operators to matrix video input from the multiple sources and send it to the dbx ZC-3 preset selector.

"Only one of the ZC-3's four presets is dedicated to video," Rutherford says, explaining the logic of his design, "and only a single source can be taken from the Rolls unit at a time. The only place system operators can make input choices is at the ZC-3. Besides a video preset, the ZC-3 was given a 'lower level' music mode that only permits six or nine dB of attenuation and gain on the master volume control, another mode that gives access to the full 24 dB gain/attenuation range of the system, and a DJ mode. The 'lower level' preset is intended for use in times when the owner is absent and doesn't want the setting of the system to be varied that much."

Once the system was commissioned and the keys were officially turned over to owner Andy Dang, the training period for users of the system--including the DJ--was about 15 minutes. With a total cost of around \$23,000, Rutherford, his client, and the restaurant's customers feel they are getting good bang for the buck from a system short on complexity and long on functionality and performance.

For all the sophisticated systems integration there is in the world, Rutherford still believes that having simplicity in design like he created at Sakura Shabu-Shabu has clear advantages.

"Within restaurant applications, unless you're dealing with a huge chain using a heavily-formatted management style where you need remote programming and other network-driven attributes, I believe you should provide a design requiring a minimum of training and programming," he asserts. "A client has to be willing to pay for a system, and willing to own it. You don't always get the latter with a lot of technology used simply for technology's sake. The end result has to engage the owner, not overwhelm them. Clients have to be able to take charge of what they own completely. The most successful associations between AV contractors and clients are those that end at a clearly defined point. When we walk away, we don't want to do anything more than come back in a year and dust everything off after a quick check. In the end, that's what the client always wants too."

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