

Charles Goldstuck Opens State-of-the-Art Bahamas Recording Facility

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In 2013, the notion of building a state-of-the-art recording studio in the Bahamas -- on prime waterfront real estate, no less -- would have sounded quixotic to anyone aware of the recorded-music industry’s steadily diminishing returns over the previous nine years. But, for Charles Goldstuck, then the executive chairman of TouchTunes Interactive Network, and more recently, founder and co-chairman of Hitco Entertainment, change was in the air. “Outside of the majors, I was seeing a much broader commitment to investing in music,” he tells Billboard. “I felt that the industry pendulum was swinging back.”

So the part-time resident of Albany, a \$2 billion, 600-acre development that locals like to call “the Monte Carlo of the Caribbean,” struck a deal with the resort’s principal partners -- including Tavistock Group founder and billionaire Joe Lewis, Justin Timberlake, pro golfers Tiger Woods and Ernie Els, and managing partner Christopher Anand -- to make the studio a reality.

Four years and dozens of investors later -- among them Timberlake, Woods, Will Smith and corporate sponsor Monster Energy -- Goldstuck, who says he also has "skin in the game," stands inside the sunlit, white oak-paneled centerpiece of his labors, The Sanctuary at Albany. "This is the finest live room ever built," he says, proudly noting the staggered array of floor-to-ceiling windows -- a rare sight in a recording facility -- that looks out onto Albany's 71-slip mega-yacht marina.



With the closings of both Chris Blackwell's Compass Point Studios in Nassau (in 2010, due to local political unrest) and AIR Studios in Montserrat (in 1989, due to devastation by a hurricane and, later, a volcano) The Sanctuary at Albany -- which officially opened for business in April -- is poised to become a destination for musicians seeking to record in an exotic locale.

Inside and out, the studio complex was built to inspire. Designed by the Danish architecture firm Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), The Sanctuary's exterior resembles a series of rectangular slabs stacked vertically in a wavelike pattern. Inside, the studio facilities were built by U.K. acoustic designer White Mark Limited (among its other clients, London's famed Abbey Road Studios). Five additional studios fitted with Pro Tools-equipped Mac work stations -- and windows flank the live room and control booth, and artists and their entourages are able to relax in a green room designed by Timberlake that includes a full kitchen, an outdoor deck with a hot tub and gas grill and a vending machine -- one of just three in the world -- that dispenses split bottles of Moët champagne. (Moët parent company LVMH has a branding relationship with the studio.)

To run The Sanctuary, Goldstuck brought in a protege, Ann Mincieli, who owns Jungle City Studios in New York and runs Alicia Keys' studio in the same complex. Mincieli says she took the gig because she sees it as an opportunity to create a musical community through the studio. "Technology has separated all of us," she says. "Musicians used to make records together in a studio. Now, you have someone programming drums 3,000 miles away and you don't even meet him."

At The Sanctuary, three of the studios -- including the main live room -- have lines of sight into the control booth, which fosters that communal recording experience Mincieli is seeking. "We could do that because we had the luxury of time and were able to design this facility from scratch, Goldstuck says. "Most studios go into office buildings and have to conform to an existing structure. Here, the structure conformed to what the layout of the studio needed to be."

Likewise, the control booth is designed to appeal to both analog and digital geeks. At its core is a 48-channel Solid State Logic Duality Delta console. Behind it, a wall of outboard gear, both vintage and the latest in digital tech, makes The Sanctuary able "to say yes to any client," senior engineer Rich Evatt tells Billboard.

Goldstuck declines to discuss what The Sanctuary cost to build save to acknowledge that the studio facilities sit on one of the most prime pieces of real estate in the heart of Albany, where homes sell for upwards of \$4 million. "Joe Lewis and Christopher Anand have a strong belief in Albany being a creative center, as well as a center for wellness and sport and lifestyle, so they did what, I believe, no other developer would have done," Goldstuck says. "They gave us the best site possible."



Anand tells Billboard that The Sanctuary came by its top-shelf location serendipitously. A high-rise development was initially planned for the space that the studio complex now occupies, but when it became apparent that the intended structure would impact the views of another residential unit behind it, “I thought, what could a one-story building be in that spot?” Anand says, adding that Rascal Flatts guitarist Joe Don Rooney, one of a number of musicians who have homes in Albany, had earlier suggested that a studio would make a smart addition to the community. “And then Charles helped curate a dream team,” Anand says.

Given that the decision to green light The Sanctuary at Albany came in late 2013, when the recorded-music industry was showing few signs of growth, Anand says Albany’s principals hedged their bets by commissioning a design that would enable the facility to be converted into a five-bedroom home, had streaming not rebooted the music industry. But that was then. “Today, I’d bet my life that [The Sanctuary] will never become a house,” Anand says. “It has exceeded all of our expectations.”

Beyond the attraction of working in a brand-new studio that, as Evatt says “caters to every taste” in production and engineering, Goldstuck and Mincieli are banking on the recreational attractions of Albany as a draw for artists who want to have their families and friends in residence while they’re recording. The resort boasts a golf course designed by Els, an equestrian center, tennis courts, spa, gym, fine restaurants and pristine beaches. (Among the artists who’ve already recorded there: Keys, Nipsey Hussle and songwriter/producer Robert John “Mutt” Lange.)



Sanctuary is not only for artists who can afford to record there. The five smaller studios double as classrooms and Goldstuck is in talks to partner with the Berklee School of Music, Kennesaw State University's Joel A. Katz Music and Business Program and other institutions to present academy-style -programs at The Sanctuary. Anand and Goldstuck also have founded the Bahamas Youth Foundation which will provide scholarships for local Bahamian teens to attend the academy. The local private school, Windsor Prep, which operates a music program, also has access to the facilities, and Goldstuck says classes and lessons -- "for all disciplines and at all levels," Goldstuck says -- will be offered to the community as well.

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Asked how Sanctuary fits in with Hitco, his co-venture with former Epic Records CEO L.A. Reid, Goldstuck says that he sees the studio "as an outlet for Hitco's creators and artists," but, he stresses that, "we're not doing this to develop local talent that we can exploit commercially. The thrust of the Bahamas Youth Foundation is to give young local Bahamians the opportunity to develop skills that they would otherwise not develop."

With both ventures, Goldstuck is betting that it's time again to invest in content, noting, "The momentum in music is undeniable."

