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BERNHARD & TOBIAS WUESTNER

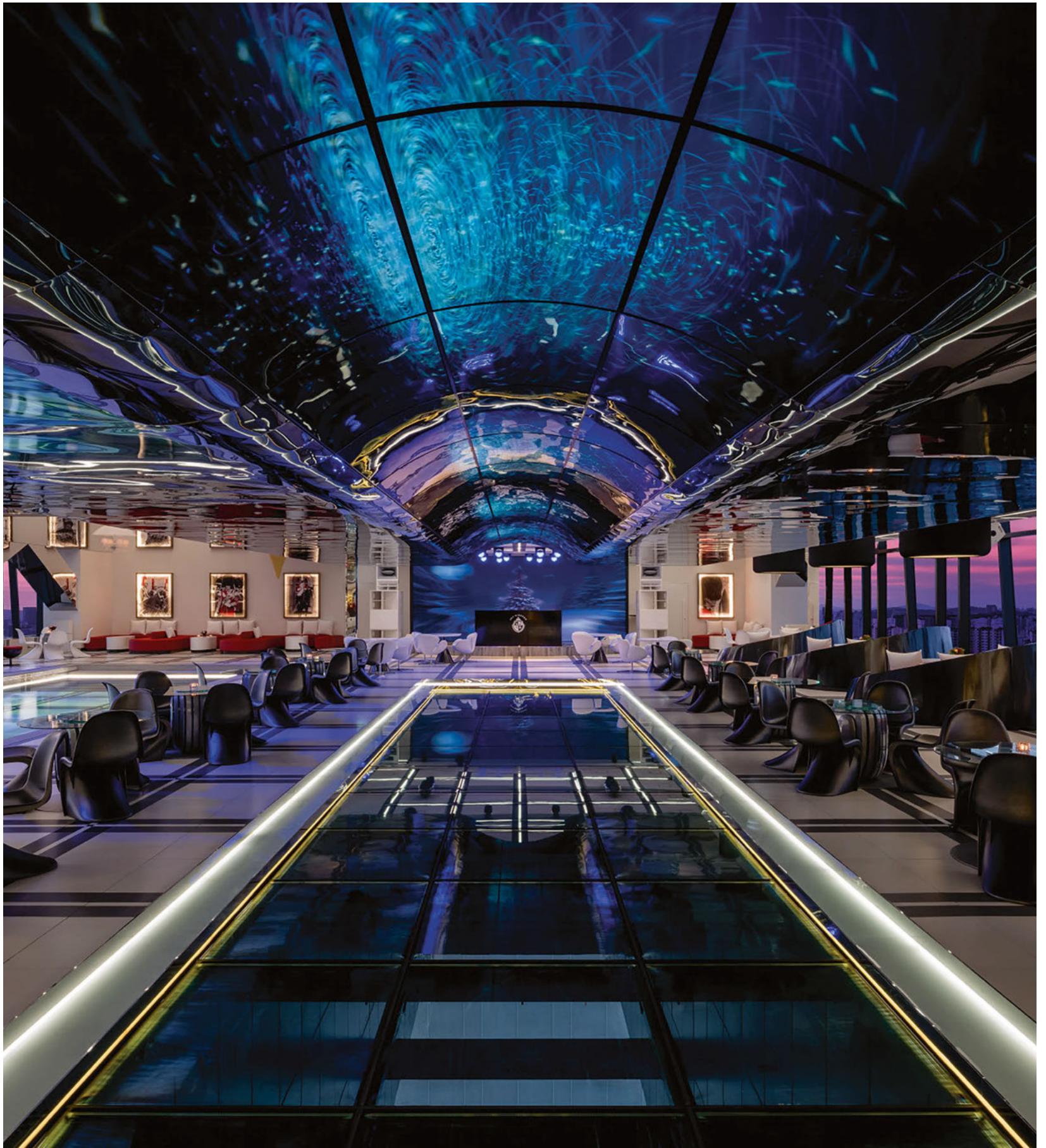
The brothers tell all about the history and growth of TW AUDIO.

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BERNHARD & TOBIAS WUESTNER

The Wuestner family are very alike, with both parents and five out of six siblings sharing a musical streak. Though it wasn't intended or planned, the creation of TW AUDiO by brother, Tobias Wuestner, made his sibling Bernhard - who had always been more interested in sports - turn to the family passion, when he asked for help to grow the company. The pair pooled their strengths and have never looked back since. mondo*dr caught up with the brothers to find out how it all began.





TW AUDiO's success over the last 14 years is rooted in passion, innovation and hard work. The company was founded in 2004 by Tobias Wüstner - hence, the TW - who linked up with his brother Bernhard four years later. The loudspeaker manufacturer now has representation in more than 50 countries - across six continents - through its distributor network and its own subsidiaries in the USA, UK, India, Malaysia and Dubai.

For Tobias, it all started with his own 'audio moment' when he was a teenager. He recalled: "I had my first experience of live concert sound at 15, when my older brothers' band played an open-air concert through a Turbosound PA - a TMS4 system. It was the first time that I'd felt a kick drum inside my body - not just heard it, but really felt its impact. It was totally different to anything I had experienced before with hi-fi speakers and, for me, it was a pivotal moment.

"It was like I had been infected with a virus, the audio virus, and I never got over it. There's a unique power in well mixed sound through a high-quality PA, it has the ability to move you emotionally and physically. The experience left me fascinated and, from then on, I began experimenting with PA loudspeakers and learning about the science behind the

magic. I wanted to recreate that feeling and move people in the same way. I also started sitting behind the mixing desk when my older brothers' bands played, even though at that time I had no idea what to do!"

His interest developed, both as a drummer and through helping out with a local PA rental company. "After a few years, I realised where I was most comfortable, and so I decided that rather than being on the stage, I wanted to be behind the mixing desk, helping good musicians to sound great." Tobias founded his first sound company in 1991, marking the start of a decade-spanning career as a professional in the business.

While Tobias was immersing himself in live music and sound systems, Bernhard was following his interest in sports. "I never intended to work in audio," said Bernhard. "I come from a completely different industry. We're a big family with five brothers and one sister and everyone is a musician... except for me! My father played the organ at the local church where my mother sang, my two older brothers are rock guitarists, my third oldest brother played saxophone and my sister played flute and piano. There was always music in our home and every Christmas we had a big family concert.

• Above Tobias and Bernhard in the warehouse at TW AUDiO HQ in Ludwigsburg.

But I was the only one out of six kids who wasn't really into music or audio, I was passionate about sports.

"When the time came for me to leave home, I followed my own path. I went to study in Heidelberg and earned a PhD in economics, becoming a scholar at Stanford University, then joining KPMG and eventually becoming Chief Financial Officer for a number of large US corporations. It was a very different world. Then, in 2008, Tobias called me to ask if I could help him turn his sole trader business into a limited company. I was happy to help my brother; I thought it would take perhaps a few weeks at most. I didn't know it at the time, but that phone call changed everything.

"Before Tobias called me, it had never occurred to me that I would become part of this industry. In fact, for the first four years of TW AUDiO, when Tobias was building the foundations of the company, I had no clue what he was doing! I lived in Berlin, I was busy in another industry and I was hardly ever back in Ludwigsburg, where my parents live and where Tobias lives. I knew he was doing something with loudspeakers, but really that was all. Then, after he called me and I became involved, we discovered that it's our differences that make us such good



partners. Tobias is an artist, a free spirit. I'm the guy who brings structure. It's a very complementary relationship." By the time the brothers decided to join forces, Tobias had spent almost 20 years feeding his interest in audio and growing his expertise in the field. He explained: "Since I first fell in love with sound, I was compelled to build PA boxes and to experiment with different technologies and ideas. In 1991, I became a freelance sound engineer, with some FX outboard equipment and boxes that I had made myself - forerunners of today's TW AUDiO enclosures. It was a simple set-up but I achieved a lot with it. I worked with a number of regional rental companies and worked with bands to mix hundreds of shows from front of house and monitors.

"The work was very varied and I learned so much. For one rental company, I was responsible for setting up and tuning a big American cluster-style PA, so I bought my first DOS-based two-channel FFT measurement system and learned how to use it and what to do with the resulting measurements. It was around the same time that the first digital loudspeaker management processors were being launched, such as the Yamaha D2040, BSS Omnidrive and TOA

DP-0204, so I began creating my own loudspeaker presets for those units, based on my measurements. In turn, that led to my deeper understanding of phase and time alignment, distortions, filter theory and signal processing besides simple frequency response. The more I worked, the more I learned."

He continued: "Around 1995, I started developing speakers - full-range models and subwoofers - for a specific rental company under their own brand name. They had a lot of success in the German domestic market - selling loudspeakers as well as hiring them out. By 2003, I wanted a fresh challenge and so I went back on the road as a sound engineer - I didn't want anything more to do with designing loudspeakers. It lasted for less than a year before I was back at the drawing board!" Tobias had identified a gap in the market and his compulsion to invent couldn't be suppressed. He recalled: "While I was on the road, I worked with a lot of covers bands who needed high quality, powerful sound in a compact, easy to transport enclosure. The ideal solution didn't seem to exist and so I thought that perhaps I should build it myself. I had the idea to develop an ultracompact but very powerful two x 12-inch horn-loaded top cabinet, and that was the birth of the T24

concept."

Tobias continued: "The T24 was the breakthrough and the door opener - it was unique, especially in the early days. There was no other box available in the industry with this kind of power in this size, no one else had anything similar. So that was the driver of success in the first years and the launchpad from which I started the company."

Tobias also developed a low-end companion for the T24: "I envisioned a two x 15-inch box with similarly compact dimensions. It became known as the B30. Both boxes, the T24 and the B30 were developed in my living room at home, and they were a true labour of love. I began to use them on shows where I was mixing, and I travelled across Germany to introduce them to rental companies and bands, all of whom were blown away by the performance and size. The potential was obvious, so, in the summer of 2004, I rented a small workshop, really a garage, and started to assemble enclosures."

Bernhard added: "All the passion and efforts Tobias put into T24 built the foundation for the success of TW AUDiO. We renewed the design five years ago and now it's called the T24N, which stands for neodymium, so it's lighter and more full range. Even now, when we do 🎧

• Above Tobias mixing in the early days for his brother's band.



• Above Bernhard with the team for Pulse Middle East, TW AUDiO's Middle East distributor, headed up by Joe Chidiac (left).

a demo or a shoot-out against bigger systems, people are always impressed by the T24N - it's the same story everywhere, all over the world. The T24N is still our door opener for everything, especially when people realise how easy it is to set the system up. In 10 minutes, you can be set up to do shows for 500 to 1,000 people, just like that."

Product development and new innovations continue to drive the company forward.

TW AUDiO's product development process is consistent and maintains extremely strict quality controls at every stage. The company pays close attention to its customers and colleagues around the world. As far as the brothers are concerned, they are just one part of the process and they view these stakeholders as their partners - by working as a global unit, they are able to create the best possible products.

Bernhard explained: "We believe in working in partnership with our customers and the broader market. From the very beginning of TW AUDiO, a cornerstone of our success was listening to and taking careful note of our customers' wishes. When we move into a new sector of the market, it's because we believe there is a desire for us to be there.

"We are fortunate to work with some wonderful partners all over the world and we consider them to be an integral part of the TW AUDiO family. As a manufacturer you can't have your ears and eyes all over the globe, so to have a reliable and trustworthy distributor network is key to achieving success. We work closely with all of our partners and we believe in building long-term trust. For example, we started working with our Chinese distributor, Ruisheng Lighting and Audio, in 2009, and we've grown together - they've gone from 20 people to approximately 100 people across four city branches. That's how it is - you have to trust one another so you can both benefit."

TW AUDiO initially grew within the touring market, but quickly realised that a lot of its customers were using the touring products for fixed install projects and began to request products with features specific to their needs. The company's approach to this is simple - by using the same, proven components and adapting the hardware it develops products that perfectly suit the application. Bernhard stated: "So, we have the same sound quality and reliability but with far more efficiency. The reactions from our customers have been very promising." Tobias concedes that, regardless of the

product or application, he can never be fully satisfied - a trait that pushes him to go further: "As a developer and a perfectionist, I am never 100% satisfied, there is always more to do and more to achieve. I always say that there is no such thing as the perfect product, there can only be a perfect compromise. I'm also frequently told that I'm my own harshest critic.

"Also, as technology continues to develop, so do the potential applications - every year we can achieve a little more, and with each evolution of our products, I feel satisfied for at least a little while... That's how it was with our first developed line arrays - VERA10 and VERA36 - and also with the new VERA20 two x 10-inch line array enclosure, and our S32 subwoofer. All of them have been greeted with the same enthusiasm as the T24 and B30, so many years ago."

Bernhard added: "The VERA20 and S32 are our latest products and in fact these two loudspeakers are about to be the focus of a global road trip. We compared the VERA20 to all of the other double 10's and double 8's line arrays in the market and we concluded that it's unmatched in terms of sound quality, weight and its rigging concept. It's not as big as competitor products, but it's extremely powerful. I believe it's setting a new



• Top
Marco and
Tobias and
Lanxess
Arena,

• Top
After trying
his hand
at mixing,
Tobias
decided it
wasn't for
him.

• Top
Product
explanations
at Prolight
+ Sound in
Frankfurt.

benchmark for this class of loudspeakers in the market.”

At this stage in its development, TW AUDiO has a strong portfolio of loudspeakers to suit a variety of applications and customers. In reaction to demand, the company is currently expanding its dedicated installation series and is looking at opportunities in the market for developing even more compact solutions.

The company's representation in over 50 countries and six continents has come via a mix of methodical and instinctual expansion into alluring territories. “We are very strong across the entirety of Asia,” said Tobias. “Not least because of the great people who work with us there. We began to look at international markets around 10 years ago and Asia was an immediate priority as we saw great potential there. I'm glad to say that we were correct.

“We first found success in China and then Korea, followed by Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, and we have continued to build ever since. In subsequent years

the Middle East has grown to become a powerhouse territory for us, especially in Dubai where TW AUDiO Middle East has been involved in some truly ground-breaking projects. More recently, India has also become an extremely strong territory, again thanks to the great work done there by our colleagues. It generally takes several years to establish a brand in a country and to gain the trust of local customers.”

Along the way, there have been a number of standout projects. Take the installation at Cologne's Lanxess Arena - the biggest indoor arena in Germany. The project was won via tender, with most of the industry's biggest brands participating. Bernhard said: “It meant a great deal to us that we won based on the quality of our loudspeakers for both music and speech reproduction.”

Then there is BASE Dubai - a unique, open-air super-club for 2,000 people where A-list stars like 50 Cent have performed. It's one of the world's most

famous nightclubs, and it's all TW AUDiO. The same is true of Jimmy*z in Monte Carlo - a very prestigious club with a remarkable history which is also now equipped with a TW AUDiO system, including T24N and T20i full range enclosures plus B10, B18 and BSX subwoofers.

Armin Van Buuren recently drew one of the biggest audiences ever in Ho Chi Minh City, playing out on TW AUDiO's biggest sound reinforcement system to date. The system was based on six arrays of VERA36 plus T24Ns for delays and fills completed by a huge amount of S33, B18 and BSX subwoofers.

The clarity and intelligibility of the company's loudspeakers has proven of great value to the house of worship community, including Korea's Gocheok Church - a brand new sanctuary for up to 3,000 people.

While they may be forgiven for resting on their laurels or at least taking a break after such impressive growth over the last de-



cade, the Wuestner brothers continue to identify potential and ways of delivering TW AUDiO sound to more audiences. Bernhard said: "We are focussed on developing more international territories, particularly the US and the UK where we have established new subsidiaries and awareness of our brand is steadily growing. Again, the key is representation, and we work with great people who understand our values and know how to share them with their local markets. We also feel that there's a lot to do in Africa and South America."

This growth will, as ever, be underpinned by new innovations and technological developments, explained Tobias: "From my personal point of view, the foundation for the future of a company is the R&D department. We now have a team of very passionate young guys who have great ideas - they are the next generation, so to speak. We have also recently added some very well-known members of the industry to our ranks, including Thomas Vestergaard as Senior Education and Training Specialist and Mick Whelan as Business Development Director in the US. By bringing in people with such a wealth of passion, experience and knowledge, we will strengthen our ability to deliver the best products for our customers now and in the future."

If the foundation of the company is R&D, its strength is derived from the family bond. It's difficult to sum up the unity that quietly exists between brothers. The

respect and understanding that the Wuestners have for each other is clear.

Bernhard said: "For the first four years of the company's existence, my brother poured every bit of energy and passion he had into making the company a success. At the beginning it was just him and some freelance guys, working out of a small garage-type facility that cost €300 per month in rent and he wasn't even sure if he could afford it. But it was clear that he had created something special. In 2008, when Tobias called me and I came to help, I was under the impression that a few weeks would be enough. But the business was growing so quickly that the administrative burden was overwhelming.

"Tobias needs to be free to do what he does best - design fantastic loudspeakers, but the sheer weight of the work needing to be done meant that he was faced with an impossible challenge. I couldn't simply leave my brother to deal with that alone. Four weeks passed, then eight weeks, then three months and so on. Soon it was clear that our very different skillsets matched, and that he could focus on creating amazing products while I handled the rest. So, in 2009 we decided that we would do this together and we became co-Managing Partners."

Tobias recognises the role played by their parents: "The way my brother and I see the world is shaped by the education we received from our parents. My mother and father worked hard for everything

• Above left
Bernhard

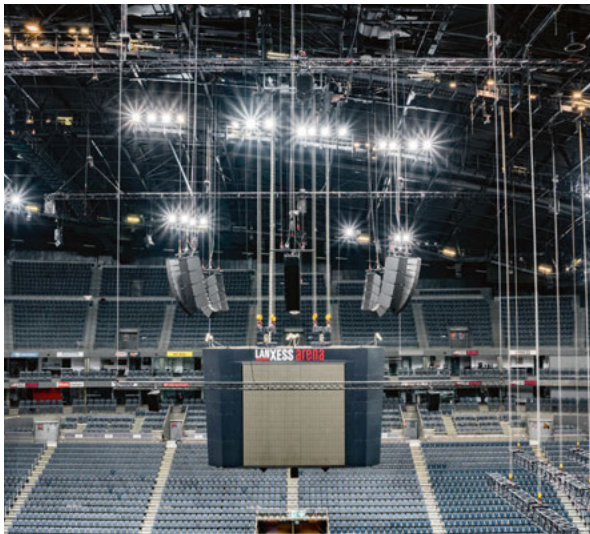
• Above right
Tobias

we had. My father worked for the city of Stuttgart, he was responsible for setting up kindergartens. They were raising us in the '60s and '70s and we were a big family, so there was very little wealth in our house, so there was no place for arrogance. We were taught that you had to go to school, work hard and do your job. They gave us a work ethic which can now be felt within TW AUDiO, which is shared by everyone here."

Bernhard elaborated: "I think that in a family owned company the culture is a little different than working for a big group of companies. At TW AUDiO, you're not just a number, you're a person. That's also true for our extended family - our partners and colleagues all around the world who work so hard to make TW AUDiO what it is. Of course, with the rapid growth that the company has experienced, there have been challenges to be met in keeping the same atmosphere intact, but I believe we have maintained the family spirit that has served us so well throughout our journey so far.

"Really the principles that we have all began with Tobias, back when he was created the T24 and drove it across Germany. In those circumstances, people will only listen to your system if you show them the proper respect and they will only buy the system if it surpasses their expectations. We have never forgotten that lesson to treat our customers with great care and to ensure our products always impress."

As Tobias and Bernhard look forward ➤



• Top
BASE nightclub
in Dubai.

• Above left
Lanxess Arena
in Cologne.

• Above right
Gocheok
Church in Seoul.

to the future, they do so knowing that their brotherhood has given them an enviable business partnership that is a decade strong. In that time, the company has enjoyed incredible growth and global success. They look ahead with their own specialisms at the forefront of their minds. Tobias continues to be inspired by the 'audio moment' that got him into this industry in the first place. He said: "When it comes to technology, I find myself equally excited at the possibilities ahead and sometimes frustrated by what I believe to be missed opportunities in live sound. My experience is that live-sound today often seems to be 'over-processed' with the use of a lot of plug-ins. A great PA should kick you in the chest and possess that wonderful expan-

siveness, which encompasses the audience. "In my mind, it's simply not enough to deliver audio consistently across a crowd as if you are playing back a recording. To really move people, there needs to be dynamics, power and energy in concert sound to convey the music and its emotional impact out of the PA. Every TW AUDIO system is designed to meet real concert sound challenges and all of those standards, giving sound engineers the tools they deserve." "I can't help but look at the audio industry from the perspective of an economist," said Bernhard. "The key point is that it is still a very young industry. Even if you look at the leading brands, the most established companies, they are still only 30 - 40 years old. The barrier to entry is relatively low, that's

why we have so many small companies in this industry. But that will change and in fact we're already seeing the beginnings of that change. "If you compare professional audio to the car industry, for instance, and you go back maybe 30 or 40 years, there were dozens of different car manufacturers, but now we have a small number of large groups. The same thing has happened in all of the engineering industries. The point is that all of those industries are much further along the economic road than audio, where even the big players are still tiny. Over time, I believe we will see a consolidation in the market with an increasing number of mergers and acquisitions. That process has begun, but it's still very early." ☺