

CULTURE

As virtual reality gets set to enter living rooms, BONSOIR PARIS gives the technology a lounge of its own

PARIS — From seamy pornography to credible journalism, recent years have seen VR technology explode in popularity and accessibility. French cinema operator MK2 has opened Europe's largest permanent virtual-reality space, designed by multidisciplinary studio Bonsoir Paris and located near the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand, in the 13th arrondissement of Paris. The collaborative facility combines the individual experience of virtual reality with an experience shared among fellow users. While acknowledging that VR has its 'own grammar and language', MK2 CEO Elisha Karmitz says the new cinema is meant to be a 'social and participatory' setting with an atmosphere reminiscent of his company's previously realized locations.

The modular studio features a nonagonal floor plan and a dozen VR pods, which are reflected in the trapeze-like suspension system that holds them. Surrounded by large bay windows and adjacent to the latest Le Perchoir, a trendy chain of open-air bars, the MK2 VR Suite dispels stereotypes of dingy arcades, instead focusing on clear connections with the outside world. Ben Sandler, managing director of Bonsoir Paris, explains that his studio aimed for a 'living space' structured around VR technology rather than simply an arcade or a product demonstration. A major part of the concept was an attempt to ease the disorientation caused by a transition from real to virtual — 'from a wide-open communal space to one's own virtual bubble' — by 'bridging individual and common experiences'.

Sci-fi-inspired design elements drawn from film and literature form an interesting contrast with warm, natural materials that evoke a softer, more inviting side to what is, in essence, a remarkably high-tech facility. 'We wanted to create something that would render the experience intuitive to anyone,' says Sandler, 'no matter their age or disposition to the technology.' — JDP

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From its seamy pornography to credible, recent years have seen VR explode in popularity and accessibility. Cinema operator MK2 has the world's largest permanent virtual-reality lounge, designed by multidisciplinary studio Birdly in Paris and located near the François Mitterrand, in the 13th arrondissement of Paris. The collaborative space merges the individual experience of VR with an experience shared by users. While acknowledging VR's 'own grammar and language', architect Micha Karmitz says the new cinema is to be a 'social and participatory' space with an atmosphere reminiscent of his previously realized locations. The modular studio features a non-axial layout and a dozen VR pods, which are suspended in the trapeze-like suspension system. Surrounded by lounge seating, the pods are lit with warm, natural materials that give them a more inviting side to what is, otherwise, a remarkably high-tech facility. 'We wanted to create something that would be intuitive to anyone, no matter their age or disposition to technology.' — JDP



