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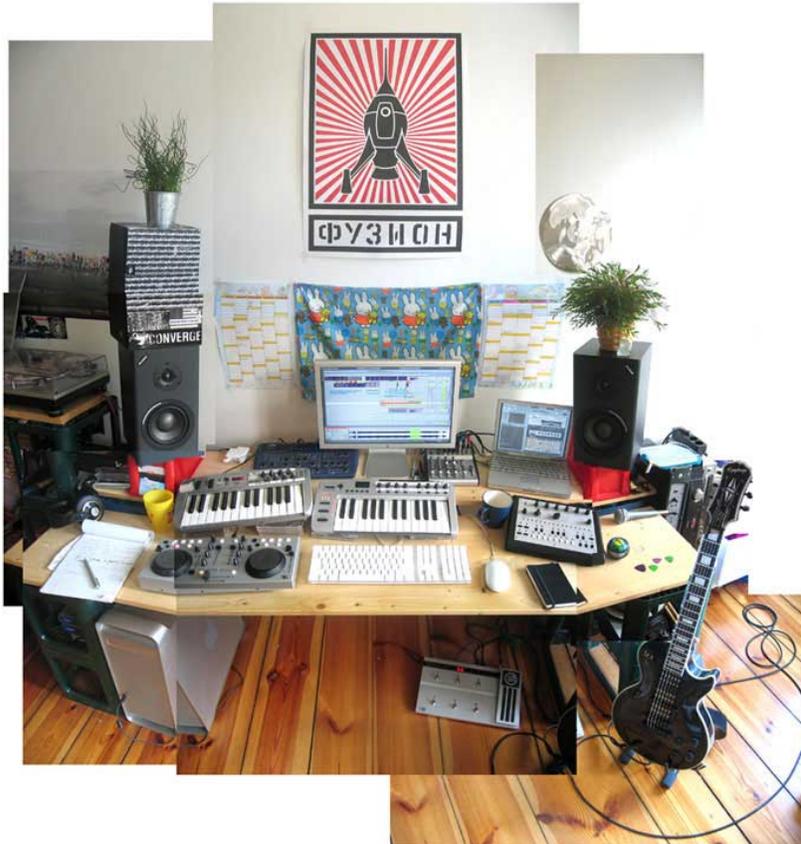
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Workspace and Environment: Aaron Spectre

October 29, 2007 in [Workspace and Environment](#) with [0 Comments](#)

Hello people. We hope you had a great weekend. We have a killer lineup for this week, so check back regularly. I'm slightly burnt from the weekend, so I'll expand on a relevant topic later.

Background:
I was born + raised in Massachusetts, Moved to New York City for a bit… moved to Berlin because NYC was too stifling and distracting, and expensive,

not at all conducive to making music. Really great for inspiration, but you don't have the time and space to focus. Berlin was perfect, and I've been able to build things from the ground up here.

How long have you been involved with music?
Drums, bass guitar: 18 years
Electronic music: 11 years

What is your current favorite piece of hardware?
Guitar. After years of struggling with synths, it's refreshing to pick up a guitar and it JUST WORKS. No wasting time drawing fader curves or noodling about w/ plugins, ahh I think I'm going to go play right now… Nowadays it's easier to get the guitar directly into the computer, high quality, with no fuss… and even if you don't want a guitar type of sound, you can use the guitar as a controller for a lot of other sounds. You don't need to use those weird midi guitar pickups which were hokey anyway… just the normal sound can have a lot of nuance and expressiveness which can do strange and cool things when run through fx / plugins / instruments. Vestax faderboard is a close second. It's stupidly crippled in the sampling department (why did they make it MONO?!?), but it allows you to get expressive in a different way standard piano keyboards don't allow – live hands-on control of the envelope. Does anyone out there know how to mod it in a useful way? get in touch.

What is your current favorite software?
Ableton Live. Everything is fluid in this program – lots of room to be expressive but still keep everything flowing together.

How does your physical space and surroundings influence your workflow?
Physical space is everything! After working in a few sterile windowless studios I quickly learned that a room's vibe is more important than its sound, for the kind of music I'm doing. I'm willing to sacrifice a little bit of audio quality for a healthy environment. I want to be able to hear the birds outside, sense the mood on the street, feel the winter chill – not be isolated in a weird sensationless chamber. If that means getting a little bit of street noise in my recordings, so be it, chock that up to added character. The city you live in, your friends in close proximity, nice diversions and distractions, nice parks / walking streets / restaurants in the area, that's all important!! It's been great these past few years, the gear has improved so much you can make high quality recordings under minimal conditions – put more effort into vibe. Get that great performance out of you – the rest is details, and can be cleaned up in a high-end studio later if need be. Make no mistake you need high quality gear where it counts – but a little effort into a nice space goes a long way. Add some potted plants, too…

Ergonomics is huge. Monitor height, desk height, easy placement of the gear you use the most. Arrange your gear based on your workflow, rather than how it all looks sitting pretty. I like a lot of open space around me when i work – I can't stand being boxed in by gear all around… so I take care to choose a minimal setup.

Are you involved in any music/sound work outside of your own projects?
I do remixes from time to time, but it's always something related to my own projects or creative goals, something I can learn from, or something I just enjoy doing.

What was the first piece of hardware you remember obtaining?
Yamaha A3000 sampler. 30 seconds of sampling time seemed like such a luxury. I made everything w/ that sampler, and tricked it out with a whopping huge 128 meg of RAM and internal 128 meg hard drive. Wooooo. AKG K240 headphones. I still use them to monitor and check my mixes. PC with a basic midi sequencer. I used to work with my school's Mac Classic, using Encore notation software to make drum tracks….

What is on your current 'wish list' for new hardware or software?
I wish someone would design some more expressive + intuitive midi controllers. But as far as things that exist:
– Gibson Les Paul for the studio – so i can use my current guitar solely on the road.
– Fender P-Bass
– 2nd big screen

Do you have a mobile studio setup?
My live gig setup IS my mobile studio setup… but when I'm on the road I tend to relax, read a book, give myself some time and space to not think about

music for once. When I'm back in the studio, then it's time to jam out. Sometimes I make music w/ my live setup when I'm away for an extended period of time… but generally when I'm on the go I want to experience life, not get back into a studio mindset.

What does it include?
Apple Powerbook G4 12″ – i like this one because it's so small and portable. ram & hd maxed out, it's still good for live sets.
Ableton Live
2x Edirol PCR-M1 2 octave MIDI controllers. Simple, portable, USB powered.
Kontrol DJ USB DJ MIDI controller http://kontrolprodj.com/
Epiphone Les Paul electric guitar + various stompboxes.
Marshall JCM 800 + 4×12. Usually the promoter rents this if I'm doing a fly-in.

Many of my gigs around Europe involve taking public transport, so it's good to be relatively compact. Though I do use a fair amount of gear, most of it is easily broken down and packed into small bags.

How many physical locations have you had your studio setup in over time and how have they changed?
5 locations, but two of them were during my headphones and Yamaha sampler days.

My two most current Berlin studio setups – in 2006

a few changes. I mounted the monitor on the wall to free up that vital front desk space, a bit of new gear, a few mic stands.

The most significant change, though not visible in this photo, is moving the computer FAR away. I got some monitor extender cables and various usb / firewire / midi hubs, and i moved the computer from under the desk to the other side of the room. This made a HUGE difference. Now that I no longer have this roaring jet engine under my desk, I can hear subtleties in the music more easily, and I'm no longer worrying about kicking the computer by accident. Just having the empty space under the desk to stretch my feet improves my flow immensely. I can just rock out and not worry about damaging anything, stomp and thrash and run around. Remove the physical boundaries and the mental ones follow.

The desk itself is homemade. I couldn't find anything long enough and not hideous, so i went down to the supermarket, got some beer crates. A few planks of heavy natural wood from the hardware store on top, gravity holding it all together nicely. I lined the underside of the desk with screw-in hooks, which hold all the cables up off the ground, so the entire footspace underneath is free. I hate feeling cautious with my feet like I'm about to snag a cable. For years I worked with monstrous rats' nests of cables snaking all over my room… Now I barely see
any cables at all, and it's a wonderful feeling. A clean work area frees up the mental space. The beer crates also make nice holding spaces for external HDs, cables, drumsticks, mics, stompboxes, tuners etc. I'll get a proper studio desk / cable management system and all that when I'm more settled, as Berlin is still a temporary home for now.

Aaron Spectre has two main projects and can be found at:
drumcorps.cc
aaronspectre.com
Aaron Spectre as Drumcorps Music

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