



Article from  
**“DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS”**  
April 1999 - translation

## **Innovation**

### **Hi – Tech on the ‘Algarvean’ Mountains**

**Two British traded Cambridge for the interior of the Algarve, where they started a company connected to the selective and sophisticated audio world.**

BY ELISABETE RODRIGUES

S. Marcos da Serra is a small village in the area of Silves council which struggles to stay alive. The majority of the inhabitants are old and still dedicated to agriculture, and the few young people’s dream is to get away and look for a job.

It is in this moribund rural centre that **Sintefex Audio** set up a year ago, a Hi-Tech company which is preparing a launch in May, at AES Convention in Munich, (Audio Engineering Society), a new piece of audio electronic equipment, the Replicator.

**Sintefex Audio** works in a house placed on a hill approximately 3 Km from the village of S. Marcos where one can access it though a dirt road, via the quietness of the surrounding mountains.

The company was created by Michael Kemp, technical director and inventor of the Hi-Tech equipment and by Mike Eden who takes care of the commercial side, i.e. marketing and distribution. Both changed the stress of Great Britain for the calm of Portugal. There is also a third director, Simon Widdowson in Cambridge where the research and development centre of Sintefex is based.



Mike Eden confessed in the interview to DN that he would like to transfer this department to Portugal. The problem is finding qualified personal within the country to work on this project. “Through the Internet we tried to contact the Portuguese Universities, but for now it hasn’t been possible to find highly qualified staff. Our area is very specialised since we are dealing with audio hardware/software, and as far as we know it is an unexplored area in Portugal.”

As Mike Eden says, “the choice of this country to work and set **Sintefex** in, is more to do with the heart than with reason.” The two partners have faced a long list of problems during the setting up of **Sintefex**.

Even though he faces the situation with humour, Mike Eden names some difficulties – four years waiting for the post to be delivered and three years for the local town council to arrange money to fix the access road, so the sensitive equipment they use and produce won’t be affected by the bumps.

Also, to install the digital lines which they need for the vital communications via Internet with the research office in Cambridge, and with clients, suppliers and sound studios, they waited three months, even with the Telecom’s promise to install the ISDN system was four days. Even though, every time it rains we are without Internet access, losing money, and the cost of the system is still very high in Portugal.

But the difficulties don’t stop there. As **Sintefex** wished that the product was really “made in Portugal”, they spent months looking for a factory in the country with the capacity and the will to produce the metal box which gives body to the Replicator, but without success. “There was a

company which would produce two thousand of these metal boxes, but all we needed was two hundred because this is a very specific piece of equipment for a niche market”.

As a result: the boxes are now produced in the UK.

The **Replicator** front panel, which is the sophisticated face of the unit, could not be found in Portugal and no one was willing to produce it. So like all the other pieces it ended up coming from UK.

In Spite of these small set backs, which are testing, **Sintefex Audio**’s will to survive on the limits of the algarvean mountains, making hi-tech equipment, **Sintefex** remains steady. The first prototypes, to be launched in May at Munich and September in New York, are going to be produced at the accommodation in S. Marcos da Serra. After this, the company plans to create a small factory inside the village, and it should be working in the next 6 to 9 month. “There, says Mike Eden, all workers will be Portuguese, in preference recruited among the local population, like the young people which just finish the Escola Secundária de Silves”. “For the production line, we need semi-skilled personal to whom we will supply training. Portugal has been nice to us, so we decided to give something back”.

The fact of creating employment in an area where the lack of working opportunities are small, is guaranteeing the project the support of several different entities. If no more than moral support. The president of the Silves council Isabel Soares seems very enthusiastic. “This is an extremely important investment, because it fits the need to place non polluting industrial units, like this one, in the interior, said the mayor to the DN. On other hand “this project can function as an attractive proposition to others”. As for now, Isabel Soares promises “to keep the access road in good condition”. As well as helping the project to get to the official entities plus recruiting labour.

Faithful to the idea of producing equipment “made in Portugal”, and incorporating the maximum amount of regional know-how, **Sintefex Audio** has ordered from a graphic design company NC&G of Portimão, plus a designer working in the Algarve, Isabel Vaz Lopes, for the conception of the graphic images and promotional material for the Replicator. This material is going to used at international exhibitions where **Sintefex** is represented, as well as contacts with audio studios and other clients around the world. “We were very pleased with this teams work and we think that, this should be recognised”, says Mike Eden.

Until now, the investment in the company, which is around the 85 000 contos-mark, has been funded by its own capital. But contacts have been made with IAPMEI, to obtain their support. “The reception of the project was very good and they promised to help”. Before that though, there is the bureaucracy phase. It’s 72 pages of forms that **Sintefex** has to present. “It’s a lot of paper work!” reveals Mike Eden.

In the first year, the company expects to sell more than 100 units of the **Sintefex Audio FX8000 Replicator**. It’s impossible to say how many units we will sell, because, they underline, “it is something innovative, turned to a very specific market”.

A new product is already being researched, and it will be launched next year. However the idea and its characteristics are still a “secret”.

### What is the Replicator

The **Replicator** is a digital effects unit, using a new and innovative technique which stores the characteristics of analogue processors and makes them available in the digital domain.

It’s a completely new technology for use in professional recording studios and post-production houses.

The **Replicator** is a simple concept. Recorded sound is not always perfect. The equipment conceived by **Sintefex** stores effects with the maximum possible quality and reproduces them how and where it’s necessary. Some sound effects like, the sound of a loud speaker at a train station or the sound of an old telephone can be memorised and used repeatedly without losing quality. Also, when a film is dubbed the sound quality remains as good as new.

Musicians can also use the **Replicator** to store effects to be used in studios or even live.

## Passion for Portugal

Michael Kemp, 47 years old, is the “father” of the **Replicator**. He is a graduate with an M. A. in Mathematics and Computer Science from Cambridge University, he turned down a research post to open his own recording studio. This happened in the 70’s during the punk era, and he worked with famous names on the music scene such as The Stranglers, Iron Maiden, Gary Numan and Toyah Wilcox.

In 1986, Michael Kemp created “Matisse” one of the first units allowing the direct connection between graphics, figures and the computer. It was used at that time to create clouds and sun to illustrate the weather forecast.

At the beginning of the 90’s, he started work on a new project, “SADiE”, a computer which allowed words and music to be recorded directly into the unit, instead of on tape, SADiE then recompiled, mixed and edited on the screen and stored the final effect in perfect condition on the computer. This equipment was a revolution to the recording industry, until then people had to cut and paste tapes to obtain the expected results. Following “Matisse”, “SADiE” also became a great success, however in 1994 Mike Kemp sold out his interest in the company.

Mike Eden, in his turn, went a very different way. He knew Portugal already from his past. In 1968, during his childhood, he lived in Portugal (Sintra) with the parents, and since that time has been to Portugal quite often on holidays. After studying hotel management, he had his own restaurant in East Anglia where he combined his two passions, good gastronomy and antiques.

When they both decided to move from England they thought about the South of France where they spent two weeks looking for the ideal place. But they ended up choosing Portugal. “It’s the furthest south we can get without leaving Europe” justifies Mike Eden.

They both love this country placed by the sea, even though they don’t hesitate pointing out some defects which could very easily become qualities. “If the Portuguese transferred all their aggressiveness behind the wheel of a car to their business, Portugal would be an incredibly successful country”, ironically says Mike Eden.