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# An American DREAM

**JIM HILL CROSSES THE POND TO THE BIRTHPLACE OF HOME CINEMA. PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM PSOLKA**

It's hardly surprising that our quest for home cinema perfection has led us to its birthplace of America – TV nation and home of Hollywood. What is more unusual is that we find ourselves lost in the wooded hills of leafy New Jersey. But it is here among the oak and the elm that you'll find some of the most sophisticated – and expensive – installations in the land.

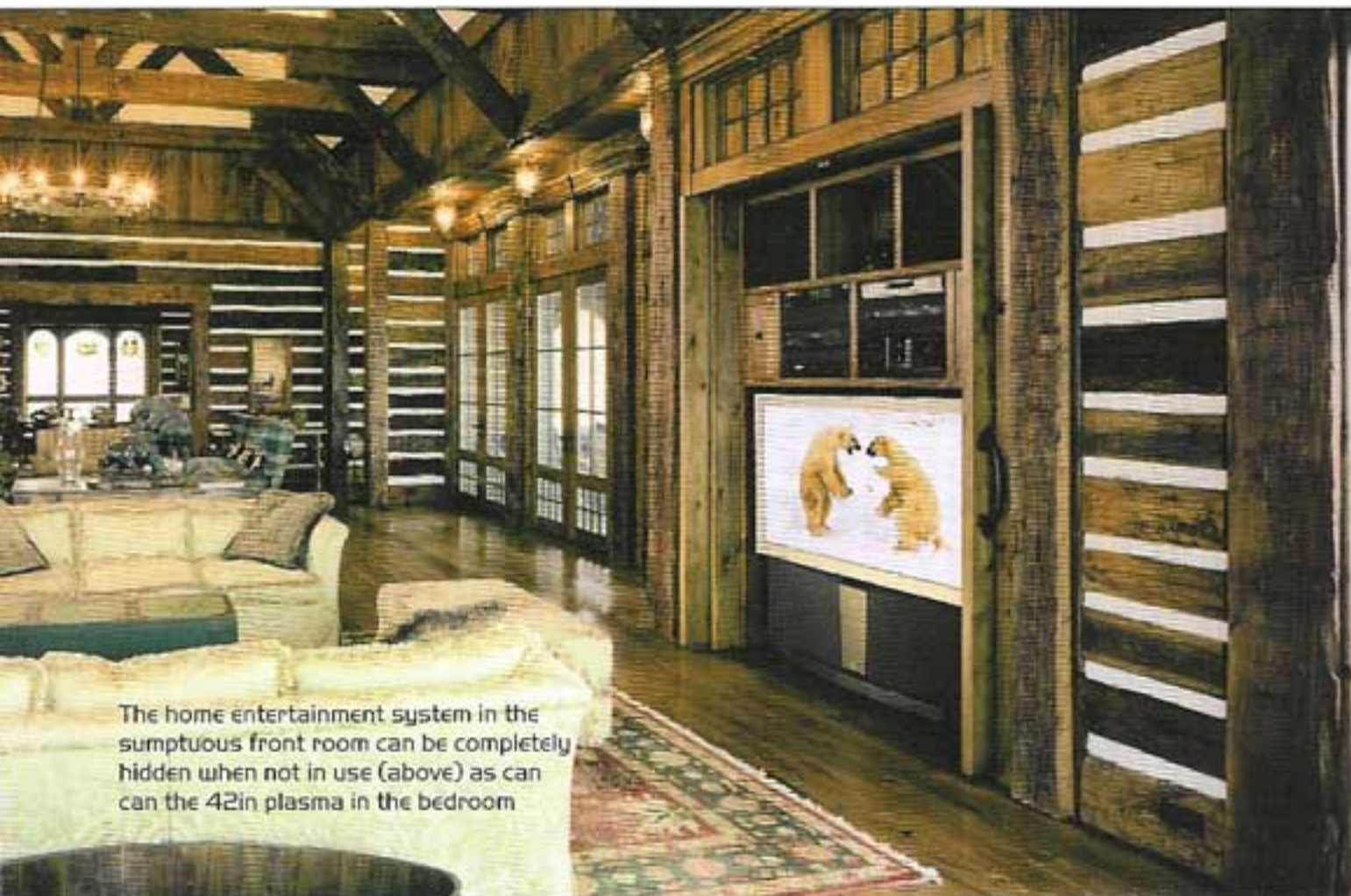
Here, folk take their home cinema – or home theatre – seriously and none more so than the professional installers of EDG (Electronics Design Group). This 8-time CEDIA award-winning company in Piscataway, New Jersey, designs and builds networked solutions into the homes of the

privileged inhabitants of the tri state area. The EDG team takes great pride in its work and were only too keen to show us their latest job on a multi-million dollar home designed by Jeff Beer of Beer and Coleman architects.

As we crunch up the drive, the massive timber and stone mansion emerges from the forest, where it looks like it has stood for a century or two. As it turns out, the building is just three years old and EDG has been involved from the very beginning. By working closely with the architects, – carpenters, interior designers and of course the owners, let's call them Steve and Mary, EDG has created an uncompromising, whole-house network that

integrates seamlessly with the fabric of the building.

Beneath the huge oak beams of the porch there's a video entry phone where I make first contact with the intelligent network within. The camera beams my bemused face onto a monitor within. My ID checks out and I'm welcomed into the warmth of a grand lobby. Fixed to the wall is the main control panel where you can control the lighting, air con, heating and music distribution for every room. At the press of just a single preset button, Steve's favourite satellite radio channel is broadcast through all of the concealed speakers on the first floor and we are bathed in ambient music. ▶▶



The home entertainment system in the sumptuous front room can be completely hidden when not in use (above) as can the 42in plasma in the bedroom



**'The camera beams my bemused face onto a monitor'**

The air-con, heating, lighting and music in the games rooms are all controlled by an AMX wall panel





#### ◀◀ ROOM WITH A VIEW

Walking through to the front reception room with its sweeping view over the Skylands region of New Jersey, I'm handed an AMX universal remote with touchscreen controls. This operates the TV and DVD player in this room and accesses a music server in the basement and the satellite radio we are listening to. Naturally, it also controls the lighting and air con. You can walk around the whole house with this controller, although most rooms have their own, if not a light-switch-sized wall panel. The study also has a PC with a broadband internet connection and a wireless wi-fi interface with its various peripherals spread across the sumptuous wooden desk.

Thanks to Mary's impeccable taste, Steve's uncompromising attitude and EDG's expertise, the house is both a lesson in interior design and a showcase for home networking technology. But there is one room of which EDG is particularly proud – the home theatre. This haven in the heart of the house was built for just one purpose and

is as near as you can get to the perfect home cinema experience. A retreat from reality for Steve and Mary and a regular treat for the grandkids.

This extravagantly panelled space is the ideal shape and volume for a moderate 12-seater cinema. The curved rear wall is there to prevent a build up of standing waves that can occur in a square room and all that panelling is actually designed to further improve the acoustics by deflecting sound waves. Even the sumptuous soft furnishings are carefully chosen to balance the room's sonic characteristics. The seating is cinema-style, but way more comfortable with beverage holders and tiered to account for the floor's gentle slope toward the screen.

#### LAND OF THE FREE

Steve left this project entirely up to EDG and their best theatre man, Joe McNeill. With no restrictions, Joe was free to specify some top-notch equipment and decided to base the whole system around a Genelec 7.1 speaker system.



### The Kit

- ◆ Sony VPH-G9000 CRT projector
- ◆ Sony DVP-N9000 DVD player
- ◆ JVC HRS-9800U S-VHS VCR
- ◆ Sony SAT-HD100 HDTV satellite receiver
- ◆ Stewart SND117H MICRO perf Lexus Delux Screen-Wall 117in screen
- ◆ Tributaries S-video amp
- ◆ Lexicon MC-12 processor
- ◆ Genelec HT210 active centre speaker
- ◆ Genelec HT206 active side and rear speakers and sub
- ◆ Genelec D18 active balancer
- ◆ AMX control system
- ◆ Lutron automated lighting



The serious cinema is downstairs in a dedicated and lavishly panelled room, while a second entertainment system is installed in the main reception

## 'This is America, so the first demo was a high-definition broadcast'

Genelec made its reputation in the recording studio and you'll find the brand installed in all of the most famous studios you can think of. The active design of each speaker is particularly successful at reproducing any signal it receives with the utmost accuracy, delivering every scrap of detail with perfect timing and reaching every frequency without ever breaking a sweat. In this case it's a set of HT210s for the front LCR channels, and four HT206s for the side and rear surrounds and a pair of HTS3 subwoofers. Quite an intimidating force, but you wouldn't know it when you first sit down, because all of the cabinets are concealed behind the panelling and these speakers work particularly well at low volumes too.

The driving force is a seven-channel Lexicon amplifier, controlled by a Lexicon MC-12, while sources include a Sony DVD player, a high-definition satellite receiver and an X-Box. There is also a VGA input next to the centre seat for Steve to plug in his laptop and give a Power Point demonstration, should the urge take him. All of these are beamed

onto the 8.5ft wide screen by a Sony G-90 CRT projector with 9in guns. Joe is in the enviable position of being able to audition all of the latest AV gear back at base in a suite of purpose built demo rooms and testing facility. Interestingly, the analysis room is similar to the WV test lab that we use to measure electronics here on the magazine.

The equipment is state-of-the-art, but nothing we're not used to finding in high-spec home cinemas in the UK. This goes to show just how much impact the design of the room and setup of the system can have on the finished result. Joe is also able to record the sonic characteristics of the cinema in order to improve it by adding sonic panelling, relocating speakers and tweaking the Lexicon processor. It helps that the room was conceived as a cinema on paper before it was built too.

Naturally, the whole system is controlled by a single AMX remote and programmed by EDG so that anyone can pick it up and operate it. This includes the Lutron lighting, which has been carefully set to illuminate the room at just



the right level for each viewing scenario.

And so to the demonstration. This is America, so the first demo was a high-definition broadcast live from satellite TV, to show just how real this cinema can appear. There are a number of HD channels available in the US now and all put our PAL system to shame with a massively unfair advantage in resolution. Oh well, at least DVDs look the same. Joe chose an extract from *Jurassic Park III* to highlight how effective the active Genelec speakers are at springing from quiet jungle sounds to thunderous special effects without missing a beat. We both jumped out of our seats when T-Rex made his first roaring appearance.

Home theatre is a big-buck business in the US, which is after all, where it was born. And it's reassuring to meet people like EDG president Bob Gullo, Joe McNeill and the rest of EDG who take the subject as seriously as us. OK, Steve's install is a tad on the expensive side but it is certainly an inspiration ■

For more details on EDG go to [www.edgonline.com](http://www.edgonline.com) ►►