

# HOME ENTERTAINMENT

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# TECH *Preview*



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# MASCULINE TO THE MAX

A homeowner, who built a private screening room for his family to enjoy, has fallen in love with it himself.

> BY B.A. HOFFMAN > WILLIAM J. PSOLKA PHOTOGRAPHY

**W**alk into this monstrous 2,600-square-foot private home theater and try to envision the kind of person who would build a screening room of this magnitude. The space is probably owned by a man, right, since it's extremely masculine in style with polished wall-to-wall woodwork, two rows of sturdy-yet-handsome leather recliners, and a red velvet theater curtain with gold tassel fringe. The nonsense interior design of this home theater is confident. Bold. Refined. Sophisticated. This is a serious space for serious entertaining.

Even the custom-carved columns at the front of the theater emote power. Can't you see two dozen Wall Streeters standing around in pinstripe suits, with cigars and cocktails in hand? The simple yet elegant antique torches that add a touch of sparkle to the walls may be a nod to those that were carried by the early Olympians. The 26-foot-long counter that stands behind the last row of theater chairs says "let's sit down in back and sign the deal now." And then there's the size of the projection screen.

"The client wanted the biggest high-definition image for gaming and sports," says Senior Systems Consultant Joe McNeill of Electronics Design Group, Inc. in Piscataway, N.J. "He said,

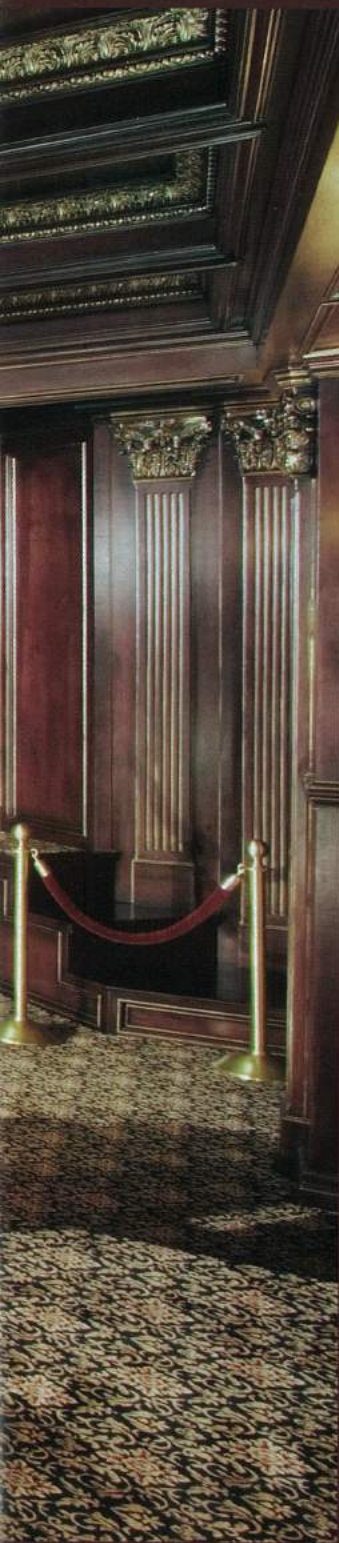
'I really want to feel like I'm at a movie theater—I want a huge screen.'" The 150-inch projection screen from Stewart FilmScreen, which sits 18 feet away from the front row of Murano black Acoustic-Smart recliners, works in tandem with the Runco three-chip projector. "He wanted the best image possible," McNeill continues, "and with a screen this massive, you have to have a three-chip projector." The video projector's three DMD chips and lack of a color wheel puts more light on the screen than the single-chip brethren.

"When Runco sells you a projector, they have guidelines on how their products can be used," McNeill continues. "You can't produce a stellar picture beyond a certain screen width."

With a serious video projector such as this, the homeowner has quadrupled his clout, right? He's the kind of guy who has a chauffeur drive him to his Manhattan office every day; the type of gentleman who will pay the most sought-after interior designer to create a coliseum-like venue for entertaining the wealthiest businessmen in New York.

Guess again.

The owner of this gargantuan home theater, which won two prestigious 2007 Cedia awards, is an easy-going professional in New Jersey's homebuilding industry. Surprisingly, he handled all of the interior design himself. He researched







Whenever the owner hosts a special event in the theater, his kids and their friends man the concession stand. “We made the area in front of the theater big so people can walk around and not interrupt the movie watchers,” he says. For extra seating, the kids bring in beanbags.

every single furnishing element that is used in the home theater without any assistance from his wife.

“We built the theater to use as a family,” says the owner, who comes from a *Soprano*-size brood. “We thought we’d go down there once or twice a month, but we’re in there two or three times a week.”

While he mostly watches football and baseball with his three middle school-aged boys, he’s been known to host the occasional movie night for the guys, hold a Super Bowl party or two, and entertain the extended family—all 35 of them—after Christmas dinner. “Sometimes the kids watch movies in there on their own, but more often they are in there with their Xbox. It’s nice to have it [to use] on a whim.”

“He was really building this for his kids and wife in the beginning,” says McNeill. “He didn’t really watch movies. But once the room was installed and he tried it out, he changed his tune. He was blown away by having a theater of this caliber.”

From the beginning, the owner decided to design the home theater himself instead of hiring a decorator. “You know, too many interior designers design what they want—not what the owner wants, and I didn’t want to deal with that,” he says. After looking at pictures of theaters in books and on the Internet, the owner and his wife decided upon a design direction—grand and Old World in style. “We knew we wanted an elaborate coffered ceiling with gold gilding. We wanted the theater that we went to as





"I'm surprised how much time we spend together in the room," says the homeowner. "We get pizza, do dinner down there and watch a movie. It's a standing thing." In addition to the soundproof mahogany doors, which are installed with rubber seams to prevent vibration, the theater floor is topped with a sheet of rubber padding. Four layers of sheetrock also help soundproof the space.

kids, but more ornate to match the moldings and general theme of the house," he says.

He found most of the interior furnishings online—from the velvet theater extensions to the pillows, throws, and movie reel artwork. The wall panels are wrapped with acoustical fabric from AcousticSmart; the 7.1 chairs, also from AcousticSmart, offer seven different reclining positions. The custom woodworking ranges from birch to maple and cherry, and features a dark walnut finish. "The difference in what you see is the hand-done gold-leaf gilding," the owner says. The built-in bar serves as Play Central for the kids when

they're playing Xbox games; the granite-topped counter conceals the bar stool seating area from the rows of theater seating. Two more built-in cabinets in the back of the theater provide storage for DVDs and all the necessary Xbox accoutrements.

"I knew what I wanted," says the homeowner. "I wanted the highest screen quality and good sound quality, but I didn't want to shake the walls off."

"The video and audio is excellent, combined with the sheer size of the room," McNeill says, adding that for any guest who sits in a chair at the end of a row, or at



## TECH TALK Behind the Scenes

The ceiling usually isn't the first thing that comes to mind when one is pondering a home theater design, but in this case the owner definitely had plans for the room's lid—plans that significantly affected the selection of a few key piece of gear. “The owner really wanted to do a beautiful, clean, uncluttered coffered ceiling, but [the other custom installers] he spoke with told him the projector needed to go right in the middle of the ceiling,” says McNeill. “I knew right off the bat that this wasn't the case: I knew we could put the projector behind the room, outside it, with the right projector.”

McNeill and his team turned to the Runco VX-2dcx three-chip DLP projector in order to get the most detailed picture with accurate color reproduction. “We went with the VX-2 because it comes with a variety of lenses, and the fact that it's a three-chip projector gave us the light output we needed to fill the 150-inch [screen from] Stewart all the way on the other end of the room.”

Despite the fact that the VX-2 is available with Runco's ultra-widescreen CineWide option, the homeowner opted for a standard 16:9 screen. “He wanted the largest image possible for sporting events and gaming,” McNeill says, adding that the homeowner didn't mind cropping the picture from the top and bottom on 2.35:1 movies via the Stewart FilmScreen's horizontal motorized masking system.

Sound is provided by six Triad InWall Gold/4 Surround loudspeakers, two Triad InRoom Platinum LCRs, and an InRoom Platinum Center beneath the screen with a Triad InRoom Platinum PowerSub on either side.

Given the reputation of Triad's in-wall loudspeakers, one has to ask, “why not go that route and place the speakers behind the screen?” As it turns out, the answer once again goes back to the long distance between the projector and screen. “We didn't want to go with a microperf screen because we didn't want to lose anything from the image,” McNeill says. Microperforated screens are designed to allow sound to pass through thousands of tiny holes in the screen material with minimal sonic coloration. But that also means that some of the light directed at the screen passes through rather than being reflected back, reducing brightness. “Having the center channel that low didn't affect us because of the great horn in that Triad center, and its integrated tilting feature. We got the sound to the front and middle rows of seating and the bar with absolutely no problem. It sounds great.”

The room also features a Rotel RSP-1098 Surround Processor and an array of Rotel 200-watt high-current power amplifiers; PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 gaming consoles; a complete Crestron control system; and six zones of Lutron lighting control, all of which is plugged into a Richard Gray's Power Company PowerHouse power delivery system, which provides the system with 21 outlets' worth of clean, isolated electricity. “It's easy for interference to creep into systems like this,” says McNeill, “and the last thing in the world you want is one hundred grand worth of high-performance A/V gear plagued by hum or noise from the lighting system. With the PowerHouse in place, we know we've got the utmost in isolation and protection for this sensitive gear. It's that simple.”—Dennis Burger

### RESOURCES

**Custom Installer:** Electronics Design Group, Inc. of Piscataway, NJ (732.650.9800; edgonline.com)

**Interior Designer:** the homeowner



In addition to housing the projector, the room behind the theater stores two equipment racks: one for the surround processor, amplifiers, and Richard Gray's PowerHouse, and the other for the Crestron control and the Lutron lighting system.

the bar, the sound is stellar. The greater the speaker-to-ear distance, McNeill says, the more well-rounded the sound. “In smaller home theaters, the speakers are right on top of you. That makes it seem like the sound is coming from two feet away, which it is. The greater distances here create much more of an enveloping sound effect.”

And the homeowner's reaction when McNeill demoed the home theater?

“He was totally stunned,” McNeill says. “He looked at me and smiled and said, ‘This is really cool. I'm going to use this a lot.’”

Now the owner is more “into” the theater than imagined. One year later, he replaced the DVD player with a Blu-ray player. “There's a noticeable difference in the quality. It went from great to fabulous,” he says.

“It was a lot more work than I anticipated,” he says of handling the interior design process and the architectural buildout from top to bottom. “It took more coordination in this room than it took in the entire house. But it's worth it. It's a cool thing to have.” **HE**

➤ For a full equipment list for this project, please visit [HEmagazine.com](http://HEmagazine.com).