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Pump Up the Volume

Commercial speakers blast 2,000 watts of audio into the room without overpowering the aesthetics. *photography by William Psolka*

A renovation of a New Jersey family's 25-year-old house inspired the homeowners to turn their dark and dreary basement into a state-of-the-art home theater. Like most basements, this one offered plenty of space to incorporate the standard big-screen display, a slew of speakers and comfortable seating, plus a pool table and a bar at the back. But this home theater space is far from common.

Commercial-grade speakers pump out an ear-splitting 2,000 watts of audio. That's nearly twice as much traditional residential speakers can handle. "The JBL Pro Cinema speak-

ers are the kind you usually find in commercial cinemas," explains Bob Gullo, president of Electronics Design Group (EDG), the Piscataway, NJ based home systems design firm hired to create the theater. Gullo admits that having this much audio power isn't for everybody, but for the owners of this theater, it made perfect sense. "This homeowner had been known to blow out his speakers," Gullo continues. "And when we met with him before designing this theater, the one requirement he had was that he wanted to be able to play movies and music really loud—a heart-



thumping, in-your-face loud." Designed to fill a huge cinema with sound, the JBL Pro Cinema speakers would ensure that he could crank it up without hurting his equipment. And crank it up he does. "When he's in the theater by himself," Gullo says, "the rest of the family stays out."

While the seven JBL Pro Cinema speakers and two JBL Pro Cinema subwoofers are definitely powerful, they are also very large, which means they were a challenge to incorporate into a traditional home setting. Standing nearly seven feet tall, the speakers could have been an eyesore in any room. But thanks to clever design work by EDG, the front three towers are totally imperceptible. The EDG team started by relocating some of the internal parts of the speakers. For example, the tweeters of the front left and right units were lowered to an ear-level

position for improved audio. The speakers were then installed into to a custom-crafted cabinet and covered with a removable fabric grille. The center-channel speaker received the same treatment but was placed on its side and mounted as high as possible in the cabinet below the screen. The remaining rear speakers were mounted to the surface of the side and rear walls. "They are designed to be angled toward the listening area, so there was no way to build them into the walls," Gullo explains.

The giant speakers, while efficient, have an appetite for power. A stack of Rotel amplifiers powers the commercial speakers, while an equalizer further tweaks the sound. Acoustical paneling and insulating materials within the walls prevent the sound from seeping into rooms above the theater even when the system is really pumped up.

What started as a dark and dreary basement was transformed into a cinematic wonderland for the owners of this New Jersey home theater. The 110-inch screen can display not only movies but also Xbox video games, pictures from a digital camera and computer graphics. Even when the family strolls into the other room, they can clearly see the video action. Or, they can close the pocket doors for some peace and quiet.

Runco VX-1000D Reflection DLP video projector
 Stewart Filmscreen Custom Luxus Deluxe Screenwall microperforated screen
 Sony DVPNS900V DVD/MCSACD player
 JVC HSR-7900 S-VHS recorder
 DirecTV HR-10-250 digital video recorder
 Extron RGB-464xi computer-video interface
 Rotel RSP-1066 7.1 preamp/processor
 Rotel RB-1080 stereo power amplifiers (2)
 Rotel RMB-1095 amplifier
 JBL Pro Cinema3635 subwoofers (2)
 JBL Pro Cinema8340 surround-channel speakers (4)
 JBLPro3678 left, right- and center-channel speakers (3)
 Middle Atlantic ERK rack
 Crestron ST-1550C color wireless touchpanel
 Crestron STRFGWX radio-frequency gateway receiver

EQUIPMENT LIST



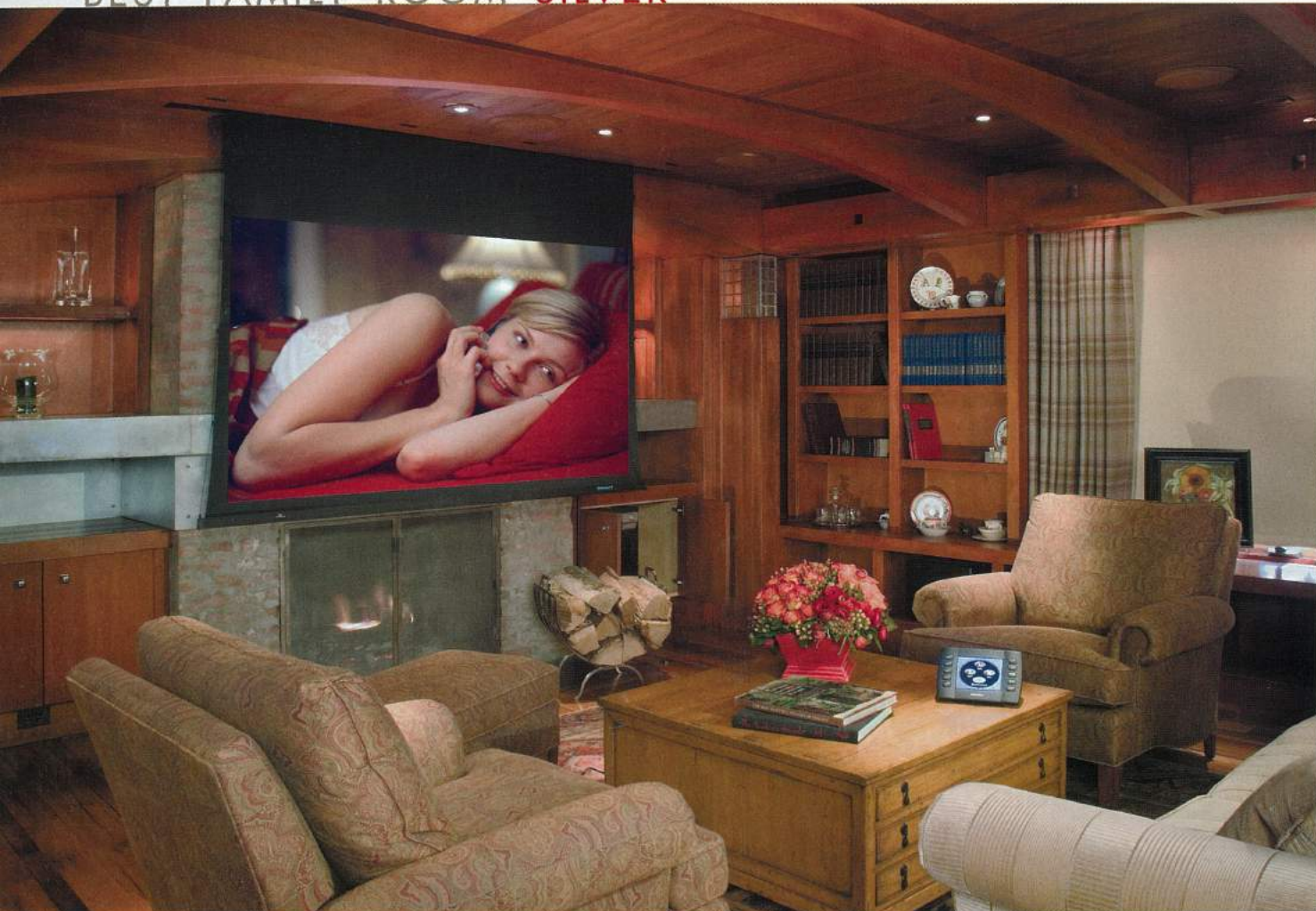
Still, this is a spot that the whole family can enjoy. With the volume set at a respectable level, it's a great area not only for watching movies but also for playing video games and listening to music. The family can choose video from a DVD player, high-definition satellite receiver, digital camera and an Xbox video game console. They can plug the Xbox, a digital camera or a laptop computer into a special wall jack to see the video on an 110-inch Stewart video screen recessed into a shallow cavity in the cabinet. The screen is made of a special microperforated fabric to let the sound from the center-channel speaker flow into the room unaffected. The fabric also contains technology to enhance contrast. A Runco DLP projector, meanwhile, creates a picture that's bright enough to view with the lights on, an important feature when playing video games or surfing the Internet. Setting the lights perfectly for each activity is a cinch. Pressing the GAMING button on the portable Crestron touchpanel, for example, brightens



All the essential components, including a DVD player, VCR, DVR satellite receiver and enough amplifiers to drive the gigantic speakers (pictured above) are tucked neatly inside an equipment rack. The speakers used in this space are commonly found in commercial movie theaters, which means so the owner can crank the volume without damaging his audio equipment. A panel made of acoustically transparent material can be snapped back into place to conceal the seven-foot-tall array.

the lights at the front of the room so that players can clearly see the buttons on their gaming consoles. Just the opposite happens when the MOVIE button is pressed. The lights lower to create a perfect environment for serious movie watching. The billiards and bar lights can stay on without interfering with the picture.

Purposeful lighting, beautiful video and ear-splitting audio make this home theater like no other. The huge, commercial-grade speakers that were incorporated could have overpowered the room, but they blend in nicely with the decor, creating a space that meets the audio demands of one family member while offering push-button conveniences and plenty of video variety for everyone else. **EH**



VITAL STATS

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Hidden Grandeur

A traditional family room turns into a high-end home theater with just a press of a button. *photography by William Psolka*

Most days, the library in this traditional New England home functions as a comfortable spot to settle in with a good book. Filled with plush furniture, stately bookcases, sun-drenched windows and a magnificent fireplace, it's a favorite room of the entire family. At 256 square feet, the space is roomy as well, making it a great place for the homeowners to entertain company or play games with their three children. The owners have two choices when it comes to entertaining in this area. They can keep the room as is to enjoy a quiet conversation with friends, or they can pick

up the Crestron wireless touchscreen remote from the coffee table, push a button and transform the space into a high-end home theater. Magically, an 82-inch Stewart Visionary screen lowers into the room from the ceiling. Positioned over the fireplace, the screen becomes the focal point, ready to display high-definition video, DVD movies and video games. Although it's not as large as some stand-alone video screens, it was the perfect size to view from 12 feet away, says Joe McNeill, senior sales consultant at Electronics Design Group, the Piscataway, NJ, based firm hired to incor-



porate a complete home theater system into the room while keeping the hardware hidden. "The homeowners are very much into technology," says McNeill, "but they didn't want the room to look high tech."

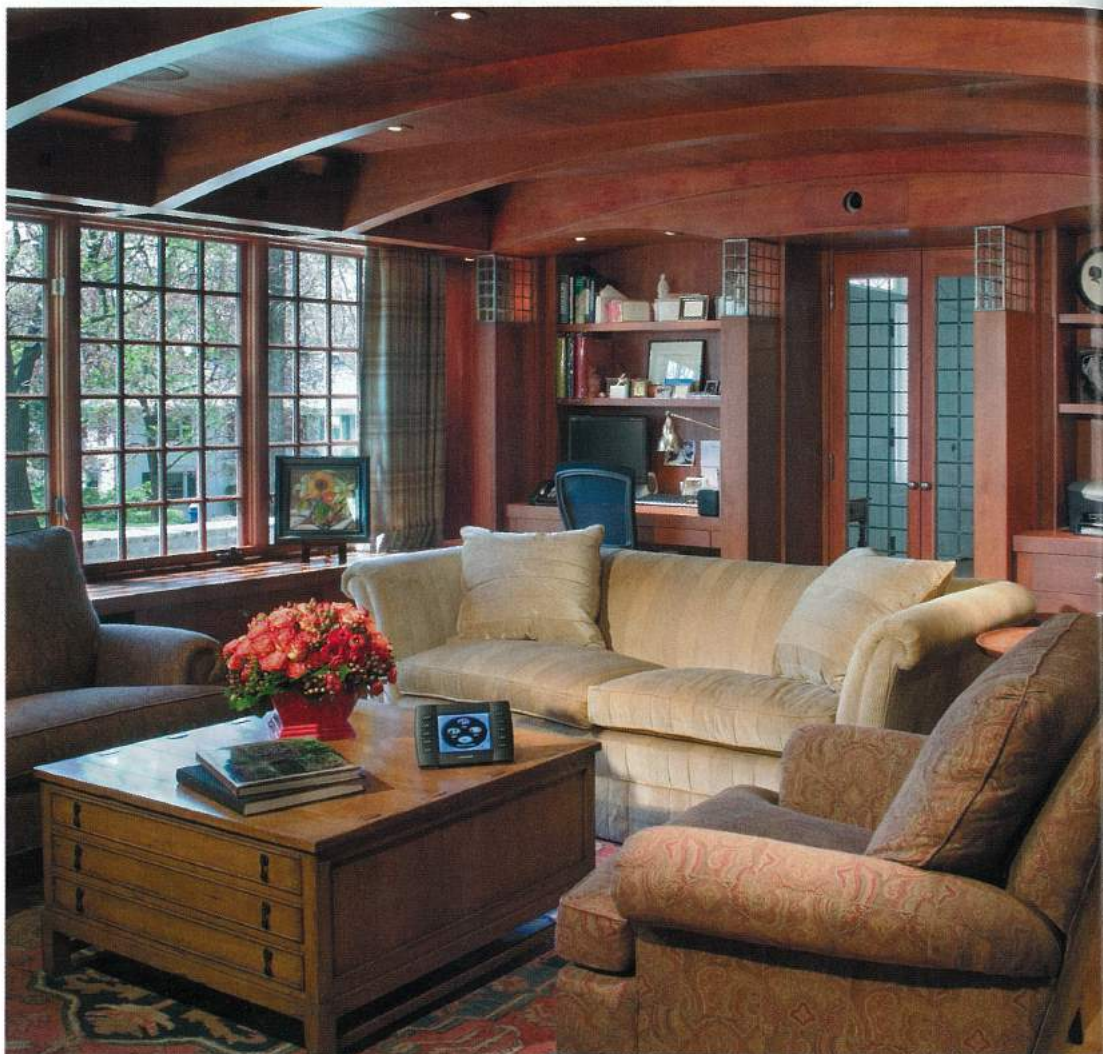
The screen is the only part of the home theater system that ever reveals itself. The rest, including a Runco DLP video projector, seven Sonance Virtuoso speakers and an impressive rack of audio and video components, stay out of sight at all times. The projector, for example, is entirely concealed within a soffit near the entrance to the room. The wooden structure matches the uniquely designed beams that stretch across the ceiling, making the soffit look more like an architectural detail than a home for a video projector. The projector doesn't give away its

hiding spot when it's running, either. Most projectors emit a humming noise, but this one stays quiet, thanks to the acoustical materials that were added to the interior of the soffit. With the exception of a small hole that was cut away for the lens, the video projector is nearly invisible.

The room's surround-sound speakers also keep a low profile. Installed to be nearly flush with the ceiling, all seven units are out of anyone's direct line of sight. Even if a person did look up, he probably wouldn't notice them. Faux painted to match the ceiling, the speakers virtually disappear into the woodwork. Using only ceiling-mounted speakers is a departure from traditional theater designs where the front three speakers are either placed in or on the front wall.

This New England family room does double duty as a cozy library and a state-of-the-art home theater. The homeowners can keep the 82-inch Stewart Filmscreen display hidden in the ceiling or push a button on a portable Crestron touchpanel (pictured on the coffee table) to have it descend into the room. As the screen lowers, all the necessary audio and video equipment, including a Runco DLP video projector revs up.

The only evidence of a video projector is the small hole that was cut from the soffit above the entrance to the room. The hole lets the image pass through unobstructed, while the entire projector stays hidden. The enclosure was packed with acoustical materials to absorb any noise emitted by the projector.



EQUIPMENT LIST

Runco XL-710LT DLP video projector
 Runco DHD video controller
 Stewart Filmscreen Visionary 82-inch diagonal motorized screen
 Crestron CP2E control system
 Crestron STS1700C color wireless touchpanel
 Rotel RSX-1067 surround-sound receiver
 Rotel RDV-1060 progressive-scan DVD player
 JVC HMDH-3000 D HD VCR
 Hughes HD-DVR250 high-def satellite receiver with TiVo
 Comcast high-def cable box with built-in DVR
 Sonance Virtuoso 833DR front in-ceiling speakers (3)
 Sonance Virtuoso RS2 side- and rear-channel in-ceiling speakers (4)
 Carver Super Junior subwoofer (1)
 Lutron Savoia motorized blackout shades
 Lutron Homeworks lighting control system
 Middle Atlantic equipment rack
 Ditek 15-amp power surge strips
 Active Thermal Management
 Cool Stacks

However, a pivoting mechanism built into the Virtuoso speakers allowed the devices to be angled toward the listening area for a genuine surround-sound effect.

Any source that the family needs to handle, including the Rotel DVD player, the JVC VCR and the Hughes high-definition satellite receiver with TiVo, are stationed in the room. But like everything else, they're hard to pick out, hidden behind the doors of a custom-crafted cabinet. The remaining equipment, including amplifiers, processors and controllers, is tucked inside a Middle Atlantic rack in a nearby closet.

A lighting control system and motorized window shades are equally important to the transformation of this multipurpose family room. Like the home theater gear, these sys-

tems are controlled by the Crestron touch-screen remote. The same command that juices up the audio and video equipment also lowers the Lutron Savoia blackout shades and tells the Lutron Homeworks system to fade out the lights. With the lights off and the windows covered, the space exudes the look and feel of a real movie theater.

From a demure library to a rockin' theater, there's nothing subtle about the transformation that takes place in this room. But as dramatic as the differences are, getting from one extreme to the other is incredibly simple for the family. Even though they can't see or touch the home theater equipment, it's all at their fingertips, making this one stealthy yet homey space for everyone to enjoy. **EH**