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Interior Motives

It takes a great design to make a home theater sizzle. by Lisa Montgomery



Comfortable couches, warm colors and decorative lighting can help establish ambiance for your home theater. Design and installation by Electronics Design Group, of Piscataway, NJ.

It's all about image," said Robert So during a recent discussion about home theater design. The professional interior designer from Nutley, NJ, has helped create scads of fabulous home theater rooms, ranging from very basic upgrades of existing family rooms to complete makeovers of unfinished basements and bonus rooms. But the one thing every space has in common, he says, is the ability to portray an image. And that, he continues, can only happen through good design.

So what exactly is "good" design? Ask a hundred people, and you'll probably hear a hundred different answers. And that's okay. "That's the wonderful thing about it," says So. "Anything is possible." If you'd like your home theater to resemble an elegant movie palace of the 1930s, the art deco details that were popular during that



Details like a popcorn machine are both fun and functional. Just be sure they don't interfere with the movie picture and soundtrack.

era can be incorporated into the space. Or perhaps your idea of home theater is a cozy nook with nothing more than a comfy couch and lots of pillows to sprawl out on. That can be arranged as well. A home theater offers the opportunity to create a space that's all yours, a space that reflects your personality and viewing preferences. It can be way over the top or straightforward and simple. As long as your interior designer and audio/video installer collaborate on the project, you'll have a room that not only looks good but performs well, too

The Impact of Design

Just as the technology that's chosen for a home theater can dictate aspects of the room design, the aesthetic features can impact the performance of the audio and video systems. That's why it's so important that the electronics and interior are unified in their goal. Fortunately, there are many items that can enhance both the design and the audio/video characteristics of the space. Draperies, for example, can add warmth and character. Plus, they can block out sunlight and absorb the sound before it bounces off the walls.

Wall and ceiling colors can help establish the mood of the theater, and usually darker is better. "It makes the room feel intimate and richer," notes professional designer Leigh Nunnery of Roswell, GA. "And the dark burgundies and blues won't be as distracting as creams and yellows," adds So. While the color of the walls can impact the video presentation, the composition of the walls can do a number on the movie soundtrack. Sheetrock, a common wall

material, is a reflective surface, which will cause sound from the speakers to bounce uncontrollably throughout the room. Hard-surface flooring only exacerbates the problem. Acoustical fabric wall paneling can banish all that bouncing for clearer and more realistic audio. At the same time, acoustical wall panels can add visual interest to the space. "You can buy panels covered in any fabric color or customize them to complement the style of the room," says home theater designer James Safronek of NXT Generation in Issaquah, WA.

Details Make a Difference

What good's a movie without a bucket of buttery popcorn and a can of cold soda? Extra details like an old-fashioned popcorn machine can add an element of authenticity to a home theater and make the whole experience more enjoyable. Other popular touches to consider include a proscenium underneath the display, velvet draperies on each side of the screen (when attached to a motorized track, they can open and close with the press of a button), movie posters on the walls, and an illuminated marquee above the doorway to the theater. These amenities have become a bit passé, however, which has inspired a new movement in theater design. The latest trend is theaters that incorporate small sitting areas at the back of the room, bar stools for back-row seating and handcrafted bars. "We're even putting in granite countertops so that families can enjoy movies while they eat their meals," adds So. What you do in your theater before and after the show have become just as integral to the experience as the movie itself. **EH**