

The Star-Ledger

The Best Seat in the House

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Where's the best seat for the Super Bowl?
The 50-yard line at Dolphin Stadium would be nice.

Or you could kiss up to Ken Nones or Sanjay Verma and watch the game in real style. They are among the million or so Americans with custom installed home theaters, according to Bill Ablondi of Parks Associates, which tracks the market for CEDIA, the Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association, an Indiana-based trade group of companies specializing in home cinema.

"It's big boy toys, that's what it comes down to: I'm going to show my neighbor what I've got," explains Ablondi, who says custom installations typically approach \$25,000. The two New Jersey dream rooms we visited averaged closer to \$170,000.

Great views from home

What's worse than a Giants loss? Try watching it in 92 diagonal inches of excruciatingly high definition.

At least Sanjay Verma can look forward to English Premier League soccer and cricket from India.

The Verma family's 11,000-square-foot home in Rumson boasts 11 televisions of varying sizes. But it's the mammoth one that everyone gravitates to. Seven-year-old Akash prefers it to a movie theater.

"I get a closer view!" he exclaims, as siblings Priya, 5, and Shailen, 2, give I their wide eyed approval.



When it's time to check out a movie, Rumson resident sits down in the comfort of his own home theater, complete with a rear projection screen and 10 surround sound speakers. A touch screen panel keep him connected to the essentials, including audio, lighting, video, TV and heating and cooling throughout the house.

security cameras, adjust climate for every room, close garage doors and surf the Web from the same wireless tablet that controls \$100,000 worth of theater electronics. The goodies include a Sony projector, Rotel DVD player, and "active" Genelec audio consisting of seven speakers and two subwoofers, all with their own built-in amplifiers.

When the walls in the 1850 structure proved a bit thin for a modern multimedia, the Verma's spent another \$100,000 or so adding this spacious, scarlet-tinged sanctuary two years ago.

Insulated pocket doors, extra layers of plaster board and sprayed foam in the ceiling, ensure everyone sleeps well when Verma, 38, unwinds with "Gladiator" after a long day of bond trading

on Wall Street.

"Over here, I can close these doors and have the volume as high as I want," says Verma, sinking into the "sweet spot" of his horseshoe-shaped couch, where 3,000 watts of audio converge from the invisible surround system. As a DVD of "Black Hawk Down" blazes across the wide screen, bullet casings seem to clank around Verma's pool table. While scorching soundtracks are one thing, noisy overhead projectors can break the magic spell.



Massive leather recliners are among the comforts of the home theater at Ken Nodes place in Holmdel.

So Electronics Design Group created a projection room behind the screen, where an elaborate \$9,000 system from the Stewart Filmscreen Corp. bounces images off two mirrors onto the back of the translucent screen. (Rear projection on this scale requires novel approaches, says EDG). As a holiday treat, Verma took his kids to a cinema for the delightful "Night at the Museum." It was his first time back in years. "I still enjoy the theater experience; it's a lot of fun," Verma insists, "But you don't have privacy. The bathrooms are more convenient here. Getting a drink out of the refrigerator is a lot easier here."

We'll Bring the Nachos

Ken Nodes taps a wireless keypad. As if by magic, lights dim, shades descend and curtains part to reveal a 100-inch screen.

A tyrannosaur charges from a ceiling mounted \$16,000 Runco VX-1000d DLP projector and roars with 1,875 watts of surround fury through a Krell sound system. A terrified visitor wants to dive under a chair.

Fortunately, there are eight oversized leather recliners to choose from. Four seats at the elevated rear bar offer additional cover from the rampaging Rex of "Jurassic Park."

Scream all you want: the ceiling is insulated.

with a sprayed foam called Icynene, some rubber and two layers of plasterboard, so as not to disturb anyone watching the 42-inch plasma HDTV upstairs. Three-quarter-inch-thick plate glass windows keep any decibels from escaping into the rec room, where the kids are thrashing Guitar Hero on a 62-inch rear-projection HDTV. Outside, three acres of lawn provide further insurance against neighbor complaints.

But most of Nodes' neighbors seem to want in. He says he has been hosting intimate gatherings of 100 or so close friends ever since the Electronics Design Group of Piscataway, transformed his Holmdel basement into a movie palace two years ago.

Tastefully decorated with cherry wainscoting, the room boasts more hidden electronics than a foreign embassy. It recently was voted best large home theater in the \$125,000-\$140,000 class in a CEDIA contest.

Duke basketball, Yankees baseball, "Lost" and the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy are family favorites on the white screen. A DVD of Metallica performing with the San Francisco symphony might convert even the staunchest heavy-metal-haters -- and that's without high definition DVD. All of our home theater connoisseurs are waiting for a winner in the performance battle between HD

DVD and Blu-ray, Sony's version of high-def DVD.

"You get lost in the sound," shouts Nodes, 40, who manages a hedge fund in Jersey City. "It sucks you in, make you part of the movie."

Metallica's rough edges are smoothed out by a \$2,000 Richard Gray "power conditioner." Electricity is inherently dirty, says EDG. This device cleans it up, for "a better image, and a more revealing sound stage." To make doubly sure no details are lost in transit, a \$1,500 digital cable from Tara Labs ferries audio signals between components.

There's nothing like a home theater to keep families at home, says Node. Most weekends find him there with wife Kathleen and Kyle, 12, and Bridget, 10. Every Netflix delivery is cause for celebration. The down-side? With those pillow-soft recliners, you can forget about the closing credits.

"My wife never sees the end of a movie," Node says. "It's too comfortable."



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