

A QUALITY HOME THEATER SYSTEM DOESN'T HAVE TO BE JUST A DREAM

SOUND INVESTMENT

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We're about three minutes from showtime, so let's make this quick: A home theater puts you in the front row of your private screening room.

Yes, the economy has been dire, but now we're all feeling a little stimulated. Maybe it's time to stimulate a couple of your senses — sight and hearing — with a full-blown home theater: That's five (sometimes more) speakers, a subwoofer for those low-down special effects, an audio-video receiver and an HDTV (or something even better).

We're presuming everyone will add HDTV programming from a local cable or satellite provider, or prop up an antenna for some glorious local, and free, hi-def broadcasts. We'll run through four sample-system price points, from \$2,500 to \$1 million-plus (for the dreamers among us).

Already have an HDTV? Congratulations, you're halfway to a home theater. OK, roll it...

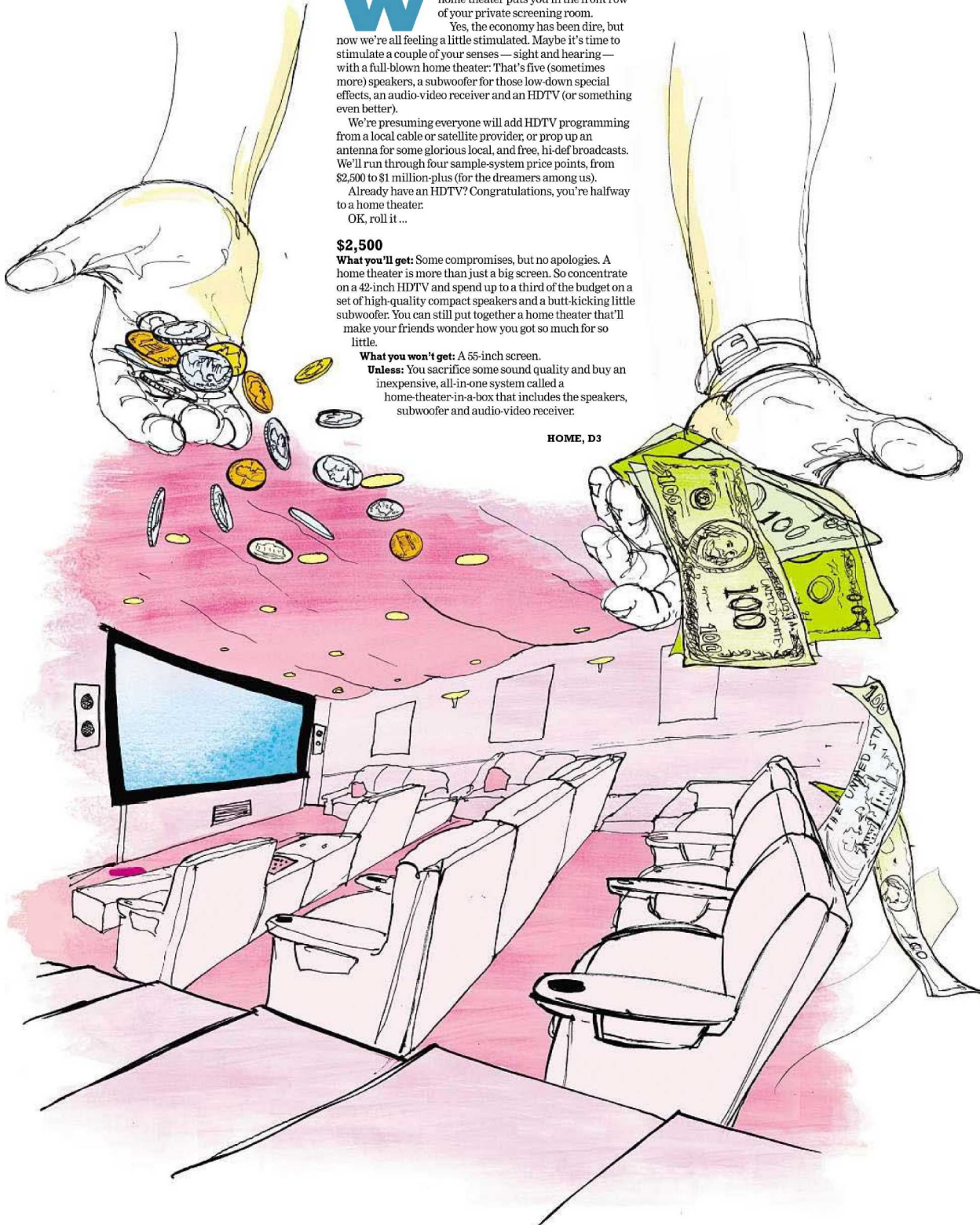
\$2,500

What you'll get: Some compromises, but no apologies. A home theater is more than just a big screen. So concentrate on a 42-inch HDTV and spend up to a third of the budget on a set of high-quality compact speakers and a butt-kicking little subwoofer. You can still put together a home theater that'll make your friends wonder how you got so much for so little.

What you won't get: A 55-inch screen.

Unless: You sacrifice some sound quality and buy an inexpensive, all-in-one system called a home-theater-in-a-box that includes the speakers, subwoofer and audio-video receiver.

HOME, D3



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Tip: Always keep room size in mind. A 42-inch HDTV might look tiny in the showroom, but it's perfect if you're sitting 5 or 6 feet from the screen at home. And always calibrate your HDTV, adjusting color, contrast, brightness and sharpness for an optimum picture and a longer panel life. We're including a simple calibration test disc in this sample system.

Equipment:

- >> Westinghouse TX-42F450S 42-inch LCD: \$699
- >> Infinity Primus P152 (five at \$80 each) or The Speaker Company's on-wall TSAT-2000 (set of five): \$450
- >> Outlaw LFM-1 Compact Subwoofer: \$399
- >> Pioneer VSX-819H audio-video receiver: \$300
- >> PlayStation 3: \$399 (for DVDs, Blu-ray discs, games)
- >> Miscellaneous (cables, surge protector, Monster HDTV Calibration Wizard test disc): \$200

\$5,000

What you'll get: Here comes the big screen!

What you won't get: One of highest-rated HDTVs, even at this price. It'll blow the budget, so search for a bargain that also promises premium performance.

Unless: You go cheap on the surround system. But don't do it! If you really want the huge screen, go for it.

Sacrifice those hulking tower speakers you had an eye on and invest in a more refined set of compact speakers.

Tip: Be the king of your home theater — get a programmable remote control that operates all the equipment.

Equipment:

- >> Panasonic TCF50G10: \$1,800 (yes, it's a plasma HDTV)
- >> Axiom Audio Epic Midi-125 home theater speaker system (five speakers, one subwoofer): \$1,300
- >> Oppo BDP-83 Blu-ray player: \$500 (coming soon)
- >> Onkyo TX-SR706: \$899
- >> Universal Remote Digital R50 programmable remote control: \$150
- >> Miscellaneous (cables, power conditioner/surge protector, Monster HDTV Calibration Wizard test disc): \$200

\$10,000

What you'll get: Is this a home theater or ... a movie theater? We're leaving the world of 55-inch HDTVs for a projector that displays images 8 feet, 9 feet, even 10 feet (measured diagonally). The sound gets bigger, too, with tower speakers flanking the center-channel speaker. If you've got \$10,000 to spend on a home theater, we assume you have the room to fit it all.

What you won't get: A vintage movie-theater popcorn machine.

Unless: You get lucky on craigslist.

Tip: A projector needs a dark room, the darker the better. A projector must be matched to an appropriately reflective screen, so always check with a professional. Calibration and installation — if you'd like to mount the projector on a ceiling or the screen on a front wall — are extra.

Projector lamps are expensive to replace, \$300-\$400 for starters, so it's better to dedicate this home theater to movies rather than the nightly news and "Sex and the City" reruns.

Equipment:

- >> JVC DLA-RS10 1080p projector: \$4,500
- >> Carada projection screen: \$750
- >> PSB Audio Concert Theater System (2 Image T45 towers, 1 Image C40 center-channel speaker; 2 Image B15 surrounds, SubSeries 6i subwoofer): \$2,145
- >> Oppo BDP-83 Blu-ray player: \$500
- >> TiVo HD XL DVR: High-definition digital video recorder that stores up to 150 hours of HD programming: \$600
- >> Projector calibration by Imaging Science Foundation-certified technician: \$500
- >> Miscellaneous (cables, power conditioner/surge protector, remote control): \$750

Fantasy (\$1 million-plus)

What you'll get: Whatever you want! (Almost.)

What you won't get: A new house to fit the new home theater.

Tip: Have patience. Planning and installation take time. Consult a professional — start with the [CEDIA](http://www.cedia.net) (Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association) finder service at www.cedia.net.

The home theater featured here is an actual installation by Future Home of Los Angeles that, from design to project completion, took almost three years — and that was a rush job so the homeowners could host an Oscar pre-party last year.

Some highlights:

- >> Oversize, 2.5-inch-thick acrylic windows installed to display a 98,000-gallon pool
- >> Projection booth
- >> Runco VX-55d projector (\$100,000)
- >> JBL Synthesis speakers (14), subwoofers (three), five-channel surround amplifiers (two), surround processor/HDMI selector (\$115,000)
- >> Kaleidescape Server 5000 movie server (\$4,000)

That's it. Dim the lights!