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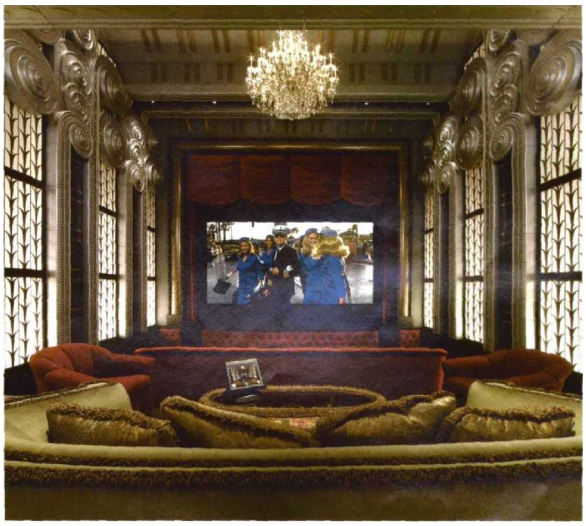
Themes to the Extremes

These three award-winning theaters incorporate today's greatest technologies, while transporting you to other times and places.

ARE YOU A FAN of the movie *Casablanca*? Can't get enough of elegant art deco architecture? Or maybe you'd like to explore underground chambers with Lara Croft. Whatever your passion or pastime, it can applied as the theme of your home theater. And we're not talking about a few posters and knickknacks. As the owners of these three super-dedicated spaces demonstrate, you can take your theme to the extreme—to create a one-of-a-kind theater that reflects the essence of your personality. The theaters showcased here were recently honored as the gold, silver, and bronze winners of Themed Theaters in *Electronic House*'s 2011 Homes of the Year contest.



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Lara Croft would feel right at home in this theater that mixes Egyptian hieroglyphs with high technology. Even the Middle Atlantic equipment rack and Runco projector are ensconced in stone.

The Stone's Story

Rather than hire a cabinetmaker or professional interior designer, the custom electronic (CE) professionals at Admit One, Edina, Minn., and the homeowners took on the design of the detailed faux stonework themselves. "We couldn't find anyone who could envision how to materialize these simulated pillars and rock," says Lance Anderson, president of Admit One. Here is how the company pulled it off:

1. First, Admit One purchased a CNC (computer numerical control) milling machine. The homeowners created patterns inspired by *Tomb Raider*. Then Admit One produced CAD drawings, and the CNC machine carved a sheet of foam 2 to 3 inches thick to create the necessary form.
2. After the pillars were cut, they underwent a hardening process to make them feel more like stone. "Despite the columns being made primarily of Styrofoam, when you run your hand along the wall, you genuinely feel as if you're surrounded by 10 tons of ancient stone," says Anderson.
3. To create the distressed look of true ancient Egyptian stone, the homeowners airbrushed cracks onto the surface and added fake moss.
4. To limit acoustic concerns from too much "stone," Admit One added absorption materials to soften the hard surfaces between the pillars.

SOUND TAMER

A JBL Synthesis system dishes out great sound and removes aural anomalies in this theater of ancient architecture.

by Krissy Rushing
photography by John Abernathy

NO ONE WOULD GUESS that above the garage in this modest home in White Bear Lake, Minn., sits a world-class theater. Here, authentic looking accoutrements inspired by the movie *Tomb Raider* commingle with precision audio and video to transport guests to the catacombs of ancient Egypt, or wherever a movie takes them.

The precision audio/video includes a JBL Synthesis system that not only belts out the sound, but helps to refine and tame it, which was essential to keeping the sound inside the room and out of the ears of the neighbors.

"They didn't want sound to leak out into the neighborhood or for outside noise to disrupt the experience inside," says Lance Anderson, president of Admit One Home Cinema, a systems design and installation company in Edina, Minn. To help contain the sound, the room was built using staggered-stud construction, plenty of insulation and two layers of sheetrock.

Soundproofing didn't present nearly as big a hurdle as the room acoustics. The theater's faux stonework, designed to look 4,000 years old, served as a major thematic element, but the hard, reflective surface would make the audio sound harsh. Admit One tackled the unruly acoustics by adding absorptive materials between the columns. The company also specified a modified JBL Synthesis system that included speakers from

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JBL's Synthesis One, and upgraded to a pair of 18-inch subwoofers and a processor from the Synthesis Two package. "Part of the reason we used this system is that JBL's room [equalization] is so spectacular. It allowed us to account for the room's anomalies and calibrate it to SMPTE (Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers) standards," says Anderson.

A 13-foot 2.35:1 masking Stewart Filmscreen, paired with a Runco VX-22 three-chip DLP projector with an anamorphic lens (for superwide CinemaScope movies), provide a video experience as spectacular as the audio, with the projector artfully hidden behind faux stonework. To downplay the appearance of modern technology, the homeowners strategically placed ominous gargoyles around the room, such as the one perched atop the projector box.

Admit One and the homeowners paid attention to every detail, from the stone floor and stairs in the entryway to the theater seats. Admit One even flew homeowners Paul and Rachel to Texas to see chairs from United Leather, where they custom-designed the Monticeto seats to protect the integrity of the "ancient" theater. Details like the weathered leather and rustic furniture tacks were chosen to complement to primordial vibe.

Admit One also kept lighting to a minimum, cognizant of the fact that electricity didn't exist thousands of years ago. The cavernous space is dimly lit, much like the mausoleums Lara Croft scours in the film. Even the Middle Atlantic equipment rack is ensconced between two stone pillars to minimize the appearance of technology.

The *Tomb Raider*-themed theater may have taken three years from construction to completion, but the homeowners are ecstatic about the results. "Throughout the process the owners and our team stayed focused, knowing that in the end it would be worth all the extra time and effort," says Anderson. In fact, the owners were so dedicated to the vision that they made a pact not to watch a single movie in the theater until it was complete.

That's dedication. We can only guess what that first movie was. **EH**

SYSTEMS DESIGN & INSTALLATION: Admit One Home Cinema, Edina, Minn., www.admitonecinema.com

Systems & Equipment

Screen: Stewart Filmscreen
Projector: Runco
Speakers: JBL Synthesis
Subwoofers: JBL Synthesis
Processors and amp: JBL Synthesis
Lighting: Lutron
Control: RTI
Acoustical Treatments: Echo Eliminator Cotton Core

Details

Room Size (LxWxH): 23 x 19½ x 12½ feet
Cost: $289,000 (includes installation and labor)
Project Duration: 3 years
Construction: New

Highlights

- Faux stonework with hieroglyphs make the theater feel ancient.
- Acoustic engineering via EQ and absorption tame this reflective space.
- A knockout projection system from Runco and Stewart create a *wow* visual experience.

BALLROOM BLISS

Reference-level gear from Stewart Filmscreen, Digital Projection and Mark Levinson fill a lavish space with refined audio and video.

by Carolina Drake, photography by Randall Cordero

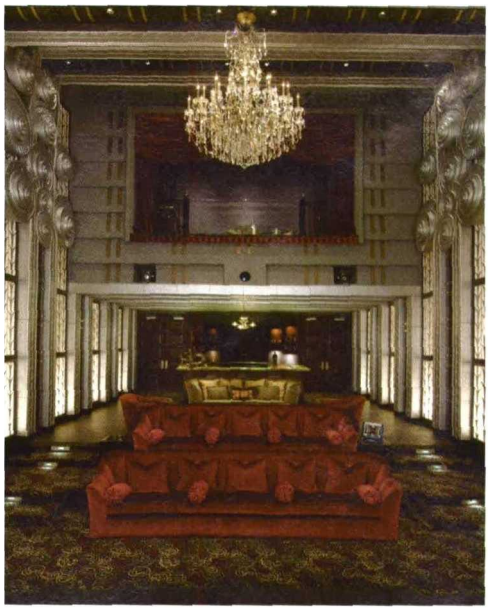
What makes an award-winning home theater? An award-winning theater designer sure helps, but you also need top-shelf gear to match. Enter Digital Projection's Titan Reference 3D projector, a CEDIA (Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association) award-winner itself.

DPI is Picture Perfect

What makes an award-winning home theater? An award-winning theater designer sure helps, but you also need top-shelf gear to match. Enter Digital Projection's Titan Reference 3D projector, a CEDIA (Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association) award-winner itself.

Sure, employing three-chip DLP technology to deliver a 1080p picture with up to 9,000 ANSI lumens of brightness and 5000:1 contrast ratio is impressive. But this theater is about reproducing every image exactly as the director intended, and the Titan Reference is the industry standard for doing so, says home theater pro Murray Kunis of Future Home in West Los Angeles, Calif.

In addition to active 3D capability, the $81,995 Titan 3D includes Digital Projection's FastFrame technology, a combination of hardware and firmware that reduces the artifacts and image blur in rapidly moving content.



TO SOME, this theater's "cool factor" is the lavish art deco design by well-known theater designer Theo Kalomirakis. The eye candy includes soaring architectural swirls, cascading banks of gold and silver, a regal red sofa and theater curtain, and the double deco-styled bars (one in the rear and one in the eight-seat balcony).

To others, the theater's true coolness is in the perfect level of technological restraint: Murray Kunis, owner of electronics installation firm Future Home in Los Angeles, abstained from overloading the room with the biggest, baddest gear. Instead, he crafted a sophisticated selection of reference-quality equipment to provide the utmost in audio/video refinement. "There are about three brands that I'd feel comfortable [with] for this room," Kunis says.

This theater's mission is about reproducing every sliver of sound, and projecting images at a particular color temperature—exactly the way the film's creators intended. "That's why we used the same screen used at the dubbing station," Kunis says of the 16-foot-wide Stewart Filmscreen 3D screen, which is paired with a Digital Projection Titan Reference 1080p DLP projector.

Audio refinements include top-of-the-line JBL Synthesis Everest speakers, which fill the capacious room without distortion, and high-end Mark Levinson amps and processors—which have the ability to fill a large venue. "This is exactly what the Levinsons are intended for, and the three-chip DLP is the industry standard for proper digital cinema," Kunis adds.

"Designing a theater of this magnitude isn't like designing a listening room," he continues. "Sure, you can debate for days about why one speaker is better than another, but in a theater you're trying to re-create the theatrical experience, which is based upon a reference on a dubbing stage. So it can't be better than the reference, but it has to be as accurate as possible." **EH**

SYSTEMS DESIGN & INSTALLATION: Future Home, West Los Angeles, Calif., www.futurehometheater.com **BUILDER:** Westpoint Development, Las Vegas, Nev., www.westpointdevelopment.com **SPECIALTY CONSULTANT:** Arch Technology Solutions Group, Oklahoma City, Okla., www.archtechus.com **THEATER DESIGNER:** Theo Kalomirakis Theaters, New York, N.Y., www.tktheaters.com

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Systems & Equipment

Video projector: Digital Projection
Screen: Stewart Filmscreen
Lighting and control: Crestron
Speakers: JBL Synthesis
Processor and amps: Mark Levinson

Details

Room size (LxWxH): 51 x 25 x 27 feet
Cost: $1.4 million
Project Duration: 2 years
Construction: New

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HIGH-PERFORMANCE *romance*

Custom Control

Change is often borne out of necessity. Or frustration.

Five years ago, when Atlanta Home Theater's Scott Ross was installing his own private home cinema, he designed a custom interface for the Crestron TPMC-8X touchpanel to operate his theater exactly the way he wanted. "I originally installed a standard interface and I couldn't stand it, so we created our own based on the way I felt it should be done. And it's been a success ever since—we use it for [the larger] theaters we design."

His custom solution: group everything—lighting, HVAC, security systems, motorized blinds and all audio/video options—on one touchscreen page for easy access and user sanity. "It takes about two minutes to learn how to operate our interface," he says. In many large theaters, Ross' company incorporates a head shot of every family member on the interface for quick access of their customized controls. When a 4-year-old touches her customized button, she's provided with the only two options she needs—an icon of a satellite receiver for watching TV, and an icon of a Blu-ray player for watching DVDs, for example.

Today, Atlanta Home Theater's custom-designed interface has become its signature touch.

In this *Casablanca*-style theater, Wilson Audio speakers, Krell amps and a Screen Innovations display outshine Bogie and Bergman.
photography by Johnny Cain

FOR A BIG-NAME Atlanta developer and fan of the Bogie-Bergman classic *Casablanca*, there was never any doubt about this theater's design. "When we first started talking about it, we decided to model it after Rick's Café in the movie," says Scott Ross, president of Atlanta Home Theater in Atlanta, Ga. "The homeowner loved the wartime scenes and the cafe's open-air feel."

This theater's entertainment performance is far from the tinkling piano of Rick's. Wilson Audio Maxx 3 and Watch speakers, as well as Velodyne subwoofers and Krell amps, produce audio to accompany a Digital Projection projector and Screen Innovations display that would transport Bogie and Bergman to another *time goes by*.

"Anyone who watches a movie in that room is blown away by what the 7.2 system is capable of," Ross says. "When you're getting into that kind of reference-quality level, it's definitely not the norm." To fill the 600-square-

Systems & Equipment

Video projector: Digital Projection
Screen: Screen Innovations
Speakers: Wilson Audio
Lighting and control: Crestron
Rack: Middle Atlantic

Details

Room size (L x W x H): 30 x 20 x 12 feet
Cost: $380,000 (includes installation and labor)
Project Duration: 4 months
Construction: New

Highlights

- The Crestron DVPHD-PRO processor allows the owner to watch numerous shows on one screen.
- The custom woodworking includes nearly 200 pounds of mahogany, valued at more than $12,000.
- The basement's "fun" zone also includes a full kitchen and bar, a family room, kids' playroom and a sauna.

foot room with sound, Atlanta Home Theater went with the larger-than-normal Wilson Maxx 3 and Watch speakers, accompanied by Velodyne subwoofers and Krell amps (the Krells are proudly positioned atop Billy Bags stands below the screen).

"To achieve really high-volume levels, we had to go with amps that were capable of pushing to that extreme," Ross says. The projector, Digital Projection's dVision 30 HD, couples with Screen Innovations' 160-inch TR160 display to provide a picture that would make Bogie blush—and capture it vividly.

By design, the theater transports viewers to a faraway place and time. It's fronted with large, hand-carved mahogany entry doors that face a portrait of the film's famous last scene. The theater boasts another of the film's vignettes on the back wall: A pair of custom-made mahogany shutters that replicate a window in Rick's Café and conceal the wall-mounted Watch speakers. The starry night sky above, anchored by Atlanta Home Theater's radical rendition of flying buttresses, twinkles over the masculine leather theater chairs by Palliser and contrasting leopard-print carpeting.—*C.D.* **EH**

SYSTEMS DESIGN & INSTALLATION: Atlanta Home Theater, Atlanta, Ga., www.atlantahometheater.com **BUILDER**: Artesian Builders, Marietta, Ga. **INTERIOR DESIGNER:** McNamara Designs, Atlanta, Ga.