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HOME THEATER IN THE SPOTLIGHT

PENNSYLVANIA CABINETMAKER IS NOT ANOTHER 'CELLAR DWELLER'

■ *MEDIA ROOMS INC. GOT ITS START IN THAT MOST TRADITIONAL OF WOODWORKING WOMBS: THE BASEMENT.*

By Anthony Noel

The production area at Media Rooms Inc. in West Chester, PA, looks a lot like the stereotypical one-man shop. With its block walls and smooth concrete floor, this could be the over-sized basement of any sole proprietor. The only tell-tale hint that one is not in the cellar is the space's 16-foot ceiling. (and maybe the lack of a washer and dryer over in the corner). There also are the three full-time cabinetmakers, busily working on elements of the company's newest showroom.

It wasn't that long ago, however, that owner Rob Dzedzy was toiling below ground. "I have always had a very strong interest in audio," Dzedzy (pronounced DEZ-ee) says. "I designed and built speaker enclosures. Years and years ago, I built electronic switchers, where you would have several amplifiers feeding off the different groups of speakers in the house, long before that product, which exists now, was readily available."

Dzedzy jokes that if he had had the foresight to patent such early experiments, he "maybe wouldn't still be working for a living."

What a loss that would have been for Media Rooms' customers.

Today, Dzedzy's troops produce casework and architectural details which grace some of the finest homes in the Greater Philadelphia area, including many on the chic "Main Line" area. And within that casework resides top-shelf electronics, from stereo equipment to projection TVs, configured by Dzedzy's two full-time electronics installers.

Dzedzy's highly specialized business merges his two strongest interests — electronics and design — to provide state-of-the-art audio and video equipment



This bird's-eye maple media unit is one of several displays that greet visitors to Media Rooms' main showroom in West Chester, a Philadelphia suburb.



This contemporary-styled media unit was constructed in mahogany with ebonized accents. The cabinet contains all of the audio and video components for the home theater system, including the front three speakers and subwoofer and all of the components for the whole house audio system.

housed in bold aesthetic statements which run the gamut of style from traditional to contemporary. Then, of course, there are the home theaters, where Art Deco elements and plush velvet movie-house seating combine to re-create the excitement of a bygone era, right in a client's home.

It was just such an environment that Media Rooms cabinetmakers were working on the day *CWB* visited — an Art Deco display theater for the company's showroom, featuring sconces of Dzedzy's own design and chevron capitals for columns in a room designed to recall a time when Hollywood magic took wide-eyed moviegoers to great cities, dark jungles and futuristic spacescapes.

No detail goes unnoticed in rooms such as these, right down to the velvet-draped walls and movie-poster frames showing off future "attractions."

But for all the wonderful aesthetics, Dzedzy knows it is Media Rooms' full service capability that sets the company apart.

"My philosophy has always been to be a complete turnkey organization," he says, "where someone can say, 'I want a new media room system,' or 'I want a dedicated home theater,' and they won't

have to contract a designer to design the room, then contract an electronic installer to get the equipment, then contract a cabinetmaker to make it all work, and hope that the cabinetmaker and electronic installer will communicate so the pieces fit and all that stuff. We pretty much do the entire process and pull it all together."

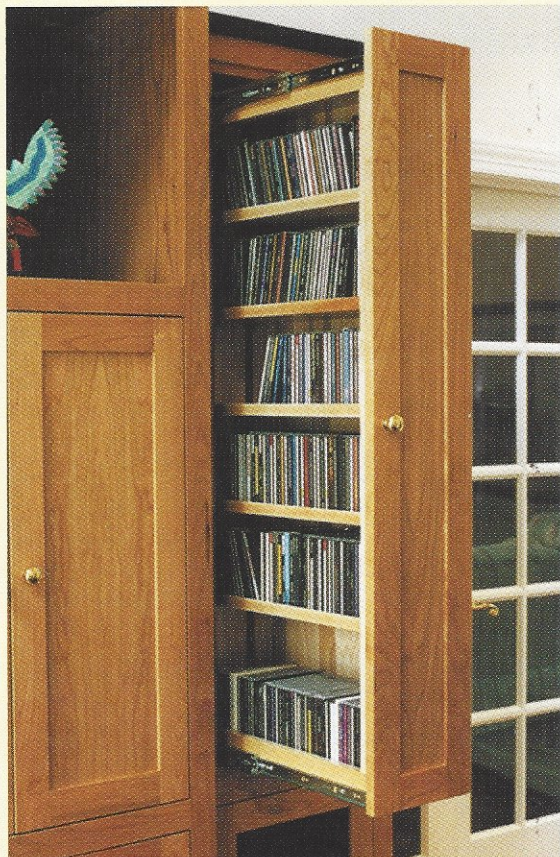
After taking a design degree in communication arts, Dzedzy worked for 15 years as an art director in the corporate world. "During that time I was doing woodworking, and stereo was always there," he says.

But the turning point of his career came when Dzedzy played a key role in outfitting the interior of a custom home — his own.

"Basically I laid out what I wanted to do with the rooms and how I wanted them shaped and contracted an architect, who did the working drawings for me. I hired a builder, who did most of the construction. But the house has all custom cabinetry inside, and I did all that myself," he says.

"I wanted the house to be a little

Shop supervisor Jeff Cashwiler works on Media Rooms' Safety Speed Cut vertical router.



To maximize storage space for CDs and DVDs, vertical drawers are often used; at only 9 inches wide, they can store hundreds of CDs.



MEDIA ROOMS INC.

different. I didn't want the traditional house," he adds. "A lot of the houses we go in have living rooms with white furniture and white rugs, and no one ever goes in there. I wanted our house to be livable throughout the whole house, so I eliminated that room and instead we have a media room."

While continuing to work at his "real"



Media Rooms Inc. owner Rob Dzedzy holds an Art Deco-style sconce of his own design, several of which will adorn the walls of the company's showroom theater at its West Chester, PA, headquarters.

job, Dzedzy continued to take side commissions, working out of his basement. Many projects featured integrated electronics, and by 1983, the growing "side" work prompted the founding of Media Rooms Inc.

"At the time, the custom audio/video installation business was just in its infancy," Dzedzy recalls. "It was a very viable business in certain spots of the country; certainly Southern California, areas of Florida, a couple of places in Texas, Minneapolis... but it was not so predominant in this area."

Today, in addition to drawing clients from the Main Line, Dzedzy's company has placed units in New Jersey and Delaware shore resorts, in the inside-the-DC-beltway community of Silver Spring, MD, and has even completed a commission on a yacht with a home port in Florida.

"It [the custom audio/video business] is still not to the point where it is in other parts of the country, but it's really be-

ginning to take hold now in Eastern Pennsylvania," Dzedzy says. Commissions also come regularly from Wilmington, DE, and Media Rooms' home county of Chester, noted for its rural heritage, and where traditional architectural forms rule.

Dzedzy pays kudos to an industry group called CEDIA (the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association), to which he has belonged almost from Media Rooms' beginning. "It's been a good resource for me to learn about the electronics side of the business, which wasn't my strength," he says.

Though Dzedzy now handles all the design and project management work, his early days shared similarities with many custom shops — beyond the obvious one of its "downstairs" location.

"I met with the customer, I designed the cabinetry, I'd install the audio and video equipment...well, in a short time, you realize you just can't do everything under the sun, and it's hard to go after new customers when you're building and installing for others," he says. "So I brought in a cabinetmaker initially, and eventually got to a second cabinetmaker, and when I got to two, I basically stepped out of the cabinet production side of the business, because it's the most time-consuming."

Today, shop and showroom split 5,400 square feet of space — about 40/60 respectively — in more fitting surroundings: a business/industrial park roughly 15 miles outside of Philadelphia.

The freedom afforded Dzedzy by the full-time staff allowed him in the early days to get out and sell. Today that has really paid off, in the form of a nearly 90 percent referral rate. This in turn allows Dzedzy to handle all customer interaction, all cabinet design and all electronics systems design.

"We do little or no advertising," he says with a grin.

Rob's wife, Christiana Dzedzy, handles office administration, programs some of the electronics systems the firm sells and installs, and developed the Media Rooms' Web site (www.mediaroomsinc.com).

Supervising work in the shop is Jeff Cashwiler, a 13-year veteran of Rutt Custom Cabinetry. Projects are done one at a time, and shop equipment is standard fare for any custom environment:



In this high-end home theater, Media Rooms Inc. installed all of the audio and video components, which include a 100-in.-wide screen. The company also designed the interior and fabricated the acoustical wall panels and decorative columns on the sides and around the screen. The columns conceal the speaker system. The Art Deco movie poster frame at the entrance was also designed and fabricated by Media Rooms.



Constructed in mahogany and stained in dark walnut, this traditional-style media unit has pocket doors over the TV and components. There is storage on either side for CDs and DVDs behind each 6-inch column.

A Powermatic III table saw (fitted with an integrated router table that shares the saw fence), a Delta DJ-20 jointer, Bridgewood planer and Safety Speed Cut vertical router.

Finishing is done in a JBI spray booth with Binks guns and accessories, spraying Sherwin-Williams KemVar topcoats over Mohawk brand stains.

Media Rooms' average free-standing or built-in cabinet system costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000 dollars and generally takes two to three weeks to build. Everything is built in the shop and shipped to the site in modules which are then assembled, most often in houses that have been completed and are already occupied. A few such units come in at more than \$20,000.

Total home theaters start at around \$25,000 and go up from there. And we're betting very few are going into anybody's basement. ♦

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TOTAL CUSTOM AUDIO/VIDEO ENVIRONMENTS

- Home Theater Audio/Video Systems
- Home Theater Interiors
- Whole House Audio
- Lighting Control Systems
- Home Automation and Systems Integration
- In-house Cabinet Design and Fabrication



Media Rooms Inc.

West Chester, PA 610.719.8500



www.mediaroomsinc.com



Showroom by appointment