



GET PLUGGED IN

The Contemporary Entertainment Center





Your living room is no longer just the place to put the couch and the TV. If you've ever dreamed of turning that quiet room into an experience for the senses, the time is now to create your dream entertainment center...and the technology is actually getting more reasonably priced by the day.

An upgraded living room will enhance your home by adding some high-tech components like plasma panels and satellite speakers. But unlike a home media room, where the room basically becomes a remote-controlled multi-media studio, your upgraded space will retain its role as a comfortable living room. (In other words, keep the couches, you're going to need them.)

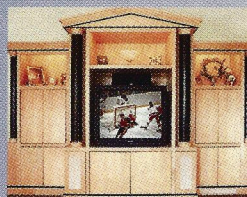
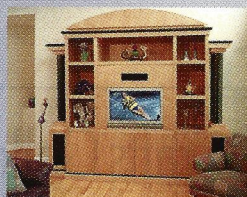
"We always need to see the room before we can help our clients select a system that matches their needs and their budget," says Jon Robbins, Chief Operating Officer of Hifi House. "In a basic home entertainment system, expect to get a large-screen HDTV and a complete surround sound system with a Dolby Digital receiver, DVD and CD players, six satellite speakers and a subwoofer." The total for such a system – including installation and programming all components onto one remote – will run between \$8,000 and \$12,000.

"First and foremost, you should have a plasma panel," says Bob Cole, President of Bob and Ron's World Wide Stereo. "This may be pricey, but it's the anchor of today's high-tech home. Then we add speakers. Four types are available: the tiny jewel-box size, the mount-in-wall speakers that can be customized to match the interior, the stand-alone speakers that are now available in beautifully finished wood, and the behind-the-wall speakers that are invisible and placed into the plaster. The behind-the-wall speakers won't deliver as good a sound as box speakers, but they are perfect when you want to hide the

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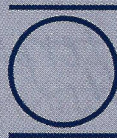


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equipment. We often use them in historically sensitive structures. The entire Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. is wired with them."

A mega-disc player is another must-have item. It is a music system that provides access to the internet so music can be downloaded and stored onto the player's hard drive, which is capable of cataloging 1,200 CDs. Then you can arrange the music by title, artist, category, even by the first line of the song, and the player can program the music to play different songs in different rooms throughout the house. Cole recommends Kenwood's mega-disc player with a built-in control system, which sells for about \$1,000.

Cole says large-screen televisions still drive the business, and DVD players should be the selection of choice. (VCRs are outdated.) As with all high-tech products, as the technology becomes more readily available, the price will decrease, allowing consumers to enjoy a better product than those available only two years ago, often at a much lower price.

Robbins says he usually recommends Sony for video products, Paradigm and B&W for speaker systems and Pioneer's Elite Series across the board. For in-wall speakers, he prefers Sonance, the inventor of that type of speaker.

Cole suggests Sovereign (a division of Kenwood) and Bose's Lifestyle systems for speakers and Runco for high-end plasma, the panel he calls "the Ferrari of plasmas." He also suggests adding an iMac for its sleek aesthetics, and large, stand-alone speakers from Totem because they are artfully sculpted in beautiful woods.

One advantage of purchasing high-quality, high-tech equipment to upgrade your living room is that if you ever want to transform the room into a full-scale media room, the audio-visual foundation will already exist, keeping the conversion costs low. With such a foundation, you can also add new components piecemeal. After the living room is outfitted with the new equipment, you can add remote-controlled blinds, drapes and lights. You can think about adding a remote system to adjust the temperature, start your coffeemaker and even, as Cole recently designed for one client, monitor your security cams to simultaneously watch your child sleeping in bed, your husband or wife getting dressed and your property in Boca Raton. Of course, you could just watch the *Austin Powers* DVD for the millionth time on your large-screen HDTV...it's up to you. — Joseph Dennis Kelly II

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