

The home theater experience

Home theaters are becoming increasingly more popular, but what exactly is a home theater? Home theater is an interesting term that seems to have different implications to different people. To some, it will mean a grand art deco movie palace with elaborate decor, curtains and theatre style seating. To others, a home theater is a



living room or rec room that contains an audio and video system. Whatever it means to you, a home theater is a place to watch movies in the convenience of your own home. The popularity of the concept is fueled by recent improvements in large screen TV, the introduction of surround sound audio systems, the availability of thousands of movie titles through rental or cable and changes in lifestyles.

The intent of a home theater is to be more than just a room. It's a show-place where movies are reproduced with the same energy, excitement and emotion that the filmmaker originally

intended. A place where you will feel like part of the action. A place where your senses will be captivated as the room is filled with clear dialog, thundering bass and special effect sounds that swirl around from every direction.

A home theater has a few basic requirements: a television with a screen size of 31" or larger, an audio/video receiver with Dolby ProLogic, five speakers, a subwoofer, a Hi Fi stereo VCR and perhaps a laserdisc player. Beyond this the possibilities are endless.

In creating your perfect home theater you first need to determine what you would like to achieve and how

much you want to spend. A basic level home theater can cost in the \$3000.00 to \$5000.00 range. On the other hand a state-of-the-art home theater can cost from \$50,000.00 to \$100,000.00 or more depending on the equipment and the decor.

To better understand home theater it is important to understand the key components of a home theater system—the video system, the audio system, and the interior environment.

The Video System

There are three types of TV's - direct view, rear screen and front projection. Direct view is the standard type of TV, containing a picture tube, that we all grew up watching. The screen size of direct view TVs range in size from approximately 9" to 35" measured diagonally. The price of a direct view can range from about \$800 to \$2000, depending on the size and quality of the TV. Direct view TVs produce a bright picture and are best suited for rooms with lots of daylight. Because of the relatively small picture size a direct view TV will not fill your field of view and therefore will not provide as dramatic an impact as a larger screen will.

Rear screen TV's are self contained units similar to direct view, however the screen size is typically from 45" to 60". A rear screen produces a picture by projecting the image onto a mirror then onto the rear of the screen, hence the name. Rear screen TV's range in price from \$1,800.00 to \$7,500.00 and because of the larger picture size they do a much better job of creating the theater atmosphere. However, rear screens are not as bright as direct view TV's so you will need to consider the amount of daylight or artificial light that will enter the room when you are planning your home theater.

The third type of television is front projection. This is a two piece system, the first being the projector and the second being the screen. A front projection system is the ultimate in home theater technology. Front projection can produce an image of 100" wide or more with quality so good that it rivals film. Front projection systems are more complex than direct view or rear

screens and do not have audio capabilities, but they are the definition of home theater in the truest sense. Front projection's only drawback is that it requires a relatively dark room, but this again instills that enchantment of what going to the movies is all about. Front projection systems start at \$5,000.00 and range to \$20,000.00 but can go quite a bit higher if you add enhancement devices

The Audio System

Multichannel stereo sound has existed in movie theaters for nearly forty years. However, it was costly to reproduce and used with limited success. Then, in 1976 Dolby Laboratories developed Dolby Stereo which revolutionized multichannel sound for the movie industry by making multichannel cost effective. Dolby Labs brought this technology into the home by developing Dolby ProLogic in 1987.

Dolby ProLogic works by decoding movies, which are recorded in "Dolby Stereo" into four audio channels - left, center, right and rear surround. By using this type of sound system in your home theater you now have the capability to tie the action on the screen to sound effects in the movie.

Along with larger TV screen sizes, Dolby ProLogic surround sound has revolutionized the home theater concept. To complete your home theater system you will need a receiver with Dolby ProLogic, a left, center, and right speaker and two surround speakers. The center speaker should be placed as close as possible to the center of the screen. The left and right speakers are obviously left and right of the screen and the rear surround speakers are placed behind you. This creates a sound field that envelopes you and enhances your enjoyment of the movie.

The audio system consists of two main parts, the receiver and the speaker system. Prices for a receiver with Dolby ProLogic, typically called an audio/video receiver, will start at about \$350.00 and go up to about \$1800.00. The price variation is due to features, power ratings and the individual manufacturer. Speaker systems also vary greatly in price and start at about

\$600.00 and go well above \$7,000.00. But since there are over one hundred and fifty different speaker manufacturers today you have a lot to choose from. To round out the audio system you should include a subwoofer. This speaker is designed to reproduce very low bass frequencies. Movies generally have a great deal of bass sound effects, especially action and adventure movies, and without a subwoofer an important part of the sound tract is missing. Subwoofers range in price from about \$300 to \$3,000.

The Environment

Although frequently overlooked, the interior design of the home theater is extremely important. Comfortable seating facing the screen, lighting that does not shine onto the screen or in your eyes, the color of the walls, the carpeting and window treatments all should be taken into consideration. Even the best audio and video systems can fall short of making great home theater if the interior environment is not considered.

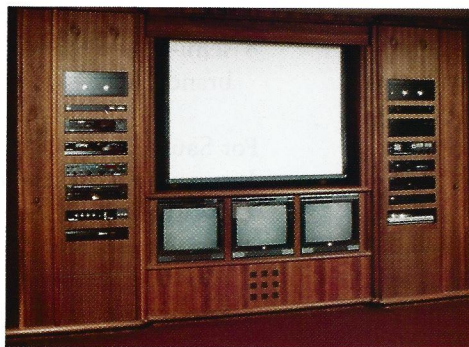
Should you want your home theater to be a sophisticated mini movie palace, there are a number of interior elements that will enable you to do just that. Theater style seating complete with cup holder arm rests, motorized curtains that conceal the screen, decorative columns and cornices, art deco light fixtures and even popcorn machines are all available. Pricing varies greatly depending on the elements chosen.

A home theater is a wonderful addition

Top: This family room home theater has a 35" TV and surround sound audio system built-in to a custom cherry cabinet.

Middle: This theater was designed to be the dominant decorative element, accommodating a rear screen television.

Pocket doors allow the owners to display or hide the electronics. Bottom: Contains a 72" front projection system for movies, three 20" direct televisions for casual viewing and vertical drawers for extensive storage.



Opposite page: Example of the ultimate in home theater—from the 8' front projection screen and motorized curtain, to theater-style seating and hidden electronics.

tion to a home. It can provide a great source of entertainment for family and friends and add value to your house. By doing a little research you should be able to assemble a home theater system that fulfills your dreams.

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