



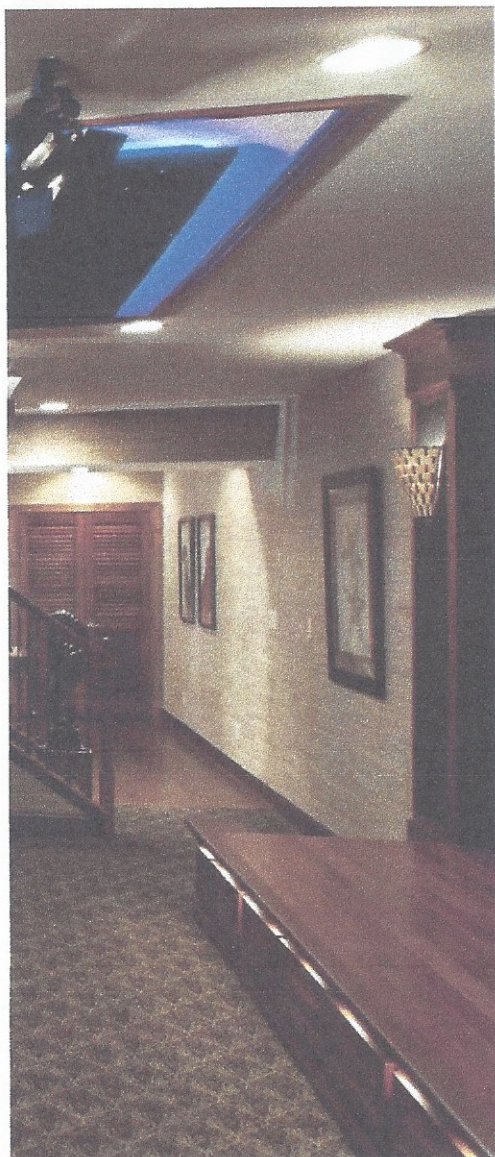
CEILING SOFFITS

By adding a soffit to the ceiling you gain a space to hide various pieces of technology.

IF YOU'RE PLANNING to integrate technology—particularly a home theater system—into a room of your house, a custom-built soffit can provide a great hiding spot for speakers, a video projector and even the wiring that will need to be added. At the same time, a soffit can add architectural interest to a space.

It also offers an often easier installation alternative to recessing equipment directly into the ceiling.

At its most basic, a soffit is a structure built to the appropriate size for the equipment it will hold. Made of wood or sheet-rock, a soffit can be a single “box” that contains a video projector



PROJECTING THE RIGHT IMAGE

Video projectors can be a tough piece of technology to coordinate with a room design, particularly when the design happens to occupy a master bedroom. When the homeowner discussed with the home systems integrators at Bethesda, Md.-based Bethesda Systems the possibility of integrating a home theater into his modern master suite, concealment of the A/V equipment was the focus. In addition to hiding a flat-panel TV behind retractable artwork and tucking a 96-inch motorized projection screen into the ceiling, the team hid a Runco video projector inside a custom-built soffit above the bed. The soffit was also constructed to provide enough space for wiring, light fixtures and loudspeakers. To ensure that all the tech would fit inside, Bethesda Systems created a cardboard replica of the projector. When the real thing was installed, they cut an opening above the soffit and mounted a Middle Atlantic single-fan cabinet cooler to adequately ventilate clever storage space.



Ceiling soffits are the perfect hiding spots for video projectors, speakers and cabling. Left: A housing built to match the millwork keeps a video projector in prime position without detracting from the decor. Design and installation by Media Rooms Inc., West Chester, Penn. Top: A video projector hides out in a soffit above the bed. Above left to right: Decorative concealment techniques help fuse video projectors into the room design. Design and installation by SoundVision, Novato, Calif., and Erskine Group, Atlanta, Ga.

or a structure that wraps the entire perimeter of the room. Either way, you'll need to make sure the soffit is adequately ventilated (to dissipate the heat generated by a projector) and insulated (to prevent the speakers from vibrating). You'll also need an easy way to reach the equipment for maintenance.

In the case of a soffit-encased video projector, there are two basic ways to allow the image from the projector to beam across the room onto the screen. Your home systems integrator can carve a small porthole into the front the soffit or you can add a motorized mechanism that lowers the unit into the room from

a trapdoor on the bottom of the soffit. The latter is more labor intensive and expensive, and only works well in rooms with a ceiling height of 8 feet or more.

Once the soffit has been constructed, it can be finished in a style that complements the room design. For example, the wood can be stained or painted to match the ceiling and/or wall surface. In addition to being architecturally more eye-appealing than a flat ceiling, soffits can fool the eye by making a room appear longer or wider than it actually is, or make the ceiling appear to be taller.

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