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ONE ROOM WITH A VIEW

A photograph of a modern living room. In the center, a large retractable screen displays a close-up of a man and a woman. Below the screen is a fireplace. To the left is a wooden shelving unit with books and decorative items. In the foreground, there is a large, light-colored corduroy sofa. To the right, a coffee table holds a potted plant and books. The room is lit with warm, recessed ceiling lights.

A Stewart retractable
ElectriScreen, Barco
CRT projector and
audio components
from Krell and Theta
transform this
spacious family room
into a spectacular
entertainment center

High-end Hideaway



STORY BY KATY KOPPENHAVER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM CROCKER

Situated in the hills of Calabasas, California, this bright, Mediterranean-style home provided custom audio/video designer Robert Bliss with the challenge of repairing a media room installation gone wrong. "It never performed properly and it never looked good," recalls Bliss, co-owner of family operated Bliss Enterprises in Agoura, California. "When you come to clean something up, it's actually twice the work."

Luckily, he had the help of master cabinet maker and 21-year design veteran, Jay Meepos of Concepts by J. Along with Meepos, Bliss worked closely with the home's owners, communications executive, Michael Horland and wife, Ivey, to reconstruct their vision of the perfect entertainment space. Horland's interest in audio/video systems combined with his technical background made him a natural collaborator. "Technology is his business," says Bliss. "He is very much into the equipment and its performance. He's also very detail oriented."

The clients wanted to turn their 21 x 24-foot family room into an entertainment center complete with front projection, surround sound and 1-touch control. The result is a very user-friendly, accessible media room relying on automated relay and current-sensing devices that create a "domino" effect between the system's components. "When you turn on a piece of gear via the Pronto remote, current-sensors say, 'Hey, I'm on,' which turns on another piece of gear which says, 'Hey, I'm on,' which turns on another piece—it's a chain of events," explains Bliss.

The owners' decision to take more of a mechanical approach to the automation process resulted in this easy-to-operate, cost-effective relay method. The process, explains Bliss, "is very robust for one little remote." The Pronto remote sends an IR code to a Niles current sensor so that when the Faroudja video processor turns on, it then sends a signal for the screen to drop down, which signals the projector to turn on. "It's a very solid handshake," notes Bliss.

In addition to correcting the mistakes of a since dismissed installation company, Bliss addressed the room's lackluster acoustics and difficult lighting.



"Because it's not a dedicated room, you can't control the acoustics that well," says Bliss. "There are cavities that flow into other rooms so we used chenille fabrics to dampen the space as much as possible."

The room's brightness makes using the Stewart stealth ElectriScreen strictly a night-time activity, so during the day the Horland family watches the Mitsubishi 50-inch rear-projection television. For evening viewing, the Stewart screen drops from a trap door in the ceiling. Bliss lauds the Stewart screen as "the only screen to use" largely due to the fact that it's a "true white" screen. "You can put a color analyzer up to it, and it will show true white coming off the screen."

Three in-room Triad Gold L/C/R speakers flank the micro-perforated screen, which is acoustically transparent, according to Bliss. "When the dialogue comes from the center of the screen, it's so much more convincing and natural," he explains.

The customized cabinetry, created from figured Anigre wood, was designed to accommodate all of the equipment, including Bliss' custom cabling—not an easy task considering the number of components and size of the room. The Anigre wood, according to cabinet maker, Jay Meepos, is a favorite

Invisible by day, a Stewart ElectriScreen is stealthily stored inside a trap door in the ceiling. Housed in figured Anigre cabinetry are a Mitsubishi 50-inch rear-projection TV and high-end components from Theta and Krell.

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Media Room

Barco 808 S CRT projector
Sony Hi 8 EC 2000
Faroudja VP 400A VCR processor
Stewart 1.3 60 x 80-inch 1.3 micro-perforated screen
Theta Casablanca preamp/processor
Krell KAV 500 amplifier
Faroudja DV 1000 DVD player
Theta Data III laserdisc player
Triad Gold in-room L/C/R speakers
Triad Gold in-wall speakers (2)
Triad Platinum subwoofer
Sunfire True subwoofer
Pioneer PD AP 1 CD controller
Pioneer Elite PDF 109 100-disc changer
Sony SLVR 1000 VCR
Sony SAT-A2 DSS receiver
Sony CDX color video printer capture card
Mitsubishi 50-inch rear-projection television
Tice Symphony Series 3 power management
Philips Pronto remote with Niles APC 2 current-sensing modules

choice because of its beauty. The figured grain of the wood shows the wavy twists and turns of the tree growth. "He did a wonderful job," reports Bliss. The cabinet style was continued through the outlying kitchen and bar area. The light hue of the wood only added to the brightness of the room—in keeping with the home's clean lines and Mediterranean flavor.

Bliss praises his favorite piece of equipment in the system as the Faroudja video processor for its "actual sheer performance." Combined with a Barco CRT projector, Faroudja DVD player, Sony SLVR VCR, Theta Data III laserdisc player, and a Krell KAV 500 amplifier, the system has all the elements of A-list performance.

Though he was limited acoustically by the room's overflow into other areas, Bliss says he tried to maintain the balance between style and function. "We used high-end electronics in terms of quality and performance, so the audio component level is very good," he concludes. "We could get



more performance by simply tweaking the room, adding more panels or by changing the structure, but it's a compromise between aesthetics and acoustics. It's a compromise the client is very happy with." ♦