

INSIDE: HOME THEATER IN SEVEN EASY STEPS



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SPACE LIFT

A total renovation of this California home included an art deco theater, Sony CRT projector, and surround sound from M&K

STORY BY M.A. GIORGIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM CROCKER

If experience is the craftsman's diploma, then Neal Parsons has earned his doctorate. The veteran cabinetmaker has designed and built hundreds of entertainment centers for just about every type of home. Although the styles and tastes have varied over the years, Parsons says one aspect has remained constant—people love home theater. "It seemed as though every job focused around a big screen TV and surround sound," he comments. "Even back in the 80's I knew my business would evolve exclusively into building theaters."





Transforming an ordinary room into an art deco movie palace begins with true craftsmanship. A proscenium/stage area is constructed of MDF board that supports the screen frame and the front speakers. Decorative features like the hand-painted black and chrome trim and sunburst ceiling stay true to the design era of the 1920s.

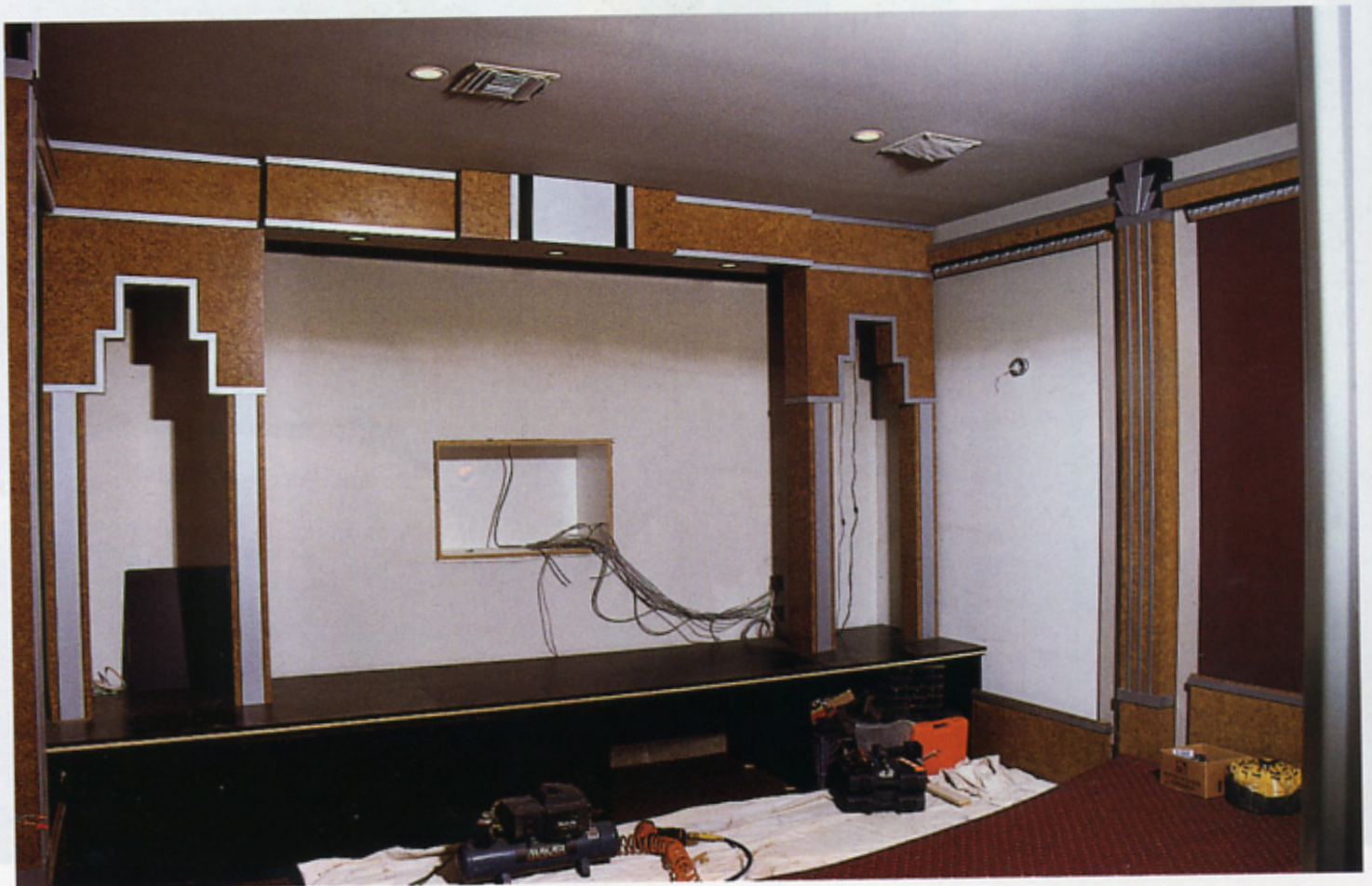
Parson's instincts were on the money, and his company, Neal Parson's Home Theater Resources, provides personalized home theater packages—from art deco to Egyptian to Neo Classic. "Our cabinets cover the gamut of tastes," he says. "So it was a natural extension to take the designs throughout the entire room."

His company's all-in-one package includes acoustic walls, prosceniums, accessories, and even chairs. It was this turnkey solution that won over interior designer/movie buff, Cathy Thomas, owner of Interiors by Cathy. "When we decided to renovate our home, my husband and I agreed that a true dedicated theater was a must," she recalls. "The only problem was that we didn't know who could do it, or if there were people out there that specialized in theater décor."

Finding the way to her finished room was a long road for Thomas who shopped home theater stores

and A/V specialty shops. "They were great if you wanted a big screen television and higher end surround sound but I wanted an art deco theater and needed a designer." Frustrated, Thomas attempted to design the room herself but quickly realized that her design and training couldn't help her with things like room acoustics and seating placement. It wasn't until Thomas and her husband ventured to the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas that she found the answer to her prayers. "My husband went to look at the audio/video equipment and I tagged along," she recalls. "My feet were hurting so I parked myself at Neal Parson's booth and sat down on one of his custom chairs. We got to talking and not only did I really like this kind, gentle man but I learned he could build art deco theaters. I said, 'where have you been all my life?'"

Parsons and Thomas put their heads together to build a theater in a 16-foot wide by 20-foot long





Parsons (seen in blue shirt) carefully oversees the placement of each acoustic panel. The handcrafted pilasters act as structural anchors that join the side, front and back walls. Parsons then adds art deco furnishings such as wall sconces and custom seats.

room located on the home's ground floor. A relatively small area with an 8-foot ceiling, Parsons had to design a space that would accommodate a 100-inch screen and 10 theater chairs. "Fitting everything into the room was a challenge," he notes. "Fortunately, Cathy was smart enough to plan ahead and her contractors lowered the floor to allow room for risers and a 10-foot ceiling space for the proscenium."

The crew began by building the proscenium/stage area, constructed of MDF board. The structure, which supports the screen frame and all of the front speakers, is covered with black acoustic fabric so it is invisible to the eye. The stage area houses a number of audio/video components, and Parsons designed it to allow room for sweeping red curtains. His craftsman skills "came out in the woodwork" as he hand-carved decorative architectural features

like the sunburst ceiling, crown molding and dramatic arches.

After the custom paint is applied, the stage area appears as though it's constructed of fine burl wood. "When you're using a decorative finish there is no reason to use an expensive wood," notes Parsons. "MDF takes finishes so beautifully, and we hand paint silver and black accents that look like the chrome metal trim that was so popular in 1920s art deco design."

Next up are the decorative acoustic walls. Parsons likes to match the side walls perfectly and measures and re-measures for accuracy. "We figure in the number of pilasters that are needed and then the panels," he explains. "Usually three panels are specified for each pilaster. Then we cover the fiberglass panels with acoustic fabric that matches the décor." Parsons and crew worked closely with Bliss





Theater

- Sony G90 Reference 9-inch CRT projector
- Sony PSS-90-C90 ceiling mount
- Faroudja DVP3000
- Canare 75 ohm LV-61S custom cable
- Stewart Filmscreen 100-inch screen
- Lexicon MC-1 DSP processor/DTS, Logic 7
- Lexicon MC-1 rack mount kit
- Genelec HT208 2-way active monitor speaker
- M&K SW-95 speakers
- MX350 THX-350-watt subwoofer
- Cinepro 3K6-350 watt power amp
- Sony DVP-NS300 DTS-EX Dolby 5.1-ES DVD player
- Sony SATHD 100 HDTV DSS receiver
- Sony HD elliptical 24-inch dual arm dish-SAN 24 MD1
- Sony SLVR 1000 SV HS deck (MA3)
- Fuhrman PS 8R 15-amp Power conditioner
- Lutron 4-zone Grafik Eye lighting controller
- Crestron STS-C SmarTouch system
- Crestron ST RMK-rack mount kit
- Crestron STCP-501 interface cable, DB9M2RJ 11
- Crestron ST SPI infrared splitter
- Crestron STVS video sinc sensor module
- Crestron CNSP-121 interface cable dB 91
- Middle Atlantic ERK4420 custom racks
- Middle Atlantic's vertical power strip
- Middle Atlantic custom rack shelf
- Xantech 283M blink IR emitters
- Canare 75 ohm LV-61S custom cable

Enterprises Custom Home Theaters so that the décor accommodated the array of audio/video gear. "The audio video guys came and spent hours tuning the room," he says. "I'm not a golden ear type but they are obsessed with achieving acoustic perfection."

According to Parsons, the handcrafted pilasters act as structural anchors that join the side, front and back walls. A light channel is added to the ceiling pilaster and rope lighting is dropped inside for dramatic ambience. Even the wall sconces were a Parsons discovery. "Art deco fixtures are hard to find in general and we searched high and low for just the right sconces," he says. "I went to dinner one night and stumbled across a little lamp shop that just happened to carry the perfect design."

A total of 10 executive style reclining chairs were installed on two risers. "Cathy wanted to seat 10 people," Parsons notes. "That was a big chal-

lenge because the room was fairly small." The dilemma was solved through compromise and Parsons installed 18-inch seats for the back row and 22-inch seats in the front. Cathy's many years of decorating experience helped her choose the perfect fabric for her theater chairs. "I wanted a light color but the fabric is treated so we don't have to be paranoid about spills," she says. "Furniture should be practical *and* beautiful and that's exactly what we have."

With the theater finished, Thomas and her family took much needed breaks while the remaining rooms came together. The personalized package approach was exactly what Thomas needed, and she has only positive things to say about her new room. "I am a movie fanatic," she exclaims. "Having a room like this is better than going to the movies, and the bathroom is always clean." If that's not a ringing endorsement for home theater, nothing is. ♦

(Depending on room size, a personalized modular theater package from Neal Parsons Home Theater Resources will range anywhere from \$45,000-\$65,000 (A/V equipment not included).)

Theater construction and design by Neal Parsons Home Theater Resources, 13250 Moorpark St. #4, Sherman Oaks, CA 91423 (818) 789-3020. Audio/video installation by Bliss Enterprises Custom Home Theater, 5533 Spanish Oak, Ste. G, Agoura, CA 91377, (818) 706-2794. Cathy Thomas, (Interiors by Cathy) cathythomas@earthlink.net.

