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## In-home theater

**How to get multiple uses out of your living room**

By Elaine Gaston

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Jim Hill knew the fourth floor of his North Ocean Boulevard house would be reserved for the family's media room.

"We wanted it to be multipurpose," Hill said of his state-of-the-art media/home theater room that overlooks the ocean in the cabana section of Myrtle Beach. "We like using this room for a number of things."

The space features six leather recliners with built-in butt kickers (devices that create movement in the chair), a projection TV system, a 10-foot screen for movie viewing and playing video games, a surround sound system that thumps your chest bones, automated blinds to block out the sun during the day and a home bar.

"At night, it's just a spectacular picture," Hill said.

While Hill spent thousands to have his dedicated media room equipped with the latest gadgetry and electronics with installation by Integrated Media of Myrtle Beach, affordable options abound for homeowners who desire to transform a den, unused bedroom, garage or their living room into a media/home theater room.

"Most home theater rooms are dedicated theater rooms, where you have very limited other uses for it," said Matt Ezzi, owner of Integrated Media. "These specialty rooms have very few windows. But media rooms are more popular and becoming more so, where they also double as the living room. They can be multipurpose but still be a high-performance theater."

The rising popularity of flat-screen, high-definition TVs and video gaming, coupled with more time spent at home entertaining friends and families, has led to an increased interest in creating special places in the home for movie and sports watching and video game playing.

"People are slowing down on buying big ticket items like cars," said Stan Kilt, general manager of Best Buy in Myrtle Beach. "They're focusing more on smaller items, like TVs and gaming units. The big focus is on big, flat-panel TVs and surround sound. It's now a culture to go and play each other head to head or online with your Xbox 360 connected to the Internet."

More homeowners are designing special places where they congregate for entertainment purposes. These rooms can be as simple as a room set up with a TV, speakers, DVD player and comfortable seating or as elaborate as Hill's home theater room or a plush home theater like the model room built in the showroom of Custom Theater and Audio in Murrells Inlet.

Custom Theater demonstrates what about \$100,000 will buy in a customized home theater. The room features a 110-inch projection screen display, leather theater-style seating, an elaborate surround sound system, acoustic panels on the wall, soft lighting, carpeted floors and a fiber optic ceiling.

"This can be done in any room, but it works best in rooms that can be completely closed off," said John Sciacca, store manager of Custom Theater and Audio. "Ideally, you want one entrance and exit. The darker the room, the better the image will look on the screen. ... You can replicate this for less money."

Key components to any media room include a viewing source, such as cable, satellite or a DVD player; the TV; controllers; and a sound system, which includes your speakers, a subwoofer and a receiver.

Sciacca recommended homeowners first decide on a budget and shop around. Those on a tight budget are looking at an investment of about \$7,500, which includes the flat-screen TV, a DVD player, the sound system and the controllers.

"It doesn't take a ton of money to do anymore," Sciacca said. Prices on high-definition, flat-screen TVs have come down, he said.

"Go to stores that specialize in these rooms and [try to] have a budget set," Sciacca said. "That helps the person you're working with help you design a system."

Most people buy smaller TVs than they could, and later wish they'd invested in a bigger set. How big to buy depends on the size of the room, Sciacca said.

"You don't want the screen to overwhelm the room," he said. "If you're putting the TV over a fireplace, you wouldn't want it to

be bigger than the mantel."

Interior designer Lorrie Browne with [www.mydesignsecrets.com](http://www.mydesignsecrets.com) offered these tips for designing a media room once you've decided on a TV, DVD and sound system:

#### Paint

Paint the room a dark color and expect to apply at least three coats to get deep color and coverage.

"Darker colors are best," Browne wrote in an e-mail. "They give you that feeling of infinity that we all love in a movie theater. And they put the focus on the screen and reduce distraction because darker colors absorb light instead of reflecting it."

Paint finish also is important. Avoid a paint finish with a sheen, which reflects light. Choose a flat finish for both the walls and ceiling.

"Trim can be painted a lighter color because it does not cover much area, but avoid high gloss finishes and opt for a satin finish," Browne said.

Browne's paint picks are Ralph Lauren's "Stadium Red," Sherwin-Williams' "Granite Peak" and Benjamin Moore's "Symphony Blue."

#### Window treatments

Window treatments add style to the room, block light and absorb sound. Browne recommends layering at the window.

"You could install blackout blinds that are available in a number of styles and then layer draperies over them," she said. "Blinds alone will not do the trick because even if they are a blackout material, light is going to peek in the sides."

#### Viewing arrangement

The best room for viewing is a relatively square one because long, narrow rooms can cause sound to bounce around.

"Flat screens have really improved overall viewing, but try to avoid seating at a severe angle," Browne said. "It's best if your eye is level with the center of the screen."

#### Seating

Theater-style seating is fast becoming the choice among homeowners for the media room.

"The ideal seating option is to have individual seats for each viewer that are adjustable and allow room for a drink and snack," Browne said. "Optimally, all seats are directly facing the screen. For this reason, U and L-shaped sectionals are not best, but can be split up into rows if you own them already."

#### Flooring

Carpeting is best for absorbing sound. Hard surfaces can cause sound to reverberate and create distortions.

#### Lighting

Dimmable recessed lighting provides good overall light and can be paired with a stylish chandelier that complements your home decor, Browne said.

"Wall sconces also provide nice mood lighting and a decorative touch," she added. "Interesting effects can be achieved with LED lighting along the floor or cove lighting above the crown molding."

#### What's the difference?

##### LCD TVs

Sizes range from 13 inches and larger

Lowest power consumption

Excellent image quality

Installs as part of home theater setup, under a cabinet and on the wall

Best for bright, sunny kitchens and small rooms

##### Plasma TVs

Sizes range from 37 to 60 inches and larger

Provides widest viewing angles

High contrast ratios provide great detail

Lifespan equal to conventional TVs

Installs as part of home theater setup or on the wall

Best for movies with nonstop action and sporting events

Projection TVs

Sizes range from 42 inches and larger

Most screen size for the dollar

LCD technology available

Installs as part of a home theater setup

Best for big, roomy home theaters and movies and games

Technology guide

**1080p resolution** | Best possible picture for home theaters

**720p and 1080i resolution** | Great picture with outstanding images on larger screens

The higher the number, the more detailed and better the image.

Source: Best Buy

Find furniture to fit your TV, Page 6E.

Outdoor theaters make a comeback, Page 7E.

Transitioning to digital TV, Page 8E.

On Feb. 17, local television broadcasters will begin transmitting digital television signals that can only be received by digital TVs or converter boxes.

The good news is most TVs sold in the past 10 years have the capability to receive the signal as they have an integrated or built-in digital TV or high-definition broadcast tuner that can receive the signal.

Those affected by the transition will be those homes with an analog TV or those that rely on TV antennas. Those folks will need to buy a digital-to-analog converter box that plugs into an existing TV. There are federal government coupons to supplement the purchase.

Cable and satellite subscribers will not be affected.

Source: Consumer Electronics Retailers Coalition and Digital TV Transition Coalition

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