

## Four-Year-Old House Gets A/V Upgrade

A custom home theater and multiroom audio help a homeowner put his own touch on a new house.

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The Lincoln, MA, house recently purchased by Dr. Taylor W. Lawrence had pretty much everything a homeowner could ask for: a modern, sleek, organic design, plenty of square footage, beautiful craftsmanship, breathtaking views of a lake, and even an interesting historical background (the architect and the previous owner of the home are both direct descendants of President John Adams). However, there was one important element the tri-level Frank Lloyd Wright-style abode was missing: a home theatre.

"It was the one thing I knew I wanted to add as soon as I moved in," Taylor says. Since most of the move-in condition house was lined with huge windows, the basement turned out to be the best spot for the entertainment setup. The fact that the space was unfinished made it all the more appealing to Taylor. "That meant I would be able to start from scratch and design my theater exactly the way I wanted it."



Audio, video and control systems made this four-year-old Massachusetts home even more appealing. "Alias" Season Five (c) Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. and Touchstone Television. Photo: Tony Scarpetta.

### A Blank Canvas for a Home Theater

An extrawide CinemaScope screen, a 7.1 surround-sound system and an architectural design that would match the rest of the house were a few of Taylor's priorities. "I have a real appreciation for technology and wanted the theater to reflect that," he explains.

The 110-inch screen from Screen Research chosen by the design and installation team at Image Tech Design of Worcester, MA, is about as cutting-edge as video displays get. Shaped wider than a typical widescreen projection screen, it would allow Taylor to view movies without having to see those distracting black bars that typically appear on the top and bottom of DVDs shot in the popular CinemaScope, or anamorphic, format. Paired with a Runco CineWide projector, the entire screen would be filled with a bright, larger-than-life image.

To stay on par with the stellar video setup, Taylor's theater would require more than a standard off-the-shelf surround-sound system. Image Tech Design created new walls and decorative columns for the space, both of which house absorptive and diffusive materials to create what Image Tech Design owner John Brusa calls "a natural enveloping acoustic environment."

While hours of acoustical engineering went into the design of the room, the Image Tech team didn't forget about the architectural integrity of the space. "We enlisted the help of the original builder to ensure that the design would blend in with the rest of the house," says Brusa. "We weren't trying to make any new statements but instead make the theater look and feel like it had always been there."

Part of fitting in with the home's clean, uncluttered design would involve concealing the theater's seven speakers and four subwoofers behind acoustically treated walls and the CinemaScope screen. The walls were lined with acoustically transparent fabric to allow the sound from behind to filter cleanly into the room, and the Screen Research screen, composed of acoustically transparent material, was able to do the same.

Taylor expects the enveloping audio, the superwide video and the stunning design to change his social life. "I'll be having my friends and family over a lot and probably won't be going out to the movies," he says. "Why should I, when the show is better at my house than at the movie theater?"

Heck, he may even stop going to his beloved New England Patriots games. "Watching the games on such a large screen in high def is amazing," he notes. "And you don't get to see all those high-def replays at the stadium like you do in my theater."

### **Indoor and Outdoor Music System**

The lower-level theater might have been the biggest, most extensive high-tech upgrade Taylor's home received, but it wasn't the only one. To keep the good times rolling, he had Image Tech install a music system that could be played on all three levels of the house, as well as outdoors.

The family room received special treatment: A 50-inch Marantz plasma TV and two top-grade Quad Electrostatic floorstanding speakers that, according to Taylor, are so good they can handle the dynamic highs and lows of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture. "Guess my 2006 system is ready for 1812," he jokes.

The previous homeowner had left Taylor with a 50-inch plasma and 5.1 surround-sound system in the billiards and game room, so those components simply needed to be integrated with the new Escent hard disc-drive music and movie server, enabling them to tap into Taylor's diverse movie and music collection.

"I have several hundred CDs stored on the server—everything from good ol' rock and roll to the classics," he says. "And getting them all onto the server couldn't have been easier or more fun. When I put a CD into the machine, it goes out to the Internet to pull off the cover art and automatically categorize the songs by genre. [The server] gets the genre right 99 percent of the time." After the discs have been stored digitally, a process that takes three to four minutes per disc, Taylor can use his computer to group songs into playlists for poker parties, outdoor barbecues, hot tub gatherings and other activities.

Every tune on the server can be accessed by a Crestron handheld remote, of which there are three in the house. Pressing the music button pulls up an alphabetical list of Taylor's hard drive-based music library on the nearest TV screen and on the LCD screen of the remote itself. From there, Taylor can scroll through his choices or skip to a specific genre, album or artist. The Crestron remote communicates with the server via radio frequency airwaves, so it works anywhere inside or outside—handy for when Taylor wants to summon music to the hot tub's built-in speakers.

DVDs stored on two 400-disc Sony changers in the theater are accessed the same way, but instead of a music button, Taylor hits "movie." That command does things a little differently, depending on which room the homeowner is in. In the living room, for example, the movie command activates an Auton motor that lowers a 50-inch plasma into the room from a wooden soffit on the ceiling above the fireplace. In the home theater, the lights dim, and the ventilation system, which produces a distracting humming sound, temporarily shuts off.

### **Wire Installation Presents Challenge**

Aside from the absence of a few high-end entertainment systems, Taylor's new house was in prime condition before he moved in. Built in 2003, its design was still modern and would benefit the addition of a home theater, high-fidelity speakers and racks of audio and video

components. Unfortunately, getting those systems into place would require cutting into cleanly finished plaster walls to route cabling throughout the residence.

"[Routing the wire] was one of the most challenging parts of the job," notes installer Brusa. "The home had no basement, crawl space or attic, so we had no other choice than to fish the wiring behind the walls." Fortunately, the original builder, Charles Letovsky of Building Solutions in Concord, MA, was there to advise the Image Tech team. Familiar with the structure and layout of the residence, he was able to point out the cleanest, quickest pathways for the wiring and build soffits for the family room's drop-down plasma TV and the home theater's video projector. After all the drilling was done, Letovsky's crew patched up the walls to bring them back to pristine condition.

The end result is a home that looks as if it had always had a home theater and whole-house music system. "They're just a natural part of the house," confirms Taylor. Even better, the systems have become a natural part of Taylor's lifestyle. Not a day goes by without music or video in the Lawrence household. And that's exactly the way life for this entertainment enthusiast should be.

### **Equipment List: Theater**

- [Runco](#) VX-2i video projector with anamorphic lens
- [Screen Research](#) 110-inch XMask Supreme screen
- [Lexicon](#) MC-12 V5 preamp
- [Marantz](#) MM-9340 four-channel amp
- [Genelec](#) amps (7)
- [Escient](#) DVDM-552 DVD and music manager
- [Sony](#) 400-disc DVD changers (2)
- [Marantz](#) DV-7600 DVD/SACD player
- High-def cable box
- [Genelec](#) AIW26 in-wall speakers (7)
- [Snell](#) AMC SUB10 in-wall subwoofers (4)
- [Crestron](#) CP2E control system
- [Crestron](#) ML-600 handheld RF remote
- [Crestron](#) CLS-C6B iLux lighting system
- [Roxul](#) acoustical absorbers
- Acoustic First 3D acoustical diffusers
- Sounds Nice fabric walls
- [Berkline](#) leather theater seats (7)

### **Equipment List: Family Room**

- [Quad](#) 99 preamp
- [Quad](#) 909 stereo power amp
- [Quad](#) 99 CDP CD player
- [Quad](#) 99 FM radio tuner
- [Quad](#) ESL 988 Electrostatic floorstanding speakers (2)
- [Marantz](#) 50-inch plasma TV
- [Auton](#) custom motorized lift
- [Escient](#) MP-200 digital media player
- [Escient](#) 15-inch color touchpanel interface
- [Crestron](#) ML-600 RF wireless remote
- [Tripp Lite](#) 7-outlet surge and noise suppressor

### **Equipment List: Billiards Room**

- 50-inch plasma TV
- 5.1 surround-sound system
- [Escient](#) MP-150 digital music player

- [Crestron](#) ML-600 RF wireless remote
- [Tripp Lite](#) surge and noise suppressor

### **Electronics Design & Installation**

Image Tech Design, Worcester, MA

### **Construction**

Building Solutions, Concord, MA

### **Millwork**

Southborough Cabinets and Woodworking, Southborough, MA