

Home theaters are not just for movie fans

By Kellie B. Gormly
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Don and Darlene Mappin have sworn off going out to the movies. For them, they say it's more convenient -- as well as classier and comfier -- simply to buy a DVD when it comes out and watch it in their luxurious home theater.

In the basement of the Mappins' Mars home stands what could be a first-class movie theater aboard Air Force One, with a \$50,000 projector hanging from the ceiling over three rows of chestnut leather love seats, complete with cupholders. A bi-level, carpeted stage leads up to the 100-inch MicroPerf screen wall, composed of a white material with tiny holes concealing right, left and center speakers, creating a sense of authenticity in the audio.

"We can recline with our comforters and blankets, and pause (the movie) when we want to," says Darlene Mappin, 37, who has two toddlers -- Morgan, 3, and Megan, 2 -- with her husband. "With two new kids, it's our lifestyle right now."

With a price range of \$50,000 to \$250,000 for one of these elaborate custom-made room systems -- designed and installed for the Mappins by Monroeville-based Kozi Media Design -- one might think only the most fanatical movie devotees would make the investment and join the home theater trend, which appeared a few years ago and is drawing more followers who want four-star entertainment in their own homes. Yet in this modern, high-tech world, even the highest investors aren't limited to Hollywood junkies.

Don Mappin -- who has two smaller home theater systems with 65-inch wide screen televisions, and even a television in his master bathroom -- is a case in point.

"I would never consider myself a huge movie buff, but when I watch one, I like the quality," says Don Mappin, 43, owner of APM Resources in Ambridge, Beaver County, a scrap reclamation service. "Just the quality of sitting down to watch the movie versus the quality you have on a regular TV."

The most common home theater systems are less elaborate and more affordable, such as the 65-inch Mitsubishi system that Bob O'Connor has in his family's Marshall home. O'Connor's television, which stands inside a wooden cabinet in the family room, has high-definition that is spectacular for sports, he said. Surrounding the television is the rest of the system's components and accessories: DVD, VCR and laser disc players, a DVD burner, and surround sound speakers built into the house during construction.

Watching a movie on a screen and sound system like his is far superior to an old-fashioned television, O'Connor said, because you see the wide-screen version as the movies were made. He also can hear sound all around him, which is a terrific bonus in movies such as "The Matrix" or anything involving a rainstorm.

"Anywhere where there's great cinematography or great sound effects, it makes sense to get a widescreen," says O'Connor, 41, a business owner.

Best Buy, a national electronic chain, carries many of the simple home theater system products in an affordable price range. One popular set for \$2,999 is a DVD/CD surround sound package with jewel cube speakers. These systems are hooked up to wide-screen televisions, which have dropped in price during the past few years; many good models that would have cost almost \$5,000 three years ago would cost around \$2,500 now, says Christopher Koziarski, co-owner of Kozi Media Design electronic architectural firm along with his brother, Timothy.

Home theaters run in sync with the rest of technology development. Within three to five years, Koziarski said, people will be able to purchase movies from the Internet and stream them onto their theater's hard drive.

"Everything that's going on on the Internet is everything that's going on in this industry," he said.

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Out with the old

If a high-tech upgrade to your long-outdated home entertainment system sounds like a terrific way to treat yourself for 2004, think about what you will do with your old television set before you bring in your new, sophisticated home theater screens.

Goodwill Industries -- long thought to be the perfect dumping ground for senile television sets -- will appreciate it.

Although people usually have the best of intentions in donating their television sets -- often the old, ratty black and white sets dating back to the '70s and '60s -- the act is not actually charitable, said Sheila Holt, Goodwill spokeswoman. Hardly any of the televisions are in working order and therefore nonsellable, so the nonprofit agency has to pay a salvage service to haul the televisions off.

"It costs us a fortune to get rid of them," said Holt, who estimates that the 22 Goodwill stores in southwestern Pennsylvania and north central West Virginia have received about 450 televisions per month in the past. At least a third of them do not work.

Goodwill recently altered its television donation policy: no TVs more than eight years old. Save the good ones for a truly charitable donation or sell them, and either pitch or give the older ones away to someone else.

-Kellie Gormly

Photo Gallery



Don and Darlene Mappin

Hedi Murns/Tribune-Review



Leather love seats

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