

"As usual this newsletter is based on topics that are tied closely with products that I've been using or experimenting with at home. It still qualifies as work... Really! Hopefully you might find the information here valuable."

Dallas

Sometimes I Surprise Myself

When we recently decided to build a new home theater facility in our office showroom, I knew that I had to put together some design criteria and components that would provide the kind of results expected from a "dedicated" home theater environment.

Choice of components, acoustical treatment, screen, projector, DVD player, remote control, cables, etc. all are contributing factors that determine the final results.

So I asked myself, "What is the best speaker system to use without stepping too far towards diminishing returns?"

Immediately, the new PSB Platinum speaker line came to mind. Paul Barton's latest and best ever design is getting rave reviews from all the trade publications.

~ \$7,600 for 2 of the PSB M2's, 1 PSB C4 Center Channel, 4 M6x1 Flush Mount Surround Speakers, and 1 Subsonic 10 subwoofer in our theater's speaker mix.

Now that we had a really great speaker system, what kind of amplifier should we use? Probably not a combination surround receiver, which puts the amplifier and processor into a single box. Although combo receivers can sound great, it seemed more appropriate in this scenario to step up a notch and use "separate" components like the NAD T163 Processor with the latest Dolby Pro Logic IIx decoding and matching T973, 7-channel amplifier.

~ \$3,500 for T163/T973 package

Over the years, I have found that using "separate" components can offer a noticeable improvement in sound quality, especially when connected to a great speaker system like PSB.

Now that the sound part of the theater is taking shape I asked, "What video products would be complimentary?"

The new Sony VPL-HS51 front projector is setting absolutely groundbreaking standards in the "price to performance" ratio. At \$3,500 it performs as well as many \$10,000 products (in my humble opinion). As a testament, I recently upgraded to the HS51 at home. Combine this with a Stewart 10' diagonal screen (\$2,000) and you have a breath taking video display. Add a High Definition Tivo (\$999) and a high-end Sony DVD player (\$999) and we're ready to rock - Almost

The next item I had to consider was, "How do we control this thing?" So I thought, "What does NASA or Disneyland use?"... AMX. The new AMX Modero color touchpanel remote system really makes things to easy to use. Touch the button for DVD and the lights dim, the projector turns on, Surround modes are adjusted and you're ready to go!

~ Roughly \$4,000 for the remote with programming

OK, now things are starting to come together, but what's the final stage? Not surprisingly, acoustics play one of the larger roles in what the ultimate sonic experience will be in a theater. We decided to add absorptive materials to the walls in order to smooth out the higher frequencies and 3 bass traps in the corners to improve the bass response. Of course, it still had to look nice so we covered the acoustic treatment with an aesthetically pleasing fabric from Guilford of Maine. It was actually quite easy to hear the improvement just by listening to our voices in the room.

~ Acoustics prices will vary based on the room. Ask for a quote.

And last, we would not be called "Supercalibrations" if we didn't bring some



test equipment into the mix. Our Audio Control Spectrum Analyzer allows us to set the volume levels of each speaker in the system to within plus or minus 0.5 DB of each other. In addition, we recalibrate the "color of gray" on the projection system to a reference level using our color analyzer. Whew!! This whole project has taken a lot of time and effort. I was pretty tired, and of course, this was the evening before our Grand Opening! Never-the-less, I wasn't so tired that I couldn't take time for a quick break-in session! After hearing the first few notes of a familiar CD, I knew that the sound was *even better* than I ever imagined it would be!

It is easy for me to tell when a system is really performing well because I have trouble turning it off!!

Now for the viewing, my favorite is High Definition football. WOW! Sharpness and clarity that still shocks me, even after experiencing it many, many times. The visual experience in our controlled environment has to be described as better than being at the game itself!

If you want to see and hear how things can work out when you dedicate a space, enhance the acoustics, calibrate the A/V and use quality equipment, give us a call or simply drop by. Give yourself some extra time as the experience can be addictive. I know you will really like what you see and hear.

LCD and Plasma

As many of you might have noticed, there are now two competitors for "super thin" high quality video displays, and I know you want one!

In the latter part of the 1990s, we saw the introduction of "plasma" displays. The prices started at around \$10,000 for a 42" widescreen display. When mounted, these sets took up only six inches of depth! Unfortunately, the picture quality on these early products was at

best described as "OK"; although, the 6" depth remained compelling. No more giant armoires to hold 35" 200 pound CRT displays. An interior designer's dream come true! Not to mention saving strain on our installers backs.

Even with the relatively poor image quality, they sold quite briskly. Now, several years later, the picture quality has increased to the point where "state of the art" has to be mentioned when discussing some of the higher-end HDTV models. The price has dropped to roughly \$3,000 for a decent 42" Plasma monitor.

About the same time period, another technology was becoming the dominant force in the computer monitor industry. These days, it is hard to find a computer monitor that is not a bright, thin LCD model. The major limitation to LCD is that it is difficult to make larger versions. Until fairly recently, anything above 30" was unheard of. Not anymore. Sony, Samsung and Sharp are among others who have 45" LCD's on the market. At the recent CES show, Sharp was showing a new 65" model. Now that's getting up there!

So what is the difference? Well, plasmas still have the edge in size. Samsung just showed a 102" prototype, so if you want large and thin; plasma is the best choice. Plasma probably has a picture quality advantage as well, but current LCD's are catching up. Although LCD's are more expensive by the inch, they have been ramping up production so the price has been dropping noticeably.

One obvious advantage to LCD is life expectancy. The light source that provides the image is replaceable, so even after the 60,000 hours that the original bulb would last, you can replace the bulb and be as good as new.

Plasmas will live a long life also, but once they run out of gas, it's time for a new display. Honestly, they will last for much longer than traditional CRT sets. Some plasma models are even guaranteed for 60,000 hours, which is in the neighborhood of 30 years of normal viewing.

One Plasma “concern” is that they can be damaged if you leave a “fixed” image like a photograph on the screen for an extended period; this is called “burn in.” Some care has to be taken in this regard, although we have had only one minor occurrence of this problem in dozens of installations.

So what to buy? Well it really depends on your needs. If you want the biggest size and best picture quality for the buck, plasma seems like the best choice. If you want long life with total immunity to “burn in” for a few more bucks, then LCD fits the bill. Or, better yet, let us take a look at your situation to help you make the best choice.

17 Years at CES

As usual, I made my annual pilgrimage to the Mecca of home electronics the “CES” show in Las Vegas. I can hardly believe I have gone every year since 1988! One side note; several of the hotels I have stayed in over the years are now missing in action. Hey the “Hacienda” (now the Mandalay Bay) was not all that bad. I think Red Foxx was playing there at the time :)

This year if there was a theme that seemed to dominate the show had to be the use of the home PC (computer) to control and access home entertainment products and software. This trend, of course, led and promoted by our buddies at Microsoft. Their version of this “convergence” is called “Windows Media Center” and I managed to actually get a hands on with it at their (HUGE!) booth. I must say, it seems to have some potential. Instead of a keyboard and mouse which would probably be a serious roadblock to simplicity, they displayed a very simple “Tivo” like infrared remote. Simply use the arrow keys or cursors to maneuver around “Tivo” like menus. Instead of a small monitor you hook it up to your new HDTV set!

In addition, all of your music can be stored and accessed with the Media Center along with the ability to record and store all your favorite TV programming, again, similar to Tivo. There is also a photo organizer that I’m sure would be great for slide shows on your new big screen. Their system goes beyond media, even controlling your lights and appliances. Hook it up to a computer network (wireless or otherwise), and access the same stuff from anywhere in your house. Pretty exciting!

As with everything “computer,” you have to be concerned about glitches and crashes that have plagued home computers since their inception. No one wants to “reboot” their TV set. Even though they have made great strides I am going to let this technology mature a bit before recommending it. We’re going to try it at our office, and I may even experiment at home.

It’s exciting, but we’ll see. More to come in a future newsletter...

After all these years, it is still impressive to me that each year the quality of television displays gets better and less expensive. Front Projection, Rear Projection, Plasma, LCD, DLP, everything looking brighter and sharper. One obvious observation; using the word “tube” to describe a television is gonna to have to go away. The long lived CRT was pretty scarce at CES 2005. This is mostly a good thing. Although analogous to the “Vinyl” lovers still playing records, there are still a few people who will not give up on their beloved cathode ray tubes. Honestly, they may have some minor advantages, but that doesn’t compensate for their weaknesses. Bring on more cool technologies!!

Hey, if you have any questions about any of the new stuff coming on the market, feel free to call. I love (as you may have guessed) to blab about all things electronic. The phone numbers are listed on the last page this newsletter.

Hey, occasionally, we have some products that we have either used here at our showroom or at home that we would be willing to offer a substantial discount on, but would still provide manufacturer warranty. Let us know if you're interested.

I hope this gives everyone some insight into the current home electronic trends. We actually find it to be great fun. We hope this shows in our work. We also know that most of our business comes from referrals. We would like to thank everyone for their continued support.

I will (as usual) be available as much as possible. So if you have any questions, feel free to call anytime. I can easily be reached on my mobile phone. My number is 612-868-6129. We have found that many problems are usually resolved quickly and easily over the phone.

One last thing; if you do give us a referral that generates new business, we have developed a new program to provide a few perks to your own home entertainment system. They make a nice reward for giving us a recommendation.

I'm always available for further discussion and thanks again for all of your business!

Dallas

Congratulations!

Our open house was a real success and we just wanted to thank everyone who attended and congratulate the winners of the events door prizes...

Sandy Williamson: Boston Acoustics Microsystem

Jill Hoyt: PSB Alpha B Bookshelf Speakers

Jim Schmitz: Sony DVD player

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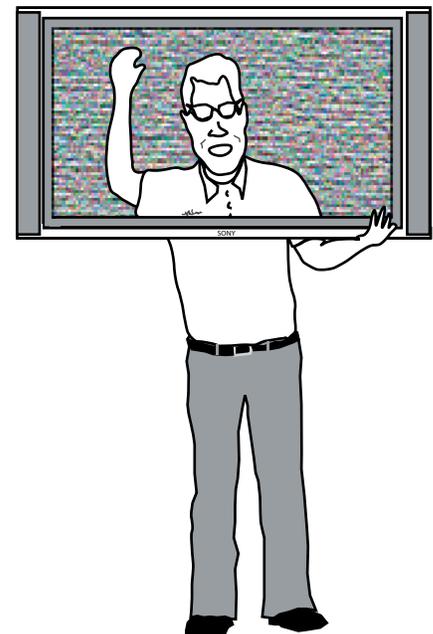
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Dallas Takes Integration to the Next Level...