

# Now Showing

With affluent residential buyers demanding immersive, experiential amenities, state-of-the-art home theaters are taking center stage.

BY **ROGER GRODY**

**O**NE OF THE pandemic's most enduring impacts is our appreciation for creating unique experiences within the home, whether it be hosting a Michelin-starred chef or enjoying a spa treatment. In addition to lavish kitchens, offices, and fitness centers, homeowners are now embracing and embellishing home theaters — previously reserved for Hollywood studio execs and the like — with all the bells and whistles of a commercial setting.

In suburban subdivisions, this trend is expressed through conversions of underutilized dens into tricked-out media rooms. However, in the luxury market, buyers are looking for dedicated home theaters with soaring screens, acoustics worthy of a concert hall, and even motion-simulator seats that mirror the experience of a Disneyland thrill ride. Price tags for elaborate auditoriums can be stratospheric, as budgets are confined only by homeowners' imaginations.

Richard Charschan, founder and CEO of New York-based AcousticSmart, has had a front-row seat to the industry's evolution for 25 years, and his just-released, generously illustrated book "Home Theaterology" chronicles his work. "Now the technology in the home supersedes what you find in a movie theater," says Charschan, who notes that while some clients spend more than \$1 million, a budget of \$350,000 can yield an impressive entry-level theater. Further generating interest are current technologies that replicate an IMAX 3D presentation, and new AI applications that give individuals greater



control over viewing conditions. "We want to make it immersive, so you're no longer a spectator but part of the movie experience," says Charschan.

Interior designer Lisa Slayman, founder of California-based Slayman Cinema, collaborates with architects, audio-video integrators, and acousticians on home theater projects. "Typically, clients want the room to make a great impression the moment you walk in, a space that everyone talks about and wants to see and experience," says Slayman. "They want it to transport them to another world and elicit an emotional response." For a theater in Saudi Arabia — in a palace occupied by a member of the royal family — Slayman blended Old Hollywood glamour and contemporary opulence in a design that incorporates illuminated amethyst gemstones and Swarovski crystals woven into fabrics.

Reporting that the gaming and esports industry is now twice the size of the music and movie industries combined, Slayman is now being asked to create new media spaces that transcend passive viewing. With accelerating technologies

LEFT AND BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTO BY ERIC FIGGE PHOTOGRAPHY; TOP RIGHT PHOTO BY PHILLIP ENNIS; INSET PHOTO STOCK IMAGE





LEFT: Slayman Cinema recreates a movie palace at home that feels as elegant and detailed as a real theater. BELOW: AcousticSmart's designs offer immersive experiences with prominent displays.



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driving new designs, many clients are requesting spaces that do more than simply accommodate movie nights. “These are multigenerational showcase spaces, designed to entertain young and old in a whole new way, and it’s a skyrocketing trend,” says Slayman. “They are self-contained environments where players and the audience feel the sensations of sight and sound,” explains the designer, who adds, “The options for sports simulation in the home are virtually limitless.”

Over the past 30 years, Florida-based Acoustic Innovations has earned an international clientele that includes Hollywood celebrities, professional athletes, and anybody passionate about in-home entertainment. The company’s staff of designers, fabricators, and acoustics experts work closely with audio-visual specialists to integrate state-of-the-art technology into theaters whose designs range from classical to avant-garde. Acoustic Innovations’ CEO Emily Miller reports, “We marry acoustics with aesthetics,” adding, “We want your space to sound great, but also look great.”





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ABOVE: This home by Acoustic Innovations includes a ticket window and all.; MIDDLE: Dreamliner design by Acoustic Innovations.; FAR RIGHT: This design is complete with Art Deco detailing.

Miller observes that some Acoustic Innovations clients request theaters with interior styles and color palettes consistent with their home’s overall design. “But others want to open the door to their theater and immediately be transported to another world,” she explains. The latter concept can result in a contemporary home accommodating an ornate Renaissance-style theater or a traditional residence with an auditorium resembling the deck of the USS Enterprise. “There’s very little we can’t do, so we love clients who come to us with an imagination,” says Miller.

Theo Kalomirakis, “the father of home theater,” now resides in Greece, but continues to design extravagant projects through the New York company he founded, TK Theaters. The firm’s portfolio includes Chinese, Tuscan, and Art Deco designs, as well as a European mansion’s auditorium whose crystal chandeliers and gilded ceiling were

inspired by a Russian palace. Now, leading theater designers are pushing the boundaries of clients’ imaginations and creating otherworldly environments in which to escape for movie night — in the spirit of the extravagantly themed movie palaces of the 1920s.

AcousticSmart indulged a client’s passion for “The Lord of the Rings” with a meticulously detailed, castle-like theme and Acoustic Innovations has created theaters modeled after “Star Wars” and “Star Trek” spacecraft. At a sprawling estate on the Southern California coast, Slayman Cinema captured the nostalgia of the owner’s hometown theater, complete with box office, marquee, and neighboring shake shop. Charschan of AcousticSmart reports that although some retro-minded clients seek to replicate landmark movie theaters, current design trends favor sleek, minimalist aesthetics, while fiber-optic LED ceilings — which can provide a soothing starry-night effect — have gained momentum.

Because of the expedited release of major feature films to streaming platforms, a practice that emerged during the pandemic, along with ever-evolving technologies, access to home entertainment has been democratized. Charschan states, “You no longer have to be part of an elite Bel-Air crowd to enjoy a first-run release at home.” ■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ACOUSTIC INNOVATIONS



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