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Designing the Perfect Home Theater

Who Needs a Home Theater System?

You might be on the fence when it comes to deciding whether or not to invest in a home theater system. You know the quality of your at-home movie and television watching will increase with a new home theater, but you still are not sure whether you are the kind of person who really needs one.

There's no perfect test to determine whether or not one should buy a home theater system. There are, however, a few indicators that should give you a good idea of whether or not a system is for you.

First, those who are avid moviegoers should definitely think about investing in a home theater. The ability to bring the movies into the home allows us to avoid all of the hassles and annoyances that seem to plague us every time we wander in to the local mega-plex. If you are the kind of person who enjoys hitting the theater on a regular basis, a home theater can make a great deal of sense. Considering the price of a movie and treats these days, doing the job at home with a great home theater system can be a cost-efficient move.

Second, you should take a serious look at how often you are home and how much of that time would be spent watching television programs or movies. In today's society, it seems as though many of us are constantly "on the go." If you don't spend a great deal of time at home due to your work or activity schedule, you may not want to invest in a system that is going to require you to be there in order to use it! However, if you don't spend time at home because home just seems so boring, then a home theater system might be the perfect solution. Consider not only how often you are home but also how often you would be home if a home theater system was added to the mix.

Third, how much do you love movies? This is a bit different than the first consideration that asked how often you actually go to the movies. This time, think about how much you enjoy the movie-watching process. There are some people who like a good flick once in awhile, but don't really love the movies. Then, there are those of us who put great cinema on top of our list of favorite things.

If you like movies, but don't adore them, maybe you can pass on a home theater system without feeling too left out. However, if you absolutely adore the movies, you really should consider purchasing a home theater system. It's a great way to enjoy films of all sorts on your schedule and can really enrich the life of a film buff tremendously.

Fourth, will your family gain from the investment? Putting your own personal tastes aside a little bit; consider your family's reaction to (and potential use of) a home theater system. Is it something your spouse will absolutely adore or will he or she just give you a roll of the eyes and a shrug? Will the kids make good use of a home theater system, or will they only use it sparingly? Think about the potential value of a home theater system to everyone in your life before making a decision.

Virtually everyone wants a home theater system, on some level, and with good reason. Tying with the latest technology is always fun and most of us spend a fair amount of time enjoying television and movies already. It only makes sense to maximize the entertainment value of pastimes we already enjoy.

However, when push comes to shove, not everyone is necessarily a good candidate for home theater purchases. Most of us can find great reasons to justify a purchase, but it only makes sense to consider whether or not the investment is right for us before running to the store and buying a series of components.

By evaluating some of the issues raised in this article, one should be able to develop a better idea of whether or not they should consider the purchase of a home theater system.

Three Home Theater Myths

Consumer technology is an interesting thing. The accessibility of equipment and materials on the technology leads almost everyone to believe they are an expert in the field. There's something about consumer electronics that makes everyone feel they are qualified to present an opinion on the subject.

Unfortunately, this can lead to the development of some seemingly intuitive and widely held beliefs that turn out to be entirely inaccurate. Consider these three myths, often perpetuated by well-meaning, but misinformed "experts."

The Bigger the Better

To hear most people talk, the size of your television is a real determining factor of the quality of your home theater. If you don't have a very large screen in the mix, many will automatically assume you have assembled a sub-par system. The truth of the matter, however, is that a smaller screen can do the job in many circumstances.

As a general rule, one probably does not want to use a screen less than twenty-seven inches in size. It is possible for a screen to be too small, after all. Twenty-seven inches may not be enough for every circumstance, but in many settings they are more than adequate. It all depends upon where people are sitting relative to the screen and upon the quality of the television.

A bigger screen may seem more movie-like, but in many situations they fail to provide an optimal experience. In order to effectively use a big screen, one must have adequate space and have a good seating plan in place. Older projection televisions, no matter how large the screen provide a poor viewing experience for those looking at the screen from an angle.

If you have the space and can afford a high-quality large screen, you may want to do just that. However, if your resources limit you to a lesser expensive (and lower quality) large screen option, you will be able to experience a better home theater experience with a smaller screen—

and you won't miss one bit of the action, either.

You Must Be Rich

Home theaters are often considered a rich person's toy. Many people will tell you that a home theater investment doesn't make a lot of sense unless you have a significant amount of disposable income. A home theater just isn't within the reach of the Regular Joe, they argue.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Although home theater was, in their infancy, a diversion for the wealthy, today's systems can be very affordable and can fit well within the budget of most households.

Sure, you can spend a fortune on a top-of-the-line home theater designed to completely replicate the cinema experience. However, you can bring much of the excitement and quality of a movie theater into your home at a relatively inexpensive mark, if you shop wisely and construct a system that meets your actual needs.

Bargain shopping, the growth of "home theater in a box" options and the overall decrease in price for consumer electronics makes buying a home theater economical. In addition, these systems can be fairly cost-effective when one considers the alternative expenses attendant to movie going at the multiplex. No one will charge you ten dollars for a small soft drink and stale popcorn at home, after all.

Size is Everything

If your speakers don't tower over your head and take up a great deal of space, there are many who will tell you that your home theater system just isn't up to task. There's a widely held belief that the key to a great sound system for a home theater is choosing huge speakers that can shake a building.

This thinking probably stems from experience with older technology. Once upon a time, bigger speakers were the only ones available that really packed a punch. However, as with all technology, speakers are shrinking. There are systems using small cubes that can fill a room with high-fidelity sound as capably as the tower speakers of earlier generations.

There are some large speakers that are an audiophile's dream and that can really blow one away. For those of us who don't want to see our homes become mock-ups of a stadium concert stage, however, there are some great options in smaller speakers that deserve a close look when putting together a home theater system.

Don't buy into the myths. Instead, look at the facts regarding today's home theaters. You will be glad you did.

Let's Get Small

If you live in an apartment and want to have a home theater experience, they say, all it will

take is a mortgage on a new house and the purchase of a home theater system. After all, no one can really expect to enjoy a great home theater experience in a limited space, right? All of the apartment dwellers of the world are doomed to suffer with tiny television screens that barely blurt out enough sound from their inadequate internal speakers. Home theater for those in small spaces is an unreachable dream.

All of that may sound almost reasonable. However, none of it is true. Those in apartments can still construct and enjoy home theater systems that will function very effectively in a smaller space. One does not need a giant media room in which to build a home theater system. In fact the corner of a living room can provide enough space for a chippy little system that will make movie watching a lot more enjoyable.

Start with the screen. Will the person with limited space be able to install a giant plasma screen on his or her wall? Probably not. It would probably be impractical. Of course, they would end up having to sit so close to that screen that it hardly seems worth buying anything that large in the first place. Instead, the apartment renter can use a smaller conventional television set in lieu of an expensive large screen.

That may sound like a horrible compromise until you take proximity into effect. The difference between sitting twenty feet from a large screen and five feet from a twenty-seven inch television is actually negligible. The apartment dweller is able to get the same sense of space while buying a much smaller screen.

This general principle holds true across the board. We tend to think that bigger is better. That may or may not be true. Bigger might be better in a large space, but bigger can actually be a distracting case of overkill in a smaller area. Those living in small spaces understandably want a home theater system. They want in on this hot hobby, too. What they must learn, however, is that they can have a great system without literally copying those in larger spaces. There is a particular strategy for selecting the right equipment and strategy for a smaller home theater set up.

When it comes to audio, the apartment dweller has another advantage. Although he or she will definitely want to invest in a good set of speakers to duplicate the surround sound feel of the theater, they will not be required to purchase a particularly powerful amplifier. A smaller space will allow for smaller high performance speakers requiring less amplification.

When buying audio equipment, one needs only to acquire what is necessary to fill the space being used. More power and more technology is simply a waste. With good components in a small space, one can create a truly fabulous listening opportunity. Some will argue that a carefully designed sound system in a smaller area can do things that a larger system can never hope to accomplish. With the right technology one can actually use a smaller system to produce sonic experiences that trump many bigger units.

One can get small and still build a great home theater system. All they need is an understanding of proximity and an accurate assessment of their actual needs. As long as one realizes they can pack the equivalent experience of a more spacious home theater into a more compact space, they can learn how to assemble a system that will make movie watching a lot more fun.

If you want a home theater but don't want a mortgage, you are in luck. All you have to do is think small and understand proximity to get the job done.

Home Theater Systems--Not Just for Movies

When we think about and discuss home theaters, we usually think in terms of movies. The very express "home theater system" is usually used to describe attempts at recreating the cinematic experience at home. It was a love for the movies and their big screen presentation that, in large measure, spurred the home theater industry into being, and movie watching is still the primary concern on most involved with home theater systems.

However, home theater systems do have a great deal of utility outside of watching DVDs of your favorite films. The same technological wizardry that brings the silver screen and all of its glory into your living room can serve other roles in your entertainment life, as well.

First, let us consider other television programming. It used to be almost silly to think about bothering watching a network television program on a large screen with great sound. Production values were limited, sound was piped out in mono, and there was no reason to be enticed by the idea of seeing the show in a larger more intense format.

All of that has changed in recent years. The competitive entertainment industry has led television to improve the quality of its offering. Once pathetic sound has been replaced by crystal clear stereo output on virtually every channel. Today's television programs now offer production values once reserved for only large budget movies. With the proliferation of cable channels and the growth of the home theater industry, television quality keeps improving on a regular basis. This makes the home theater even more valuable, as it can become a means of enjoying television productions in a way that will truly make them larger than life. If you feel television can be a little lifeless at times, it might be simply because you lack a home theater system to revive it!

Additionally, home theater systems boast high quality sound systems. The speakers that pump out the rousing score of your favorite movie can also be used to play the music of your favorite recording artists. Today's home theaters feature great speakers, with extra bass often provided by dedicated subwoofers, and sufficient amplification to enjoy musical offerings. The home theater system, in essence, can do double duty as your home stereo system. Basic systems might be limited to a CD player, but with auxiliary inputs available, one can use the amplifier and speakers of their home entertainment system with any other audio component, whether it is a retro turntable or the latest MP3 innovations.

Finally, home theaters can be used as some of the most impressive video arcades ever seen. A video game console, connected to a home theater system can bring games to life. Today's video games feature amazing graphics and spectacular sounds--some are even scored like movies. Using a top-notch home entertainment system for output can elevate a fun game into a truly spectacular event that grabs us and just will not let us go. There is nothing quite like a well-designed video game buttressed by a high-tech delivery system. It creates a uniquely

entertaining and engaging experience. These games are so popular that they are no longer the purview of children alone. Adults, especially those with home theater systems, are learning to appreciate the fun and excitement, too.

If you are considering a home theater system, do not just think of it as an investment in movie watching. Even if it were all about the movies, the expense would still be justified. However, a home theater can bring a lot more into your life than film. Television, music and video games can all be handled in a miraculous manner by a good home theater system.

“Home theater system” is almost a misnomer, as these powerful tools can do a lot more than recreate a movie experience in the home. They can also bring new life to television viewing, fill your home with your favorite music the way it was meant to be heard, and serve as outstanding video arcades that add new dimensions and excitement to gaming. Home theater systems are far more than imitation cinemas. They are, in reality, complete entertainment options.

How to Build an Ugly Home Theater System

Unless you are a real fan of technology, all of those black boxes and wires can be something less than attractive. In fact, one of the ugliest possible things a person can put together is a high quality home theater system. A home theater may bring home some awesome visuals when everyone gathers around in a dark room to watch a high-powered movie, but by daylight, it can be an eyesore.

Do you wonder how you can make your home theater as ugly as possible? Follow these simple directives and you are guaranteed to have a truly unattractive system. All it takes is a little work (and a little more refusal to work) and you can have an obnoxious home theater system that pleases the senses when on and assaults them when off.

First, show those wires and cables! Nothing says tacky more clearly than a tangle of visible wires! Let those speaker wires snake right across your floor where everyone can see them! That batch of cables hanging from the back of the components? Do not make any effort to disguise those, either.

Some may try to sell you on wireless systems that eliminate the need for speaker cables altogether. Others may recognize easily hideable flat cables or give you suggestions for running the wires unobtrusively. Do not go with these options if you are looking for a truly ugly home theater. Of course, stay away from entertainment centers that allow that wiring to disappear behind them, too!

Second, make sure size always wins out over substance. Nothing makes a less attractive centerpiece to a room than a giant subwoofer, and a pair of six-foot tall speakers against the back walls is particularly offensive to the eyes. Big, bulky components are the way to go and they should not be matched if you are aiming for hideous. If your system is sleek, compact or features elements of good design, you are not going to be able to claim the ugliest home theater award any time soon.

Do not even consider the smaller speakers based on newer technological advances that deliver sound as effectively as the behemoths! This will only make the system potentially less hideous. You can also resist buying matching components or newer ones with an attractive design. Big cubes in contrasting colors insure an ugly display.

Third, milk crates are fine. You have put your home theater somewhere right? How about on some overturned milk crates. If you are feeling constructive, consider some plywood planks and cinder blocks. These two methods will help your system scream "dorm room" and will assault the senses of every guest to walk through the door.

Do not look at great home entertainment systems or other attractive furnishings that are specifically designed with the goal of bringing a home theater system unobtrusively into the living room. Your ugly system should not be hidden by a nice hutch or home entertainment system!

Finally, remember that there is no less attractive home accent than a remote control. Make sure you litter the room with remotes, the way some homemakers do with throw pillows. These little handheld pieces of ugliness can really influence the way your room looks and give your tacky system a little extra "oomph."

There will probably be someone, somewhere along the line, who will mention universal remotes to you. He or she will tell you just how handy and easy it is to control all aspects of your home theater system with one simple controller. Although that might sound like fun, remember that fewer remote controls make for a better-looking home theater system. If your goal is an ugly rig, there is no place for a universal remote controller.

Follow those tips and you can be sure to have an incredibly ugly home theater system that will make others raise an eyebrow or two. Sure, there will be plenty of beauty once the screen lights up a dark room and the film begins, but in the meantime, your home theater can be a real design disaster.

A Home Theater Theme Night

Home theaters are an awesome way to enjoy a movie. They can also become the centerpiece of a great social gathering. People love the movies. They appreciate and relate to them in a very unique and personal way. Everyone, it seems, considers themselves a fan of film. This love of the silver screen prompts a lot of people to invest in home theater systems. Those who have taken the plunge can parlay their investment in technology into a great social opportunity.

This can be effectuated by having a special movie night at one's home theater. Sure, you could just choose a single movie, or you might even choose a popular trilogy of films for an all-day affair. The party can be further enhanced in numerous ways to make it a truly unforgettable experience. Consider some of these basic pointers for combining friendship and film into a fun evening for all to remember.

First, it is a good idea to choose a movie that is pretty much universally accepted as a good film. Trying to build a themed party around a movie many people either didn't care for or don't want to see would entail fighting an uphill battle. Instead, try picking a tried and true classic. Former Best Picture Oscar winners or movies that you know to have universal appeal within your social circle will make the best choices.

Movies are great. However, food can really make a party. If at all possible, consider serving a menu that somehow relates to the movie. For instance, if you had chosen *The Godfather* as the film for the night, you may want to create an Italian buffet offering everything from antipasta to cannolis. The idea is to create a theme in order to really make the party a happening and not just a gathering. You might even warm people up with Italian music or pop music performed by some great stars like Louis Prima and Frank Sinatra, just to set the mood.

This idea can be further extended by inviting people to show up dressed in the fashion of the film. This could be as wild as dressing like characters from *Star Wars* to something as simple as wearing baseball jerseys for a showing of *The Bad News Bears*. No matter what you are showing, there is likely to be some way to add a dress component to the festivities with a little creativity. Participation can be encouraged with a few small door prizes of some sort. If possible, the prizes could somehow be related to the film, as well. A showing of *Forest Gump*, for instance, might net the best-dressed woman a box of chocolates and the man a coupon for a shrimp dinner. Have fun and use your imagination. You will come up with something.

Watching the movie itself can be interesting when there is a crowd involved. Early on, you will need to decide if the movie will be a backdrop to the party or its centerpiece. If you merely want the film to be on in the background and available, that is one thing. If you want everyone to have a chance to seriously watch the movie, however, you will need to make sure chairs are properly deployed and that everyone has a great view of your spectacular home theater system.

Make sure to show off that home theater system, too. Give your guests a real opportunity to see the way a movie experience can be brought into the home. By giving them a chance to enjoy the film, they are more likely to come back for a series of fun future movie nights.

People love to be social. Parties are a blast and gatherings with friends are always time well-spent. Likewise, everyone really seems to love the movies. By creating a movie theme night party, you are able to combine these two appreciated activities into one unforgettable evening that will offer great fun and memories to everyone in attendance.

Home Theater Themed Lighting

To create a unique home theater experience, there are a variety of lighting options to choose from. When selecting the lighting for your home theater it is important to take into consideration the overall look of your home theater area. Everything from flashy neon lights to classic Hollywood style lights are available. With all lighting projects, it is important to have a certified electrician handle the work.

For those that love the personalization that one can achieve in a home theater, there are personalized wall sconces. These lights are customizable with your family name or movie themed images, such as popcorn, projectors, tickets, and comedy/tragedy masks.

An illuminating ceiling effect can be achieved with a galaxy dome. This specialized lighting fixture makes it possible to have a ceiling full of twinkling stars. The galaxy dome lights are very low heat, energy efficient and require no assembly. The starry effect is achieved through the use of LED lights making this a project that you can install yourself. No wiring is required at all. A galaxy dome is roughly \$2000.

For those that want the same starry sky effect for a fraction of the price, consider a star ceiling kit. For \$300, a fiber optic star kit creates a similar effect with an even easier installation. The kit covers 22 square feet of ceiling space and uses over 140 LED "stars" in blue and white to illuminate the space.

A third option for a starry night effect is using star tiles. Star tiles eliminate a lot of the installation work when using other LED light options. The LED illuminator inside the ceiling tiles combines twinkling and stationary LED lights to create a more realistic and non-distracting LED experience. Multiple tiles can be linked together to cover a wider ceiling area.

The star tiles are available in 2' X 2', 2 X 4', 4' x 4' and 4' x 8' sizes to accommodate all ceiling areas. Star tiles are almost maintenance free and are cleaned using a simple lint roller. Depending on the size of the tile, star tiles are priced from \$48 to \$300 each.

Nothing says classic Hollywood movie theater like wall sconces. If this is the type of effect you are trying to achieve in your home theater space, consider using wall sconces to heighten the drama of the room. When choosing the perfect sconces there are several things to consider. First, the shape of the sconce is important in creating the look of your home theater space. Sconces are available in square, cone, mushroom, wave and half moons styles. Also popular are teardrop shaped sconces and angled sconces, which have an Art Deco appearance to them.

Sconces are available with cut out shapes to create dramatic lighting effects in your home theater space. Filmstrip edged sconces are a popular choice, as well as star cutouts. Some unique cut outs include fire themes and fleur de lis shapes.

Sconces range from \$150 to \$300 depending on the material used and elaborateness. Ceramic wall scones can be painted to blend in or stand out against your home theater space's walls.

Domed ceiling lights are also available in matching patterns with your wall sconces. These domed ceiling lights fit well over existing ceiling light fixtures and can be used in other parts of the home. The ceiling lights are made of white bisque and are able to be customized with paint.

A fun touch to your home theater can be projector lamps shaped like film cameras and miniature film crew lamps. These types of lamps fit on tabletops and are adjustable from 11" to 14". They retail for approximately \$40 and can add a bit of whimsy to your home theater area.

For another Hollywood touch to your home theater area, there are Hollywood floor lamps. Retailing at \$395, these lamps stand at 56" and feature classic Hollywood characters such as "the cowboy", "the rebel", "the rocker" and "the starlet."

Explore your options and keep your home theater theme in mind when choosing appropriate lighting. The right touches can turn what was once your plain game room into an attractive movie palace.

Home Theater Seating

You've invested the time and money in putting together your perfect home theater system. You've got the best screen, the best speakers and a brand new DVD projector. What's next in making your experience complete? Specialized Home Theater seating can turn your bonus room into a deluxe movie palace.

If you've got an extra room to create a personal movie theater, home theater seating should be your next investment after the home theater system itself. For your sitting pleasure, there are several options you can go for.

Your basic home theater chair has woven fabric and a frame made of wood covered with black laminate. These woven chairs come in several colors, including black, maroon, purple, navy, hunter green and classic cardinal. The chairs are available individually for around \$400, with a small discount per chair if ordered in rows. The chairs can be upgraded to velour, Nusuede (a synthetic suede) or leather for an additional cost. For the velour or Nusuede upgrade, the estimated cost is an additional \$150 per chair. For leather, the cost increase is up to \$600 per chair. Most basic chairs come with cup holders, as this is a popular feature for home theater enthusiasts. Basic chairs come with all the parts necessary to mount directly the floor or to risers. If you are not planning on mounting these chairs to the floor, it is recommended that you order a floor plate to help stabilize the bottom of the chairs. Floor plates retail for around \$70 depending on the manufacturer.

The next upgrade in home theater seating is adding rocking to your chair's function. Rocker chairs are available in woven fabric; Nusuede and leather, just like the basic chairs. These chairs also include cup holders in the armrests. Rocker chairs range in price from \$500 to \$1200 depending on your choice of material. This cost is for single chairs only and there is a volume discount when you buy rows of chairs.

Deluxe rocker chairs feature armchair style arms, rather than the covered wood laminate arms. These rocker chairs are priced around \$1200 to \$1700 for single chairs, with volume discounts for rows. They are available in velour, ultra suede and leather, in a variety of colors.

If you are interested in seating that looks a little less like it belongs in your local Cineplex, a home theater lounger may be for you. These chairs are designed to look more fitting in your home. Most are made of leather and feature deep-seated comfort, like that of your favorite armchair. The home theater lounger comes with drink holders installed in the wide arms. The arms are available in straight and wedge styles to best accommodate your home theater plan.

Home theater loungers start at approximately \$1800 for individual chairs with volume discounts.

Many home theater lounge manufacturers also provide matching wedge tables. These tables are convenient for drinks and snacks. They can also double as a storage area for remotes, additional speakers or blankets.

For those with lots of space, home theater sectionals may be the best purchase for your home theater. Home theater sectionals range in price from \$1500 to \$3000 and can seat up to 8 people comfortably. The benefit of having a home theater sectional versus separate home theater seats is that the configuration possibilities are endless. Home theater sectionals are available in leather and micro fiber. When purchasing a home theater sectional, more so than with other seating options, it is important to take careful measurements of your space so that you can be aware of which seating configurations you can take advantage of.

Some fun extras that make your seating space more comfortable are ottomans and snack trays. Ottomans come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Themed ottomans are available featuring embroidered Hollywood style iconography, including clapboards, movie tickets, comedy/tragedy masks and stars. Ottomans for your home theater come in velour and range in price from \$350 to \$450.

Snack trays can also make your home theater watching experience complete. Snack trays for movie theater seating can be up to \$27 each and snack trays for loungers can be up to \$30 each. Both styles make it easy to adapt your chair's arm to rest remotes, popcorn and other movie watching goodies.

Whatever your preference, your home theater seating options are wide. Take the time to develop a plan for your home theater area, shop wisely and you can have the seating area of your dreams.

Rediscover the Classics with Your Home Theater

We often think of home theaters as a way of enjoying the latest Hollywood blockbusters. We think of home theaters as the perfect way to bring those intense, mind-boggling special effects into our living rooms. We salivate at the bass-heavy booms of explosions and the blinding light of on-screen fires.

Home theaters are a great way to bring today's hottest movies right into your living room. However, they also provide an excellent way to rediscover the depth and quality of some classic films, too. Watching some of the all-time greats on a home theater system can be every bit as rewarding as checking out the next catastrophe film!

Most of us are familiar with many of the great movies through television. We were able to see some of the most influential film work of all time thanks to late night showings and specialty cable channels. Some of us with a really intense interest may have even rented some videotapes along the way in order to see some of the great earlier films.

However, most of us still haven't really seen the movies. Why not? Television tends to use a pan and scan technique instead of showing the full screen at any one time. Letterboxed videotapes were and remain relatively rare, meaning that even if you were to have rented a classic movie, you probably never saw it in its full scope and glory.

Additionally, problems endemic to videotape also acted as a stumbling block to enjoying the movies. A well-used tape suffers in quality. Video is not sufficiently crisp and audio can sound dull and muted. If one combines those limitations with the televisions upon which we were probably watching the movies, the lack of quality viewing is even more obvious.

Home theater systems offer an alternative and a great way to watch some of these glorious films in the way they were originally intended. Take for instance the classic David Lean movie Lawrence of Arabia. This classic film plays well even on ragged videotape. The story is powerful and compelling, the scenery gorgeous and the direction even-handed and sure.

However, those who first saw Peter O'Toole's star making role on the big screen experienced something far different than those who have watched it on television in subsequent generations. One of the movie's characters, in a sense, is the desert sand of Arabia. The vastness of the desert and its loneliness set the mood and spirit of this classic. On videotape, one sees the desert, but they never see the whole of Lean's vision. They see a part of what he wanted to convey. It is almost the equivalent of going to the theater and having a curtain draped over one half of the screen!

Now, however, you can rent or purchase a completely digitally re-mastered copy of the film that features the proper cinematic ratios and perfect sound. A movie you may have thought was "pretty good" will suddenly become a very appreciated classic upon a viewing with a great home theater system.

Other examples, of course, abound. It isn't just the wide scope of a Lean film that is improved by watching on a great home theater system. All of the old classics are made somehow new again when presented the way they were intended to be seen and the results can be dramatic. It is as if we are witnessing these movies for the very first time.

Don't limit your selection of viewing materials to the new release rack when you are looking for something to watch with your home theater system. Investigate some of the highly regarded classic films of the past. You will probably be amazed at some of the great filmmaking you missed simply because earlier technologies failed to deliver all that was necessary to enjoy them.

Popcorn Options for Your Home Theater

Every home theater should have one essential piece of equipment...a snack bar! There's something about sitting down to a film with a tub full of popcorn and a large soda that makes the experience "complete." The home theater enthusiast shouldn't have to go without that "real movie" experience.

Microwave popcorn has made getting bowlfuls of your favorite buttery treat as simple as pressing a few buttons. Many companies offer "movie style popcorn" with extra butter flavoring. But this buttery flavor comes with a price. An average a 5-cup bag of movie popcorn has 15 grams of fat and 200 calories. Over 60% of the calories come from fat in this type of popcorn.

For those who want to save some calories, retailers also offer "light" versions of butter flavored popcorn. These varieties weigh in at an average of 5 grams of fat at 125 calories for the same 5-cup portion. The fat to calorie percentage for "light" popcorn is a manageable 29%.

Microwave popcorn has changed in the last few years with the addition of new flavors like Kettle Corn, a sweet and salty popcorn variation. Kettle Corn microwave popcorns are comparable to movie style butter flavors in calories and fat. They are sweet alternative to those who want something a little different for the movie-watching snack. Other sweet varieties of microwave popcorn available include caramel, cinnamon butter and honey butter. Of course, the do-it-yourself popcorn eater can add any sweet extras themselves. Sprinkling cinnamon, sugar, or even M and Ms into your popcorn can satisfy even the sweetest tooth.

For those who want something more savory, microwave popcorn is also available in cheddar flavors. White cheddar seems to be the most popular among retailers. Orville Redenbacher's "Pour Over Cheddar" popcorn allows you to add a real cheese topping to your bowl and covers each kernel with the taste of cheddar cheese.

If microwave popcorn still doesn't it cut it to enrich your home theater experience, you might consider investing in a movie popcorn machine. There is a range of options available for those who want fresh movie style popcorn in their very own homes.

The smallest models require tabletop space and produce enough in one cycle to fill roughly 4 one oz. bags. Most small models have a cycle speed of about 3 minutes, meaning that 92 ounces can be popped in an hour. Coming in at a weight of 45 pounds, a small model popper can fit on a large counter top in your game room or family room for easy access during movie watching sessions. A 4 oz. machine can range in price from \$250 to \$350. The next step up would be a 6 oz. machine that produces enough to fill 6 one oz. bags during the 3-minute cycle. These machines range from \$400 to \$600.

Home popping machines are also available in 8 oz., 12 oz. and 16 oz. styles. These models can cost anywhere between \$500 and \$1200 dollars, depending on the actual size and quality of materials used to build the machine.

If you want to save counter space in your home theater area, consider investing in a popcorn machine with a cart. The addition of a cart to your popcorn machine can increase the total price by \$100 to \$200 but will save space in your game room or family room. Most quality carts are made from powder coated steel to remain sturdy and reliable throughout their use.

Many companies that offer home movie style popcorn machines also sell popcorn-making accessories. Popcorn portion packs make popcorn popping extra easy. They consist of corn kernels, special blends of seasoning salt and coconut oil. To use, you just tear open the packet and put the contents in your machine for perfect movie popcorn every time.

Movie popcorn is just not the same out of your regular bowls. To get an authentic movie popcorn experience you can purchase popcorn bags, boxes and buckets. Other necessities available are scoops, which come in both metal and plastic varieties. Kettle cleaning kits help to keep your machine in top working condition.

For variety, you can try a popcorn shake-on sampler to make interesting flavor combinations. Some popular popcorn shake-on flavors are barbeque, white cheddar, Parmesan, ranch, sour cream and onion, nacho cheese and jalapeno.

No matter whether you choose to microwave your popcorn or upgrade to a professional popping machine, popcorn will always be an essential movie treat.

What's on TV Tonight?

Many of us can remember when someone would ask, "what's on television tonight?" and the queried party could actually provide a comprehensive answer. There were three broadcast networks and, depending upon where you lived, a public broadcasting channel. Television viewers could memorize the prime time schedule and if someone wanted to know what was on, the answer was readily available.

That has, of course, changed a great deal. Today, most of us have cable or satellite television and literally hundreds of stations might be available at any given time. The idea of memorizing the television schedule for the whole of our channel selection would probably be impossible. There are so many things to watch at any given time that the mind reels trying to answer that once simple question.

When cable began to grow, it looked like a solution to programming overload was developing right along with it. The videocassette recorder (VCR) promised us the ability to program a simple machine that would snag all of our favorite shows, guaranteeing we didn't miss anything important. We might not be able to memorize the cable schedule, but if we could isolate what we liked, we would never have to miss the programming. Of course, we soon found that ninety minute magnetic tapes, frustrating programming interfaces and other problems made the VCR a great way to watch movie rentals, but not much more than that. Meanwhile, our television options continued to grow at a breakneck pace.

Recently, a new solution has arrived and this one seems a bit more promising than the clunky VCRs from the last generation of television recording technology. DVRs, digital video recorders, allow us to select programs we would love to watch and record them using a very simple programming interface that even allows searching from all available scheduled programs. TiVo, a DVR system based on a subscription model, has become so successful that the proprietary name brand has morphed into a verb. "Did you see that yet?" "No, but I TiVoed it, so I will check it out tonight."

Other DVRs are also available. Many cable providers make them available to customers, as to satellite dish programming providers. These handy devices really do allow us to get a grip on television programming and an ability to capture the programs we want to watch for later

viewing.

In addition, DVRs allow one to “freeze” or pause live broadcasts. That run to the refrigerator or restroom doesn’t require a commercial break anymore. Just hit pause, and you can take as long as you would like.

Speaking of commercials, DVRs are really turning that industry on its head. When you record a program, you can watch it quickly and easily without actually sitting through the commercials. Most DVR users soon develop an expert touch on the fast forward button as they skip over commercial messages while watching their favorite show.

The DVR is a necessary component of any top of the line home theater system. The subscription movie channels to which one subscribes have their valued multiplied several times over when one has access to a DVR. No matter when HBO, for example, chooses to air a movie, you can TiVo it and watch it at a time that is right for you.

So, what is on television tonight? The answer used to be extremely limited. Today, however, one can say, “Whatever you would like” in response to that venerable question. DVRs allow us to control what we will watch and when we will watch it. They allow us to be something of a meta-scheduler for all networks and give us the ability to watch our favorite programs without the inconvenience of any commercial interruption.

The systems are relatively inexpensive and offer a great way to maximize the value of cable and satellite offerings. Today, every home theater system should be equipped with a great DVR. The VCR may have disappointed in the long run, but the DVR shows great promise to improve our television experience.

The Home Theater as a Gift

If you are ever in need of a great gift idea for a spouse or loved one that will undoubtedly be well received, you might want to consider buying a home theater system. Although it may seem like a large gift, it can be a present that will long be remembered. In addition, with smart shopping one can complete the task cheaper than they may expect.

Who would want a home theater system as a gift? Almost everyone. Home theaters are one of the hottest elements in the consumer electronics market and everyone seems to be looking for a way to better enjoy their favorite programming from home.

Home theaters are so amazingly popular because they tap into one of our greatest loves, the movies. Movies have long enchanted and amazed us. They are one of the cornerstones of the entire entertainment world and a great film can impact us in ways that other forms of art simply cannot. There is something unique about the movies--it is one of the few art forms that really found a way to appeal to everyone. You would be hard-pressed to find someone who does not enjoy the movies, and many of us consider ourselves outright film fanatics.

That universal love for the movies is what makes buying a home theater system as a gift such a

wonderful idea. You might be considering buying him an expensive watch. That is a great gift idea, but you will have to be sure he likes its appearance and feels comfortable wearing it. It is a good idea, but it comes with some sizeable risks if you guess wrong about fashion tastes. You might be planning to buy her another piece of jewelry. That is always a decent bet, so long as you know what she likes and can remember what she already has, but after years upon years of receiving jewelry, it might be time for something new and different.

Purchasing a home theater as a gift is a perfect alternative to the humdrum presents we give one another for special occasions. Instead of just adding to what we already have, a home theater system literally creates brand new opportunities for ongoing entertainment. It is a gift that really does keep on giving with each broadcast of a dearly loved favorite and every new release that filters out to retailers.

Choosing a home theater system can seem difficult, but with a little guidance and some research, you can manage to discern your home's home theater needs and how to meet them. Websites like this one, for instance, can provide you with a wealth of home theater information to get you on the right track. There are also magazines available on the subject. Additionally, trained sales staff at audio/visual retailers can help you to make sure you get everything you need to put together a winning home theater system that will meet your budget.

The cost of a new system will depend upon exactly what you want to buy, of course. However, some very interesting home theater systems can be had for only a few hundred dollars. If you are interested in doing something a little more deluxe for a special occasion, you can make a greater investment in a nicer system. That is another great thing about home theater buying for gifts--there really are systems out there to meet all budgets and needs. There are systems ranging from inexpensive entry-level systems to high-powered cinema reproductions. Regardless of your home's exact needs, you will be able to find the right home theater system to meet them.

If you have a gift to buy for a very special person and are looking for something that will truly knock them out, you should consider picking up a home theater system. Not only will they be surprised, they will be thrilled, as well. Home theater systems may not be as traditional a gift as some of the old stand-by items, but it can be a present that will bring a great deal of joy and entertainment into a home.

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