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Selecting the Right Components For Your Home Theater

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Selecting the Right Components For Your Home Theater

Choosing a Home Theater

Everyone knows they want a home theater, but they don't necessarily have a great idea of exactly how they want to make that dream a reality. They have a concept to which they cling, but they don't necessarily have a blueprint in mind to help them realize their objectives. One can build a home theater system that would be the envy of any cinema, or they can amass only the bare necessities to improve their at-home viewing experience. Options really do abound! Regardless of specifics, though, everyone is looking to put together a home theater. The objective is always the same—to improve the quality of entertainment at home.

One can spend tens of thousands of dollars to build an awesome home theater system replete with every new high tech bell and whistle. The best DVD player, embedded speakers, gut-shaking bass from the sound system and a screen so clear and vibrant it doesn't even seem real are available to those willing to spend the money. For others, a system costing a few hundred dollars may be in order.

They may only need a DVD player, a basic sound system and a reasonably sized traditional television set to meet their goals. There are some common characteristics to both extremes, though. A clear visual, good sound quality (usually featuring a surround sound effect), and a means of playing the preferred recorded medium (today, the DVD). If those basics are present, one has a home theater, regardless of what they may have spent to get it.

Some will choose an integrated solution often referred to as a home theater in a box. These low-end solutions are relatively cheap. They generally do not include a television or monitor, but do supply a bundled DVD/CD player, a series of usually compact speakers that can be placed to duplicate theater-style sound, and a receiver/amplifier to power the sound. They are virtually pre-assembled and ready for operation right out of the box. These systems generally cost far less than assembling a system one component at a time.

However, the home theater in a box solution often suffers from lower overall quality and a lack of power that can be frustrating for those with larger spaces to fill. One can upgrade the speaker quality for these systems, but will be limited in terms of increasing the output power. They can be good solutions for those looking for a low cost rig, but do not mimic the power and overall performance of higher end home theater system equipment

One can purchase their home theater equipment in a variety of locations. For those with simple needs a large multipurpose retail store such as Target or Circuit City may do the trick. Shoppers may not find the ultimate in home electronics at these stores, but they can find basic systems at reasonable prices. Big box stores usually offer a reasonably wide selection and although the top of the line equipment may not be offered, several quality options will be.

There are some who will eschew the department stores for stereo and home theater specialty shops. They will be willing to pay more for the kind of equipment that ensures a truly amazing home theater experience. Others will shop for equipment online, trying to steal the best possible bargains on the components and supplies they need to perfect their home theater system.

Internet shopping of this sort is best suited for those who know what they need. Others may benefit from discussing the matter with a member of a specialty store sales staff who can inform them about equipment specifications and make recommendations for purchase while offering overall home theater advice and options. Higher end stores often offer more customer support, which can make them a great place to shop if one is looking for a home theater system that is somewhat more advanced over the budget entry level systems.

Choosing Home Theater Video Components

Building a home theater can be a complicated proposition or an easy one-hour project. Home theaters can be as simple as a television set, a few speakers hooked up to a stereo and VCR or DVD player. Regardless of the kind of system one wants to assemble, however, they must make sure they have the right television to accomplish their goals. In some cases that means using an already-purchased set; in other situations, people will choose from the increasing number of sets available. From rear projection to plasma to LCD screen thinner than a volume of the encyclopedia, there are a lot of different sets out there. In order to choose what will work best for you, you should acquaint yourself with some of these options.

Direct view televisions are the traditional set with which most of us are familiar. Utilizing a cathode-ray tube, these television sets do a fine job of transmitting a fairly decent picture. Today however, new technology has produced sets that do better and provide a more impressive picture. Most assembling a home theater system are looking for that little extra some of the newer sets provide. Also, because of the curvature of some tubes, the image could be distorted and a glare produced with direct view sets. Those direct view televisions offering a flat screen can avoid this problem, if you are planning to stick with the proven old commodity. However, if you want your home theater to feature a big screen, a direct view TV is not for you.

If you want a larger-sized screen option, a rear projection TV may be what you're looking for. It's similar to a direct view TV because it involves a tube, but the picture is projected and reflected onto the screen from behind it. You can actually get monster-sized screens at a decent price. But with those huge screens come some flaws. Depending on where you're sitting, the picture may be dark and you can't always see what's happening. Fortunately, some newer models combat this problem by giving a wider viewing area. Rear projection sets can sometimes lack clarity and have a reputation for sacrificing picture quality in order to increase picture size.

On a different note is the plasma screen. These are really popular right now and often carry a hefty price tag. Plasmas are really thin and light TVs that have good picture quality. There are no tubes or any need for a projector. These are great for smaller home theaters because of their small size.

Also, once you narrow down the type of TV you want, be sure to keep in mind a few things. Make sure you don't get a huge TV and then try to fit it into really small space. Lots of times people get engulfed in getting the biggest and best thing they can find only to realize it's way too big for the space and not practical.

Also, if a TV is too big, it may not result in comfortable viewing. In addition, make sure you can get the TV home. Some TVs are so large that they won't fit into an average automobile. Keep this in mind when trying to transport your set. And the bottom line is to test TV before you buy. Make sure the picture is clear and crisp and meets your needs. Big doesn't always mean it's the best. Expensive doesn't guarantee satisfaction. If it's not what you want, it doesn't matter how expensive or great it is, don't get it.

Some other tips include the darkness of your TV screen. The darker the screen, the better, unless you're using a projector. If so, then the screen should be white. Also, you want good picture quality. Flat screens have the least amount of glare and won't distort the image.

These are a few factors to consider when selecting a new television screen for your home theater system. There are other options available and new models being introduced all of the time. However, these guidelines should provide some assistance in finding the right set for you.

Choosing the Best Value DVDs for Your Home Theater

Even if you have selected the right screen, projection system, home theater seating and accents, the experience is not complete without your favorite films on hand. For the new home theater enthusiast, compiling a large library of films can be a daunting task. There are many different places that you can spend your movie-buying budget and it is important to get the best value for your money.

The first option most people think of is visiting a local retailer. One of the advantages to shopping at stores like these is convenience. This is especially true with Target and Wal-Mart. Since these stores have a wide variety of other items to choose from, picking up a DVD movie while shopping for other items is quick and convenient. You may already be shopping at stores like these on a weekly or monthly basis anyway, so you do not have to go out of your way to build your DVD movie collection.

On the downside, these stores are limited in their inventory of DVD movies. Often times, these stores are promoting a specific set of DVD movies. Normally, the DVD movies being promoted are the recent DVD releases. These releases are normally in a higher price range, \$15 to \$20, and are available in the stores for a limited time.

As more people become comfortable with shopping online buying DVD movies there as well is gaining in popularity. There are several different methods to buying online: using a popular brick and mortar retailer's website, shopping from a popular online retailer and bargain hunting on auction websites.

For the first time Internet buyer, there is a level of comfort and trust in shopping with a traditional brick and mortar retailer's website. Sites such as Target.com, Walmart.com, BestBuy.com and CircuitCity.com bring the trusted retailers to your home computer. The benefit of using these familiar retailers online is that you are already comfortable with shopping from the company. The problem of limited stock and inventory is removed with using a website, rather than visiting the local store.

There are a few online retailers that have come to the forefront in the Internet commerce world. These trusted websites have been around for many years and offer a safe and secure system to get great deals on your DVD movie purchases. One such online retailer is Amazon.com. This website offers a wide variety of items to choose from. The DVD selection is incredible and there are ratings and lists to help you choose additional movies based on your genre preferences. Using the recommendations can be a great way to build your movie library and stretch your film watching experiences.

There are some things to keep in mind when using any Internet retailer. Keep careful records of your transaction so that if there is a problem with shipping, you have your order number and confirmation number handy to give to customer service. Also, factor in the price of shipping and handling when comparing the costs of buying DVD movies online and from a local retailer. A purchase that seems like an incredible deal may not hold its value when you add in the shipping and handling charges. Many websites offer free shipping when you purchase a specified amount (such as \$50), so it might be a smart idea to compile a list of movies that you wish to buy. This way you can benefit from the shipping discount.

Perhaps the best deals online can be found in auction websites such as Ebay.com and Overstock.com. These sites host auctions that are set up by individuals and small companies. Auctions can be a terrific way to find out of production DVD movies and cult classics. The benefit of shopping on the auction sites is that there is a better chance of getting bargain basement deals on your favorite films. These sites can be a bit confusing for the beginner. There is also the risk of getting a low quality reproduction of your favorite film. However, most people who run auctions on these websites conduct themselves very professionally so the overall risk is minimal. Keep in mind that there will be a shipping fee on most auctions.

For those who are comfortable with spending time learning the auction website's format, these websites can offer the best deals on DVD movies. If you would like a simpler approach to online buying, there are several other websites available that provide DVD movies for lower prices than you can find in local stores. So start your DVD wish list and comparison shop for the best deals.

Choosing the Right Screen for Your Home Theater

The centerpiece of any home theater system is the screen itself. This vital piece of equipment should be given some careful thought and planning. There are many options out there and choosing the right screen is extremely important in enjoying your home theater experience.

The three basic options are using a plasma screen television, a rear projection television or a front projector. They each have their merits and disadvantages and with a little research you can discover the right option for your home theater.

A plasma screen television offers higher resolution and, therefore, better picture quality than conventional television screens. High-end plasma television screens are capable of displaying 16.77 million colors that enhances the realism of the film being watched. The relationship between the width and height of plasma screen televisions make them ideal to watch wide-screen formatted films. Plasma screen televisions also make a beautiful display with their picture frame appearance and super thin bodies.

Another feature of the plasma screen television is that they offer a viewing angle of 160 degrees. This is much wider than the viewing angle on rear projection televisions. This essentially allows more people to enjoy the proper image reproduction from more places in the room.

The limitations for plasma screen televisions are the size of the screen. With a rear projector or front projector system, you are only limited by wall space. The largest plasma screens available on the market are 61". The price of plasma screen televisions can also be prohibitive to many buyers.

A less costly option is the rear projection television that offers excellent quality for a lower price than a plasma screen. The television gets its name from the process used to display the image. The image is projected and reflected from behind the screen, unlike traditional projection, which comes from in front of the screen. One of the drawbacks to a rear projection television system is that there are a wide variety of technology options that go into the components of the system. The choices in these options can make huge differences in your picture quality and it can take some time to wade through the options that are best for you.

With rear projection television technology, it is essential that you have enough brightness in your home theater room. Without sufficient light the image from a rear projection television will look muddy. It is also important to pay close attention to the contrast ratio that you are trying to achieve when constructing your system. Pixel density is another consideration and this can be affected by the method of projection technology that you choose. Pixel density affects the resolution of the image achieved on the screen.

Finally, it is important to realize that all projection televisions have problems with side viewing. Optimum viewing for rear projection television systems is best from the center of the screen. This can be a drawback if you have planned a larger home theater room with a variety of seating areas.

Front projection systems are similar in technology to rear projection television systems, with the main difference being the method of projection. One advantage to front projection over rear projection is that the former doesn't require a box or unit to store the components. To set up your home theater system with a front projection screen, the front projector unit can be mounted to the ceiling or placed in an area that has a direct view to your screen. The screen for a front projection system is also a big consideration. It is possible to use a front projection system on a blank wall or old sheet. However, to get the best film watching experience it is

advisable to invest in a higher quality screen.

With screens for projection systems, a little time and extra effort should be spent in researching the options. One of the main differences between screens is the color of the screen. There is the standard white screen, but there are also light gray screens available. Gray screens are ideal for home theater rooms that do not have dark walls and dark accessories. The gray screen helps to keep too much light from being reflected back off of the screen in “non-ideal” viewing situations. Since many people set up their projection systems in living rooms and other non-dedicated home theater areas, the gray screen could help maintain the contrast of the film’s image.

High Tech Options for Your Home Theater System

If your home theater needs exceed a simple television set combined with a few stereo speakers and a DVD player, you might want to consider a more sophisticated home theater system. You might have started with a simple all-in-one solution, but now feel the need to upgrade your equipment. Maybe you think it would be better to start all over again from scratch? No matter your inspiration, there are some really impressive high-tech home theater options available, and they do produce impressive results!

Home theaters are designed to reproduce the traditional theater experience as much as possible. This involves great picture and equally impressive sound. This is one reason why many home theater fans utilize surround sound technology and wide-screened televisions. One truly can bring the movies home by selecting items that are top of the line and represent the pinnacle of home theater system technology.

Large speakers are available that include built-in amplifiers. Those wanting body-slammng bass effects often invest in additional subwoofers, as well. These speakers can be very attractive, and will not necessarily make your home theater area look like an electronics store showroom.

If you are looking for the best high-tech sound system on the market and are concerned about space and aesthetics, satellite “nucleus” speakers in the form of heavy, colored balls are the best option. For their modest size (some have a diameter of as little as four inches) they really are a powerhouse of sound. Their cool, fun design merits placing them on bookshelves or plant stands to be displayed rather than hidden away. These smaller options can reproduce everything from dialog to massive explosions wonderfully and are a great option to consider. These smaller speakers really do pack a wallop!

Most micros have 22 H2 high frequency, which means a lot of power in a small space. Although many micros need about 50 hours to really “warm up” after being taken out of the box, the nucleus speakers perform at their highest capacity when they are brand new. Smaller options like these can be a real value and they are often sold with an included subwoofer to tend to one’s bass needs.

The VHS recorder is quickly becoming outdated, so most high-tech home theaters will eschew a traditional VCR in favor of a DVD player and recorder. The best DVD recorders are combined with a hard drive, and the prices keep plunging as more and more consumers are investing in these models. The best DVD recorders use laserdisc technology, which enables smooth functioning. DVD recorders usually function much like VHS recorders, and most models have AV inputs, and a TV tuner. You can usually copy homemade videos or recordings from other sources, but you cannot bypass anti-copy encoding. Other features included in a good DVD recorder are playback format, AV inputs for 3 composites, AV outputs for 5 composites, Dolby digital, a built-in channel programming system.

Plasma televisions are the current epitome of "high tech." They can be wall-mounted and they are beloved for their sleek design. These can be used as a centerpiece of your high-tech home theater or can be mounted on the wall. A typical plasma television has around 1024x768 pixel resolution, a 60,000 screen life and can display HDTV signals. The average size of a plasma TV is 42" with a 16x9 screen, although some "compact" varieties are around 37" with a 4" thickness for easy wall mounting. Some Plasma TVs have built-in stereo capabilities and are compatible with most sound systems.

Some people like to consider their camcorder part of the action, and with digital models gaining momentum, they can be a fun part of a home theater system. In the most basic of terms, there are two varieties of digital camcorder on the market: MiniDV and Digital 8. The former was developed first and is the most common variety. Most consider it to be the most user-friendly, and it uses a 6mm tape with 90 minutes of recording. The digital 8 models are slightly larger but use 4 mm tapes with one hour of recording time. However, digital 8 models can sometimes have more sophisticated copying capabilities and other special features. If you are looking for a basic digital camcorder with a good reputation, try a MiniDV, although if you like the special features of the Digital 8, it may be worth your investment.

Home Theaters Offer Many Options

It's easy to think of home theaters as little more than the at-home version of the local cinema. We usually use the term to describe collections of components designed to duplicate the big screen experience, after all. Most people who have developed an interest in the home theater area were inspired by a love of the movies and the desire to get a silver screen equivalent in their own home. Home theaters, you might think, are all about the movies.

In reality, a home theater system can do a lot more than deliver a good flick. The components of a home theater are also potentially valuable for other entertainment purposes. If you only think of home theaters as a "movie thing," you are really underestimating them by a wide margin.

Television viewing is one area where home theaters can be really valuable. It used to be that television programs were the "lite" version of film. They were produced on the cheap, using videotape instead of real film and the sound quality was on par with AM radio. No one really felt that inspired to optimize the TV viewing experience.

The advent of cable and the proliferation of other entertainment options, however, have inspired television production to new heights. Today's programs, particularly television movies, feature effects and qualities one used to find only in large budget Hollywood blockbusters. As pressures have mounted on the industry, television has responded by drastically improving the scope and quality of its offerings. A home theater can capture those programs in a way no traditional TV could every rival. Today's high quality television programs can be an absolute joy to watch when one has the correct system. A home theater can truly breathe new life into traditional television viewing.

Home theater sound technology is so advanced that it can be used for other purposes, too. The home theater may be great for giving your movie very listenable background music, but those same speakers can handle any of your other favorite musical recordings, too. Solid amplification and a series of well-designed speakers make the home theater system a great sound system, as well. Some basic units may be initially limited in this regard, but even the cheapest systems tend to offer at least one auxiliary plug-in, allowing the connection of other components, whether it be a new MP3 player or an old 8-track tape deck.

Additionally, home theaters are the perfect way to maximize the entertainment value of video games. Connecting a game system to a nice home theater system can make a game stunning and even more exciting than if it had been played on some other platform. A great home entertainment system can bring today's fantastic video games to life, creating an interactive experience that will certainly be a thrill for everyone. Video games continue to escalate in sales because adults are learning just how much fun they can have with some of today's popular games. This additional feature of home theater is, thus, a valuable one. The home theater system becomes an amazing arcade for video game play quickly and easily.

Those considering a home theater system should think about how it will perform as a movie theater re-creation. However, they should also consider some of the other awesome functions of a home theater system. It can be a spectacular arcade, the main household stereo unit and a way to get the most out of TV programming.

Using the expression "home theater system" sometimes seems too over limiting when one considers all of the great things that can be done with a solid home theater system. You can listen to tunes, blast aliens and fall in love with television all over again. Oh, and of course, you can still be blown away from some great movies. Home entertainment systems can show off a movie, but they can also do a whole lot more.

Making the Right Speaker Choice

One commonly overlooked aspect of home theater construction is speaker selection. A great set of speakers can elevate a simple TV/DVD combination into a legitimate home theater, when properly powered. In order to create the best home theater experience, one should not try to substitute a questionable bargain speaker when a quality speaker will better do the job. One should invest in high quality speakers that don't require a great deal of maintenance and that deliver the kind of home theater sound we all crave.

When choosing speakers, one must consider the amount of money they are willing and able to spend. Sure, the more costly speakers are usually the best choice, but not everyone has a budget that can secure the very best equipment in the industry. Determine what you can spend for speakers and then search out the best possible home theater speaker collection that will fit your spending limits. If you cannot find anything that fits your price requirements, it may be time reconsider your spending assumptions.

Research speakers at stores, by looking on the Internet and by seeking out any other information you can find. Choose recognized names in the industry-these companies are concerned enough about customer satisfaction that they produce quality goods. Some unknown brands can produce good speakers, but they should be tested thoroughly before purchasing them. All speakers should be outfitted with an adequate warranty or guarantee policy.

If at all possible, buy your speaker somewhere where they can be tested prior to purchase. Don't be hesitant to test the speakers at a high volume briefly; you need to know what the speakers are truly capable of accomplishing. Use a recording you own and are acquainted with so you can really assess the quality of the sound produced by the speakers relative to the system you currently have. It's better to err on the side of quality. It is generally less expensive to update components later than it is to upgrade a full set of home theater speakers.

If you are willing to spend a bit more, it is worthwhile to invest in surround sound, which will deliver a cinematic sound quality to your home theater. In addition to delivering optimal sound, make sure that your speakers look good and that they match your stereo. However, you might want to buy smaller speakers in bold, fun colors, or more traditional style block speakers. Tower speakers do not need to be unattractive; you can find speakers embedded in a wooden case, which can match your home entertainment shelf.

If you are planning to connect your speakers some distance from your home theater unit, make sure that your cables are sufficiently long to reach from your unit to the end of the room. Good cords can improve your sound quality dramatically, and copper cords deliver the best sound. Your speaker system should have line in/line out, cords so your speakers can also be hooked up to a VCR, computer or video game console.

If you would like special features, you can find speakers with extra bass instead of purchasing an extra unit known as a subwoofer. You may also find speakers with equalizers or alarms. The best speakers have a good warranty and manufacturers of these better components are known for standing behind their products.

You can choose from various styles of speakers. If you don't mind very large speakers, you can invest in tower speakers that come in wood cases or in metallic, modern designs. The most high-tech home theaters combine traditional speakers with an amplifier or a subwoofer. There are also very flat speakers available that match your flat panel television. You can purchase a home theater system that comes with five or six small speakers that can be distributed throughout the room. There are many places you can place these small speakers that will not interfere or will even enhance the aesthetics of your room.

This is especially true if you purchase a system with speakers that match the décor of your room. You can place small speakers on bookcases, in corners or in plant stands. Satellite

speakers are very conveniently sized and shaped, and they combine style with optimum sound. These are often trendy, globe shaped speakers, and unlike traditional speakers, have an extra octave of bass available.

By knowing a little bit about what kind of speakers you need and expect, you can help yourself construct a really impressive home theater system. Speakers are an essential part of a home theater and deserve a great deal of concern and attention.

Speaker Cable Management for Home Theaters

Nothing is quite like perfect home theater sound. The right speakers and components can create an unparalleled movie experience. Capturing that perfect sound does not just require the correct equipment—it also necessitates the perfect set-up. In order to achieve the sound you want from your home theater system, you are likely to put speakers in a variety of locations throughout the home theater area. Although the result might be awesome sound, it can come with one real annoyance: speaker cables.

There is nothing as frustrating as staring at a web of speaker cables sprawling out across one's floor. It is an ugly proposition and brings with it an element of danger—both to components that might be yanked about if a cord should be tripped over and to the poor sap who actually does the tripping and ends up sprawled across the floor. Luckily, there are some good ways of handling the speaker cable problem.

First, one can “hide” cabling by running it along the baseboards of walls and/or under the carpet. This is the most commonly used technique to handle the cable problem. If done well, it can be almost unnoticeable. In most cases, however, it ends up being something less than perfect. Using the “tuck along the baseboard” plan is cheap and easy, but can fall a little short—especially when doorways are involved.

One can refine the technique by making use of flat speaker cable. Flat cables can go under carpets and remain undetectable. They do not produce the telltale bump in the rug traditional cords can make. They are also often paintable, making it easy to blend them in with walls or baseboards.

Second, one can use a wireless system to handle speaker needs. This takes the cables completely out of the picture and can produce a very clean set-up. This technique is often used for only part of a system. For instance, distantly placed surround sound speakers might be a perfect candidate for “wireless cabling,” even if the rest of the system is more traditionally connected.

Wireless systems are more expensive than regular cabling. There is also a probable loss of some sound quality, although it may take a true audiophile to notice the difference. Overall, however, a wireless method can produce some great results.

Third, some home theater owners have opted to actually build their speakers into the walls and/or ceilings, making the wiring an invisible part of the equation. This strategy requires both

a commitment to the speakers purchased and to their location.

It requires a great deal of up-front effort, but can produce fantastic results. Instead of dealing with visible speakers and a mass of cabling, the sound system actually melds with the surroundings seamlessly.

Finally, one can opt to run wires through the walls while still maintaining speakers outside of the walls. This requires a considerable amount of planning and effort, but it can produce the desired results. One must be certain they have determined the optimal location for speakers before starting this process.

Generally, it is a strategy best suited for those who know they will be using the same home theater for some time. The effort required just makes the process less than sensible for more temporary systems. Changes in equipment down the road may lead to changes in speaker placement. These shifts can make a lot of earlier wiring work seem like a real waste!

No matter what system one embraces, it is important to find a way to minimize speaker cable hassles. Many home theater owners have actually knowingly performed installations that fell far short of optimization simply because of the prospect of dealing with yards upon yards of cabling. One should not let a little cable compromise the quality of their home theater experience. Instead, they need only find the best way to handle the cables discretely and professionally.

Three Home Theater Picks You May Have Missed

Home theaters are a great way to enjoy any movie, but some films really do pack an awesome wallop when presented by high-end technology. In recognition of this, it's hard to find a DVD collection lacking some of the better-known titles featuring top-notch vistas and action among home theater owners.

However, with Hollywood cranking out movies at a record pace, there are occasional gems that somehow get lost in the shuffle. If you are looking for a great movie to watch on your home entertainment system and would like to spend some time with a great flick you may have missed, you may want to consider one of these three great options.

The Mission. This film won the Golden Palm award at Cannes when it was originally released, but never found a huge audience in the United States. Featuring Robert DeNiro, Jeremy Irons and a host of indigenous people from Latin America, *The Mission* explores some thought-provoking political and personal terrain with an amazing backdrop.

The South American scenery is breathtaking, and those massive waterfalls and greener-than-green foliage will really come to life when viewed on a big screen television or monitor. The first scene, featuring a slain missionary and a remarkable fall is worth the rental fee alone!

In addition to a solid cast and stunning visuals, *The Mission* has an audio component that is nearly unbeatable. Italian great Ennio Morricone handled the score for the movie. If that name

is not familiar to you, his music undoubtedly is. Those unforgettable themes from the classic Clint Eastwood "spaghetti westerns" were Morricone's doing. The music in the mission is haunting, sparse and utterly memorable.

The drama centers upon European mission work in the Americas shortly after exploration of the New World began. Jeremy Irons is the priest who runs the mission. Robert DeNiro is the slave trader who finds salvation there. Political intrigue and double-cross put the mission and both men at risk.

It's a great movie and one that is well suited for home theater viewing.

The Long Kiss Goodnight. Action movies roll out of Hollywood on a daily basis. Even the most enthusiastic lover of butt-kicking excitement cannot see each and every production. One commonly overlooked classic in the lot is *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. It features Geena Davis and Samuel Jackson.

There is nothing like a home theater to bring action and mayhem to life! This movie will give any system a workout. The explosions are so realistic they almost become characters. It's a solid movie with a far better than average plotline and a very unique set-up. Davis is great as a housewife turned assassin. Jackson plays the ne'er-do-well detective who befriends her.

If you want to feast your eyes and ears on an impressive action movie while avoiding the same old films you've seen a dozen times, you should definitely check out *The Long Kiss Goodnight*.

Koyaanisqatsi: You probably weren't thinking about watching documentaries that are over twenty years old and that don't feature a single line of dialog when you were unpacking the components of your home theater system. However, if you were aware of *Koyaanisqatsi*, you might have been.

Godfrey Reggio directed this film, named after for a Hopi word meaning "life out of balance." The film was scored by famed minimalist composer Phillip Glass and features the work of cinematographer Ron Fricke.

The music is spectacular and hearing it through your high-fidelity home theater system will just make it that much more powerful. The visuals, however, are the documentary's greatest strength. The movie, which takes a look at the interaction between humanity, technology, and nature features a series of unforgettable images. The striking beauty of *Koyaanisqatsi* will be emphasized by a great home video system.

What's it all about? Reggio says that's for the viewer to decide. It's a challenging movie and can be almost as frustrating as its subject matter would leave you to believe. It's also a treat for the eyes and ears and a good home entertainment system will make that clear.

The next time you are looking for something to watch on your home theater system, consider one of these three films. Though often overlooked, they all offer wonderful home theater experiences.

A Guide to Speakers for the Home Theater System

Perhaps the most essential component of any home theater system is the speakers. The sound portion of the home theater experience is what creates a movie like environment for film enthusiasts.

There are some basic types of speakers that are in all home theater packages. The front left and front right speakers, the center channel speaker, the surround speakers and the subwoofers are the components of most home theater sound systems. There are many brands of speakers to choose from in these categories but the most important thing to remember is that the speakers must work well together to create the best sound experience. For this reason, it might be best to purchase a home theater speaker kit or at least stick to one manufacturer for all of your speakers. "Voice matching" is the term used to express the desired effect of the speakers working together. It is important that all of the speakers in your system have compatible "voices" to get the best sound quality.

The front left and front right speakers provide a wide range of the sound effects and interact with the screen image to create a more realistic movie experience. The front left and front right speakers are responsible for the movie score and reproducing off stage effects. There are a wide variety of styles available for front left and front right speakers, including floor-standing speakers, bookshelf speakers and satellite speakers. Floor-standing tower speakers are the most efficient and provide the richest sound; however, they are space consuming. For small spaces, satellite speakers combined with a sub-woofer may be your best option.

Many interested in home theater may overlook the center channel speaker, but these speakers do a majority of the work. In addition to providing over half of the soundtrack, the center channel speaker also provides the dialogue. The speaker normally sits on or below your television. For those with wall mounted flat screen televisions, there are wall mountable center channel speakers to adapt to your home theater set up. These speakers are available in a variety of sizes. In order to find the perfect center channel speaker for you, consider the size of your front left and front right speakers. It is also important that these speakers be voice matched to each other for optimum sound quality.

Surround speakers are responsible for the ambient sounds in films, such as the sound of rain, wind or crunching leaves. These sounds are what make the film watching experience more complete and realistic. They draw you into the world of the film. The most common set up for surround speakers is a 5.1-channel surround system. This set up comes with a single pair of surround speakers. Many home theater enthusiasts later upgrade their systems to two or more pairs of surround speakers to enrich the sound experience. Richer surround sound can also be achieved with 6.1 or 7.1-channel surround systems.

The final component of the home theater sound system is a subwoofer. Most Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks come with a deep bass track that is only heard through a subwoofer. These low frequency effects (or LFE) provide the "big" feeling achieved in movie theaters.

For an interesting twist on the subwoofer, many home theater enthusiasts have installed ButtKickers in their seating. A ButtKicker is a small linear motor that responds to an audio signal sent by an amplifier. It is similar in function to a loudspeaker. Instead of transferring

sound through the air like a loudspeaker, the ButtKicker attaches to home theater seats and sends low frequency sound into the movie enthusiasts' bodies.

The ButtKicker functions on the scientific principle that we use two senses to perceive sound. We hear sound, but we also feel low frequency sound. Normally it would take big speakers, such as those in a movie theater or at a concert, for people to feel low frequency sounds. What we are responding to at concerts and the Cineplex is actually the pressure of the sound on our bodies.

The ButtKicker reproduces that feeling in a much more efficient way that is conducive to home use. By mounting the ButtKicker LFEs directly under your home theater seating, you achieve the same effect experienced in the movie theater.

Widescreen Televisions Enhance Movie Watching

I am continually surprised by the amount of people who prefer to watch "non-letterbox" or "full screen" versions of films. I have heard everything from "it makes the picture look smaller" to "I hate the black bars." What full screen fans are missing out on is the director's original intent for the movie. Film directors not only concentrate on what is being said in the movie, but the camera angles and framing play an important part in making a statement in a film.

Letterbox editions of films are necessary in order to get the full-intended framing of a film. The problem with trying to watch films on conventional televisions is that the aspect ratio for movie screens and the aspect ratio for televisions are vastly different. A movie screen projects images on a rectangle shaped screen, as we are all familiar with. Often times the width of the movie screen is two times larger than the height. A standard television set obviously does not have the same set up. Although the television screen is not a perfect square, it is boxier in shape than a movie screen. As a result, it is impossible to view films in their intended framing without using the letterbox method.

When watching videos at home became popular in the 1980s, many manufacturers thought that they had a solution for the aspect ratio problem. The result was a technique called "pan and scan." The movie is re-edited by finding the center of focus in each frame and fitting that center in the viewing space available. There is a problem with the use of "pan and scan." Since the film is re-edited with a focus on keeping the main action in the center of the screen, it is not surprising that important dramatic framings are lost in the process. Characters are cut out of shots, panoramic views are chopped down and background details are lost.

For example, in a scene from Mel Brook's classic "Blazing Saddles," the "pan and scan" version shows Gene Wilder as Jim the Waco Kid alone in the frame speaking to a character off screen. However, in the widescreen version of the same shot, Jim the Waco Kid is speaking to Cleavon Little's character Bart. Director Mel Brooks framed the shot originally to show the two characters interacting. However the use of "pan and scan" has reduced the scene to a shot of Jim the Waco Kid alone with Bart's disembodied voice interacting in the dialogue.

Another powerful example of the drawbacks of the “pan and scan” technique is from “The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.” The stunning panoramic views in this film are greatly reduced when viewing the film in a full screen format. In one scene from the film, the audience is shown the eye of Sauron on the top of the tower in Mordor. In widescreen and letterbox formats, the shot includes a faint glowing from the top of Saruman’s tower in Isengard.

These are the two towers to which the title refers. However, in the full screen “pan and scan” version the frame only includes the Mordor tower. The original framing underscores the theme of the film and points out that these two towers are working together for the forces of evil. The “pan and scan” version reduces this powerful framing to a simple shot of one tower.

Important background details can also be lost in the “pan and scan” process. In the James Bond film “Tomorrow Never Dies,” the villain character played by Jonathan Pryce stands in front of a large screen. In the widescreen and letterbox versions, the screen is visible with the words “The Empire Will Strike Back.” This message is lost in the “pan and scan” version.

Letterbox versions of films offer a solution to the problem by mimicking the shape of movie screens on conventional televisions. However, the main problem with letterbox versions is that the images appear smaller. Depending on the size of your television screen, this may be a hindrance to watching letterbox films.

There is a new solution though for film fans who don’t want to sacrifice the framing of the film or the size of the image. Widescreen televisions bridge the gap between the Cineplex and your home theater. These televisions provide similar aspect ratios to movie screens and therefore can offer the intended framing of a film.

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