

HOMIE THEATRE



Photo by Andre's AudioTronic

HOMEMADE POPCORN, FRONT ROW SEAT By DEANNA MERRICK AND KERI-LYNN TURNEY

Remember when it took months for a new movie to be released on VHS for rental? Or when you had to tape a TV show, one episode at a time, and set up again every week while the series ran? It wasn't that long ago, but today's new films and TV shows are often accessible at a moment's notice. Technological advancement has raced forward and today, stunning home theaters are available to anyone who wants their entertainment front row centre, right in their own home.

An entire industry has been built around the home theatre. We spoke to some of the area's leading experts and learned that the meaning of 'home theatre' has broadened, offering a variety of at-home entertainment centres, including some found in the great outdoors!

Andre's AudioTronic has been serving up the latest in audio and visual equipment to Okanagan residents for 30 years. Their reputation for knowledgeable staff, fair prices and high level of after-sales support and communication are



Photo by Andre's AudioTronic

key elements in their long-standing success.

During the past 15 years, home theatres have become increasingly popular, and individual requirements are as varied as the people who are buying these state-of-the-art systems. The process of designing a custom home theatre starts with the client. In a preliminary meeting, an in-depth evaluation of your expectations is done and the activities you want to be able to do are identified. Home theatres are commonly used for movies, gaming, virtual concerts or just regular TV viewing.

Justin Hamilton is Andre's go-to expert on home theatres. After the initial consultation with a customer, his job begins in earnest.

"Our customer service philosophy is to listen to our customers; hear what they want for their home and then provide an exciting and cost-effective plan



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for each of our clients. There are so many ways to personalize your home theatre, and we want our customers to be completely satisfied," says Hamilton.

Components in a home system are also varied; they can include five to seven speakers, depending on the size of a room; an amplifier; DVD player; large screen TV or a front projector with a very large screen. They very latest in technology includes a 55- to 65-inch 3-D home theatre, using a large screen LED or Plasma TV. Room calibration and on-site adjustments and testing ensure the best possible results.

"We want to evoke an experience that captures the same wonder and excitement as a movie theatre, as well as being a fun place for family and friends to enjoy good times together," Hamilton explains.

At Andre's Audiometric, their selection is outstanding. In home theatres they use name brands like Sony, Panasonic, Samsung, LG, Bose, Denon, Yamaha, Control4 and Speakercraft. They select these companies because of their commitment to research and development, and they will always be found on the cutting edge of the latest technology.

When building a new home, builders often insulate and double drywall the theatre walls for sound proofing. They can also use a sound dampening material if the homeowner is looking for extreme quiet. Often, a home theatre is built under the suspended slab of a garage. As heating can affect the performance of a home theatre, it is important to have a temperature controlled room with a fresh air intake and an

exhaust system.

Their business is growing; they have locations in Kelowna, Vernon, Penticton, Castlegar, Cranbrook, and Kamloops and will soon open a new store in Prince George.

Andy Hoxha has been in the industry since 1993 starting on the North Shore of Vancouver and creating his own company, In Tune Sound & Security in 1998 before moving it to the Okanagan in 2000. He says home theatres have evolved since then, as instead of putting them in the family/living room, more and more clients are dedicating whole rooms to the at-home theatre experience.

"The builders have also seen a need or request for planning and making the space available in a home for a theatre. I find in the Okanagan with tourism, vacation rentals are also offering dedicated theatre rooms for their guests," he adds.

But his work is much more than installing a theatre. He does lighting, seating, décor, sound proofing and sound conditioning. As well, these dedicated rooms are often multi-purpose: golf simulators, bars, poker tables—you name it, Hoxha can do it.

"System Integration has been a very large part of our business in the last decade," he says. "Known as automation, local control of your theatre room has not stopped there. Touch-screens, hand-held or wall mounted, tablets, laptops, and cellular phones have been the major all-in-one control for theatre's, lighting, security, HVAC, pool/spa, irrigation, CCTV and multi-room audio," he explains.

"With an increasing amount of summer homes and vacation rentals in the Okanagan and the owners living in other provinces even in other countries, the call for remote access to their home systems are increased quickly."

And just about everything can be automated. Hoxha says you could be sitting on the beach and turn up your A/C, get the hot tub ready, open or close the blinds . . .

"These control systems are endless in what they can do for the end user. I commonly tell our clients, 'you name it, we can do it, the possibilities are endless.'"

Ryan Dockrill of Kelowna Custom Theaters is seeing the same kinds of things.

KELOWNA REALTOR GARY ATHANS is no stranger to upscale homes in the Kelowna area. He is intimately familiar with new homes, older homes and renovated homes and he summarizes it best:

"The majority of upscale homes have a home theatre. They include everything from bars to popcorn makers. One client had a complete mini-theatre themed from the 1950's. A home theatre is great in the winter and total entertainment for the family and get-togethers. And of course, it should be located somewhere near the wine cellar!" he says.

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“Our clients like having one central system that they can access their whole house - HVAC, security system, security cameras, weather, lighting, music, blinds, gates, fireplaces etc.” he explains. “Keeps the wall clean and makes everything easy to operate.” He goes on to say, “Everything we do is making people’s homes look non-cluttered by not having equipment everywhere and we make their life simpler,” says Dockrill.

Kelowna Custom Theaters tailors your theatre to your lifestyle. The sophistication required to do this does not come out of a “theater in a box” system. After a visit to your home, their engineers and designers create comprehensive installation documents. Such documents include important aspects of the installation like electrician’s wiring diagrams, audio/video/control block diagrams, CAD

drawings, acoustical studies . . . and the list goes on. They work with your architect and interior designer and general and sub-contractors to make sure everything fits just right. All this attention to detail, coupled with close team work gives the client what Dockrill calls “an outstanding final product.”

Kelowna Custom Theaters performs an analysis of sight lines and acoustics to “ensure great sound and picture quality at every seat,” promises Dockrill, adding that they design a consolidated control system, enabling the client to dim the lights, close the shades and even start the movie with a push of a button.

But the process has to start somewhere. “Our process for custom theater design begins with the interfacing of the client with our team,” he says.



Photo by Kelowna Custom Home Theaters

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HOME AUTOMATION



Photo by Andre's AudioTronic

The staff works with the customer to gather the information required to understand the direction you wish to go, and your style, according to your home's interior, your budget, or your wish list. During this first meeting, they discuss ideas with you, familiarize you with the latest in audio/video and whole-home automation systems, discuss accent lighting and seating options, and go over acoustic reinforcement and warchitectural elements.

"It is not about large quantity of theaters each year, we make sure we do the job right and with excellence," he says.

Once retained, Kelowna Custom Theaters presents a proposal, refines ideas, gathers sample materials and begins the visual diagrams. Once a preliminary budget is created, they get to work creating your in-home theatre dream.

But forms and diagrams aside, all the companies seem to agree: simplicity is where it's at.

"While technical ability is great, some people don't understand all the details on what and how their system goes together," explains Robb Farr of Starwatch Audio Video.

"We like to simplify it down to basic wants and needs to keep the project easy to talk about without our clients' eyes glazing over and not being a part of the conversation."

Whether a client chooses a straight theatre room or a lifestyle room where the room might have something like a pool table or a bar, they usually add automation of some sort. It might be great features like "automation to simplify, music to bathe in

and lighting to set the mood," Farr says.

"Our job is technical side, your job is to enjoy." He says that they always add their own "custom spin" on any project they are doing.

"We like to do a lot of décor in our theatres, budget permitting, so we can theme your room to be from a night at the movies, to the Bridge of the USS Enterprise and you are the captain."

While a higher quality video and audio experience in a home theatre is part of the experience, one thing remains the same no matter where you watch a movie: "People do love popcorn in all theatres!" says Farr.

Wayne Derkach of Home Link Automation & Theatre Installations has another great point about home theatres: "It also brings families together, having a place of their own to go watch what they want, when they want." He adds, "No traffic, no line-ups, no rude people . . . just pure entertainment."

But what about the cost of entertainment in the comfort of your own home?

"Every system we do is budget-based. Some people think that a home theatre or music in every room is for the rich and famous," Derkach says, "but we can design a system that meets everyone's budget to bring the reality of having an entertainment system home."

He says the home automation part of the business can be a tough sell, as people don't realize what it can really do for them.

"Think of how convenient it is to open your car door and the interior light comes on," Derkach suggests.

"Why not have your house automated so that when you open your front door the interior lights come on or use a driveway sensor so you never come home to a dark house."

But there are times you want the dark . . . in your home theatre.

"We refer to it as everyday easy . . . the TV turns on, the DVD player starts, lights dim and the movie starts," says Derkach.

Don't forget the butter on the popcorn!

CONTACT

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