

## Media Matters

### Making the most of your media room

By Alicia Holston

Televisions have become a part of the American household as much as indoor plumbing and telephones and has had as much impact on the lives of their owners. Housed in wooden cabinets, they were another piece of furniture to make room for and move around. Now, televisions are works of art, sleek, stylish and hanging on the wall for those who have made the leap to the newest technology.

#### Television trends

Most people have seen the new flat- screen televisions becoming more prevalent in homes across America. Step into any consumer electronics store, they cover the walls. Panasonic offers many sizes of HDTV-ready screens. Some of their latest offerings include the TH-42PX60U and TH-50PX60U. They are 42- and 50-inch diagonal screens respectively and run between \$3,000 and \$3,500. For something that appeals to both men and women, Sony now has the KDL-46XBR2 model. It is a 46-inch LCD-TV with native 1920 x 1080 full high-definition resolution for a superbly clear picture. It comes in six different bezel colors to match any decor and is priced at \$4,300.

If you have a little extra saved, a popular choice is the new Pioneer Elite 1080p. They run about \$10,000, but offer twice the clarity of other plasma televisions. The "p" stands for progressive. It is a technology that enables the TV to display every line simultaneously, as opposed to the interlaced format screens where half the lines are displayed, followed by the other half a fraction of a second later. Progressive scanning gives a more movie-like appearance to the video, with less flicker because all of the lines are displayed in one sweep. This model displays 1080 lines per sweep whereas other HDTVs (high-definition televisions) typically show 720. This gives the Elite twice the resolution of other screens.



Photos courtesy of Elliston Systems & Design

#### Surround sound

With the rise of HDTV, there have been breakthroughs in surround-sound technology. Dolby led the pack with Dolby Digital surround sound. It has 5.1 channels of audio delivered to speakers placed strategically around the room. Now, high-definition television offers the same surround sound experience as the movies by encoding and directing the audio signals to those same speakers. With HDTV and the right speakers, viewers at home can watch a football game hearing the crowd around them and the announcer in front of them, as if they were really there. It's virtual reality in your own living room.

## **HD DVD vs. Blu-ray**

Televisions aren't the only things getting a high-definition upgrade. DVD players are evolving just as quickly. New on the market are HD DVD players and the Blu-ray technology. HD DVD (high-definition DVD) players are the next step up from the original DVD players. They range from \$100 to \$500 at places like Best Buy and Circuit City. Toshiba offers a state-of-the-art HD-DVD player with standard DVD upconversion. That is important to look for when upgrading your DVD player. Like the progressive plasma televisions, these new DVD players have progressive scan technology as well.

Blu-ray disc players are so new there are still some compatibility issues playing other discs. Samsung BD-P1000 offers standard DVD upconversion, meaning standard DVDs should play in them as well as Blu-ray discs. Blu-ray players still run about twice the price of the HD DVD players. Blu-ray and HD DVD are the future of disc-based video, offering a better picture quality than ever before.

## **Customized frames**

Televisions imitate art literally with Panasonic's custom-built plasma frames and gallery of art for the plasma screen. The screen already looks like a picture hanging on the wall, so Panasonic took the technology to the next logical step. The Panasonic HDTV plasma screens do double duty as art when the TV is not in use. Viewers can download famous works of art to display on their television from the company's main web site, [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com). Panasonic has also developed a line of plasma screen frames to take it a step further. These custom-built frames can turn a slick looking screen that may seem out of place with your Queen Anne sofa into period decor.

## **Beyond the store**

Bryan Voskuil, the Magnolia Home Theater supervisor at the Hurst Best Buy, says one of the biggest trends is delivering a dynamic home-theater experience to the average family. You don't need a degree in electronics to have the home media setup of your dreams. There are numerous stores across the metroplex trained to answer questions and provide customers with complete systems to fit their lifestyle.

You can expect questions about your viewing habits, how the room is arranged and get a general idea of what product combination will best serve your needs. These types of stores also teach customers how to use the equipment. Best Buy/Magnolia sends a professional out to the house to install the system, but the customer is empowered to maintain the pieces himself.

Magnolia is only one of a myriad of home theater specialists in the area taking the extra step to make the user comfortable with the powerful system they are buying. Places like Home Theater Store will come in and wire your house so the speakers can be installed in the wall rather than having cables strung across the room creating a hazardous situation. Home Theater Design Group and the Home Theater Texas are yet other area companies that provide media room design services.

Whatever you are looking for, select a professional that meets your needs and communicates with you through the entire process. Finding the right media guide can make a world of difference to your world of entertainment.