

Custom Installation

Home cinema fan Ian always knew the room at the back of the house, in what had once been a Granny annexe, would make a great home cinema room, if only he could get rid of the bouncy castle. No, honestly. What is now a fantastic media mecca once housed a fully-fledged inflatable fort upon which his kids could bounce themselves silly.

Anyone with children will know that some negotiations can be a trifle delicate, and the idea of losing a favourite plaything is a particularly tricky one. But Ian reckons his were happy enough once they found out what would be replacing it. And so they should be. Now they've got a home cinema that knocks the spots off any old bouncy castle.

When the installation was completed last summer, it was the end of a two-year quest to build the perfect system. Having seen what a professional install looked and sounded like at a friend's house, Ian started doing his research to build his own room, visiting lots of installers and reading every install review he could get his hands on. 'I wasn't reading about the installs so much as critiquing them,' says Ian, 'deciding what I liked and didn't like about them, what I would have done differently. By the time it came to doing my own room, I knew exactly what I wanted.' He'd also settled on who would be putting it together for him.

Having visited a lot of demo rooms, Ian settled on custom installation specialists Pounds of Enfield, though not without telling them first how he thought their own demo room could be improved. 'It was a bit tongue in cheek,' explains Ian. 'They were obviously very passionate about the whole business and I really felt comfortable telling them exactly what I wanted.'

There was more to the conversion than dragging out the castle and putting the AV kit in its place. A huge window at the far end of the room was replaced by smaller one, centred on the wall. A door out of the room at the back on the left hand side was bricked up, as was a window further down the same side of the wall towards the screen and a serving hatch on the opposite wall. A radiator on the left-hand side of the wall was moved to the back of the room and replaced with an ultra-modern, ultra-cool silver affair that complements the finish of the room perfectly.

It also ties in very nicely with some stylish DVD racks where Ian's movie and CD collection resides. To house the kit, a small cupboard at the back left of the room was ripped out and replaced by a bigger unit large enough to house the Middle Atlantic rack which contains the electronics. There's no front door on this cupboard, so the kit is the first thing you see as you enter the room. And what a sight it is, with the gorgeous, gleaming silver and black boxes, punctuated by the tiny, shiny LEDs. >>



Once a children's playground, now a home cinema haven

David Murphy visits a media room that once housed something rather unlikely



King of the castle

◀◀ When home cinema kit looks as good as this, you'd be crazy to hide it away. Replacing the cupboard with a bigger one helped in more ways than one. When the old one was removed it left a useful void to the loft space above it, making it easy for Pounds custom install manager, Mark Eastwick, to run cabling all around the room.

The kit itself is primarily of Ian's own choosing and he's clearly a man of great taste. The processor is a Lexicon MC8, the amp a Parasound HCA-2205 five-channel, 220W-per-channel beast. Sources include a Denon DVD-A1 multiregion DVD player, a Philips DVD recorder, a Panasonic Super VHS VCR and a Technics tuner.

There's also a SkyPlus box, with the Sky signal distributed around the house. The projector is a handsome Runco VX-1000 DLP, firing at a Stewart Firehawk 7ft. screen. 'I originally wanted the CL700, but thought it was not good enough in terms of detail, depth, blacks and richness of colours,' Ian recalls. A system this good demands a decent set of speakers and has them in the shape of three Miller & Kreisel MK150P actives across the front, with four MK-SS150 tripoles on the surround channels and an MK MX350 sub to shake the floorboards.

EASY DOES IT

The installation was straightforward. It only took three weeks from start to finish, even with all that building work. Nevertheless, there are some interesting aspects to it, such as the acoustic panels on the ceiling. Surprisingly, these were not chosen primarily for acoustic purposes. They were Ian's idea and came from the fact that the ceiling was too low to consider putting a false ceiling, which would, of course,

No attempt has been made to hide the gear – it's all deliberately on show with the DVD collection



Acoustic panelling is functional as well as stylish

be even lower. With the ceiling painted black, there was some reflection of the image on the projector screen. The panels prevent this and also help to soundproof the room. Ian's young daughter sleeps above the front end of the home cinema room. Despite this, he says, he has yet to wake her up when he's putting the system through its paces of an evening.

There's more acoustic panelling on the walls. Each panel is made up from a MDF back, covered with insulating foam, then finished with a piece of Italian Alcantara designer fabric. The effect is absolutely stunning, giving the room a luxurious, upmarket feel.

The look is completed by downlighters round the sides of the room and LED wallwashes. The lighting is in the hands of a Lutron control system, and this, like the home cinema kit and the blackout blind on the window behind the screen, is controlled from the Crestron touch-screen remote control unit.

Anyone looking at that single chair plonked fairly and squarely in the room's sweet spot might think that Ian likes to keep his home cinema to himself, despite what he promised the kids when the bouncy castle bit the dust. But nothing could be further from the truth. When we went along to see the system, Ian was using a chair loaned to him by a company that is custom-building a sofa upon which the whole family can settle down. Ian's DVD collection certainly seems to bear this out, with the Tweenies and Bob the Builder competing for shelf space with the likes of *Gladiator*, *Blade* and dozens more classic home cinema 'workout' titles.

For our demo, we compromised with *Toy Story 2*, which is one of those movies that kids of all ages enjoy. The opening scene is cracking entertainment at the best of times and on this system, it really felt like the best of times. Ian is certainly happy with it. 'They have achieved the unachievable,' he says. 'I've got a system that is even better than I thought it would be.'

In fact, says Ian, the first time he sat down in front of the system, he had an experience that took him back to his own childhood. 'It was like being in an episode of Mr. Benn' he remembers. 'I watched the movie, then stepped through the door out of the room back into the rest of the house and it really felt like the moment when Mr. Benn finishes his adventure and steps back into the shop and the real world,' says Ian. 'It was a very weird experience.'

Weird perhaps. But like Mr. Benn all those years ago, it's one that Ian is quite happy to relive again and again. And again ■

The Kit

- ◆ Lexicon MC8 processor
- ◆ Parasound HCA-2205 5x 220W power amplifier
- ◆ Runco VX-1000 DLP video projector
- ◆ Stewart Filmscreen Motorised Firehawk 7ft. projector screen.
- ◆ Denon DVD-A1 multiregion DVD player
- ◆ Philips DVD recorder
- ◆ Panasonic NV-HS880 Super VHS VCR
- ◆ Technics ST-GT650 tuner
- ◆ SkyPlus box
- ◆ 3x Miller & Kreisel MK150P active speakers (front left, right, centre)
- ◆ 4x Miller & Kreisel MK-SS150 tripole speakers (surrounds)
- ◆ Miller & Kreisel MK MX350 subwoofer
- ◆ Crestron ST1700 touchscreen remote controller
- ◆ Lutron four-zone lighting controller
- ◆ Electric blackout blind
- ◆ Middle Atlantic equipment rack
- ◆ Spectral DVD wall racks

The room before...

Top: The large picture window was reduced in size

Middle: The serving hatch was bricked up

Bottom: The door went and the radiator was moved and replaced



A custom-built home theatre sofa is on order to finish the room