



◆ Designer: Martin Redwood
◆ Project Taken: 18 months
◆ Cost: £120,000



High-Rise HOME THEATRE

Dave Murphy is knocked out by a home cinema inspired by Japanese rooftop restaurants

How do you decorate a home cinema? It's a question that anyone who commissions one has to think about sooner or later. While every room is different, there is a consensus that you should go for something neutral and understated to replicate the look and feel of a real cinema. The odd movie poster perhaps? Or do what Paul, the proud owner of this fantastic home cinema did, and commission a movie set designer to invent a complete one-off. The left and right-hand walls of Paul's home cinema are home to an imaginary futuristic cityscape that cost a small fortune to create and was, for want of a better word, a bugger to install.

'I had spent a lot of time in Japan before buying this property, so the idea for the side walls came from sitting in rooftop restaurants in Tokyo, looking out over the city', explains Paul. 'I wanted a cityscape theme, but something slightly futuristic, with *Star Wars*, *The Fifth Element*, *Blade Runner* influences.' The panels were created by a renowned movie set designer, who spent two months producing the artwork, which was then digitally photographed, with the photos mounted on to sheets of perspex by a process known as Duratrans, and the panels then lit from behind. So far, so intricate, but the real fun started when the time came to place the panels in position.

'The panels were too large to do in one piece so we had to butt the panels up to each other and join them together as seamlessly as possible to create each cityscape,' explains the owner. 'This process was extremely complicated to get right, but we persevered, and the end result is well worth the effort that went into it.' The panel lighting, says Paul,

'I wanted a cityscape theme but something slightly futuristic'

was also troublesome. 'There were too many lights in there originally so you couldn't dim it down enough, so it was a case of trial and error, offering the panels up to see what effect the lights were having, until we got it right,' he says.

Some of the fluorescent tubes were even hand-painted to achieve the softer glow required. The cityscape effect is completed by fibre-optic lighting in the ceiling, with – count 'em – 422 tails, creating a mesmeric effect.

Snooker loopy

The install was carried out by Enfield-based Pounds, and took around 18 months from start to finish. If this sounds like a long job, it should be noted that the barn in which the home cinema is installed was completely gutted and rebuilt, so Pounds were in at the beginning, running cables and working with the builders, then back when all the building work had been completed to terminate their cables with lovely shiny bits of home cinema kit.

When you have a completely empty building to play with like this, it is tempting to go big with the home cinema room, and so lose some of the intimacy that is part and parcel of the movie experience. There was no danger of that here though. For when you exit the cinema to the rear, you find yourself in the games room, complete with full-size snooker table. 'There's a minimum amount of space you need all round the table to play your shots, so that limited the size of the room,' he says. Even so, because of the need to accommodate the snooker table next door, the projector had to be half sunk into the rear wall in order to get the throw distance needed for the huge 9ft screen.

Having met Pounds designer Martin Redwood by chance at a motor racing day, the two men started to put some serious thought to how they could make Paul's home cinema dream a reality. With the barn being ripped to pieces and rebuilt by the builders, the relationship between the builders and Pounds was always going to be important. In this respect, Paul says there were no problems. ▶



◀ 'The relationship between the builders and Pounds could not have been better,' he says. 'In fact, I think they were the only "contractor" the builders didn't complain about!'

The challenge for the installers, apart from the fact that the room is on the first floor, and, during the refurbishment, could only be accessed through a small door at the top of a rickety temporary staircase, was to create a home cinema room that would accommodate the needs of an enthusiast who had a very clear idea of what he wanted.

'The air conditioning is a case in point,' explains Martin. 'Because the room is at the top of the house, it gets very hot in summer, so Paul was insistent on having an aircon system in there, and he wanted it vented into the room. This meant we had to effectively hide the aircon installation in the pelmets at the sides of the room and build in grilles so that there would be an even flow of air, which would not create too much noise. This was all quite fiddly and hard to achieve, but knowing how important this was to Paul, we were able to give him what he wanted.'

Another of Paul's demands was for a step effect in front of the main sofa. Accommodating this meant more work for the builders, who had to move one of the room's big supporting beams down by three courses of bricks. But once again, Paul got what he wanted, and the two-tier nature of the room is perfect for accommodating a large group of adults and kids in the same room. To make sure the kids don't trip over the step at the end of a film, Martin and his team sunk some LEDs into the step, just like a real cinema.

A different league

Despite his interest in gear, Paul says he was happy to leave the choice of kit to Martin and his team.

'I'm familiar with the lower-end and mid-range kit, but this stuff is in a different league' he says.

Pounds chose a Runco VX1000 DLP projector for its high brightness, which is a must when you're trying to fill a 9ft StewartScreen Firehawk screen. The front speakers are from Miller and Kreisel. These, including two subs, are concealed behind the screen, which is acoustically transparent. To maximise the surround effect, there are two pairs of sides

and one pair of rear speakers, all Triad dipoles which are sunk into the ceiling. Apart from the Crestron remote to control everything, including the Lutron lighting systems – there are two in the room – the rest of the kit is housed just outside the room in the corner of the games room. Here you'll find a Denon DVD-A1 DVD player, Sky+ box, Lexicon MC12 processor and Sherbourn 7-channel amp.

'We went for the Lexicon partly on sound quality, but also because of its switching capabilities,' says Martin. 'It's very intuitive. If you put a DTS disc on, for example, you can set it up to recognise the fact it's DTS and select THX sound.'

The kit is housed on a Mid-Atlantic racking system, which pulls out onto a glass panel in the floor which looks down onto the kids' playroom below. But don't panic, the glass can take it. 'I had to weigh the kit and the rack and give the details to the builders, who then commissioned a sheet of toughened and laminated glass that could take three times that weight, just to be on the safe side,' explains Martin.

THE KIT

- ◆ Runco VS1000 DLP processor, ISF calibrated
- ◆ StewartScreen gin acoustically-transparent perforated projector screen
- ◆ Sherbourn 7-channel amp
- ◆ Denon DVD-A1 DVD player
- ◆ Pioneer laserdisc player
- ◆ Sky+ box
- ◆ Panasonic NVHS880 S-VHS VCR
- ◆ 3 Miller & Kreisel MK S150P active speakers
- ◆ 2 Miller & Kreisel MK MX350 active subwoofers
- ◆ 3 pairs of Triad In-Wall dipole surround speakers
- ◆ Creston CP2 processor and colour touchscreen controller
- ◆ Middle Atlantic equipment rack
- ◆ Lutron 3103/3106 lighting controller
- ◆ Two runs of cold-cathode coving lighting and 422 fibre-optic 'star' lights with cold-cathode lighting for Duratran images
- ◆ LED lighting for stage and step areas

'Some of the fluorescent tubes were even hand painted to achieve the softer glow required'

Acoustic implications

Those cityscape panels have implications for the acoustics of the room so Pounds specified a thick carpet, with an equally thick underlay. They also put insulation in the walls and clad the rear walls in panels faced with alcantara, the upmarket suede-like fabric which is often specified for high-end home cinema installations. These panels are hinged, concealing shelves which offer ample storage for Paul's DVD collection. As a final acoustic measure, the installers also recommended a fabric, rather than a leather sofa.

After 18 months of planning and project managing, the barn conversion, including the home cinema room, was finally completed last September. So did it live up to Paul's expectations? 'Oh yes,' he says. 'I had every confidence in Martin and his team because they had been so professional, but I was completely blown away when I first heard the system. I had also been very sceptical about a projected system. This was my single biggest concern, but I took it on faith from Martin, and he was absolutely right. I'm very impressed by the clarity and brightness of the projector and I prefer the filmic effect of the projector now, compared to the stark effect of the plasma screen.' Not surprisingly, Paul says the room gets lots of use. 'It's one of the favourite rooms in the house' he says. 'Apart from the movies, the kids can hook their PlayStation up in there and they absolutely love that.'

As is obvious from the size of the property – the home cinema is in what you would call an annex if it wasn't so big – Paul is clearly not short of a bob or two. But as the laser disc collection shows, he is first and foremost, a home cinema nut. And when someone has both the money and the vision to create a home cinema like this, with a little help from those clever people at Pounds, of course, you have to say, he and his family deserve every bit of enjoyment they get from it ■

