

THE HOME Theater

February 2001

To the Victor

Go the

Spoils



A California audiophile proves that patience can pay off in the form of a Vandersteen home theater system.

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To the Victor, Go the Spoils



A. The designer of the theater's loudspeakers, Richard Vandersteen, uses a frequency analyzer to measure the room's bass response.

B. To the right of the front array are double doors that conceal the theater's electronics and hundreds of pieces of software.

We live in a world full of clichés. In fact, it's hard to get through a day without hearing one. Such gems as, "Good things come to those who wait," "Patience is a virtue," and "Slow and steady win the race" often sound inane in this era of instant gratification. Until, that is, you talk to Gary Steinberg. Gary is living proof that the above clichés can really pay off, sometimes in spades.

Gary wanted a dedicated listening room and home theater that was truly a comfortable environment, with the emphasis placed on great music. "I really love music, and the room I was planning to build had to be all about performance." Gary is also an avid classical guitarist and has a good ear for musical performance in a loudspeaker. Hence, he found himself at Genesis Audio and Video in Orange County, California, in January 1999.

Recalls system designer and project manager Marvin Allin, "Gary was looking for a new pair of speakers, and I auditioned the Vandersteen Model 5 for him. He liked them immensely but still

wanted to audition a few other brands that Genesis doesn't carry. Three months later, he came back and asked if he could listen to the Model 5s again. This time, he brought along an extensive collection of CDs, and we had a great time listening to different music and evaluating the performance of the speakers."

Gary, who had listened to several speakers, believed that the Model 5s were the best-sounding speakers by far in that price range and ordered a pair. Apparently, at that time, there was a 12-week lead time on production. Obvi-

ously, Gary is a patient man.

He came back to see Marvin at Genesis yet again, and this time he was carrying plans for the dedicated listening room/theater he was going to add on to his home. Adds Marvin, "After he approved my concepts, I told him I wanted to bring in a designer that I thought would be just right for this job, Lezlie Trujillo." Lezlie is a Southern California-based interior designer who has also specialized in the design and installation of home theaters for more than a decade. Lezlie understands the importance



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of equipment performance, and she works hard not to compromise that in favor of aesthetics.

That said, after she looked at the rather distinctive shape of the

compressed Fiberglas with a black fiber back. We did this to prevent sound leakage into the remainder of the house, and it also acts as a bass trap."

Around the rest of the room, installed to mathematical calculations, are additional two-by-four studs with Fiberglas insulation, $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch soundboard, and $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch drywall covered with acoustically transparent Guilford of Maine fabric. This helps to control the frequencies in the room. Massive amounts of plywood over Fiberglas at the bottom third of the room's walls provide the room with flexible bass response.

Adds homeowner Gary, "We even used 100 percent wool



job not only with the fabric-covered walls but with tuning the room with various absorbers and diffusers. Adds Marvin, "We also talked to Lezlie about designing some natural diffusion for the room, and she came up with a fabulous on-the-wall bookshelf at the rear of the room that really does the trick."

In fact, Richard Vandersteen—the acclaimed designer of the Vandersteen Model 5 loudspeakers, who has been designing speakers since the mid-1970s—

has been out to the house and helped to tune the bass in the room. Talk about full service. According to Richard, "It's all about preserving the waveform, and I prefer to deal with problem rooms through diffusion rather than absorption, which can compress the dynamic range. Diffusion can solve acoustic problems without absorbing energy."

Richard used a frequency analyzer to tune the bass and determine proper speaker placement, and he was delighted with the results of the room even before he started measuring. "I can often tell how accurate a surround sound system is going to be before I even enter the theater. If it sounds great



C. & D. The cabinetry that ensconces the Zenith 64-inch RPTV opens to reveal the amp's unique placement over the center-channel speaker. This was done to keep the amp as close as possible to the speakers to avoid a lengthy cable run.

E. A foot of plywood, under Guilford of Maine acoustic fabric, surrounds the side-channel speakers to aid reflectivity. Lighting by Lutron enhances the room's theatricality.

Vandersteen Model 5 loudspeakers, Lezlie was able to duplicate the shape of the speakers in the cabinetry behind where the speakers are placed, much to the delight of Gary and his family. It's the actual nuts-and-bolts construction of the room that really shows where attention to detail is imperative. By using acoustic computer-modeling software, they were able to determine where the problem spots in the room would be.

Says Marvin, "For the front wall and ceiling behind the main A/V cabinet, we placed a 1-inch air gap from the rest of the house. Then we installed two-by-four studs with Fiberglas insulation. Over that is $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch soundboard, then SoundCor soundblock followed by $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch drywall and 4-inch duct material. This is a moderately



carpet from Berber, as nylon carpet can be reflective. We installed heavy-duty, solid doors that are weather-stripped to help prevent sound leakage, as well as double-paned sliders and windows."

Marvin credits Jaysen Van of Fabric Walkcraft for an excellent

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F. Two menus on the PHAST touch-screen indicate how easy it is to use the theater and have parental control.

from the hallway, can you imagine how it will actually sound in the room?! Genesis did a wonderful job on this theater."

The equipment rack is ensconced to the right of the system behind doors identical to the matching double

pair you use to enter the theater. This gives the front of the theater a symmetrical, seamless appearance. To the right of the Middle Atlantic rack system are custom-built shelves that hold Gary's hundreds of CDs.

One of the problems that was creatively overcome was the need for short cable runs between the electronics and the speakers. The

Equipment List

Preamp/Processors and Amplifiers

- 1 Proceed PAV preamp and analog processor
- 1 Proceed PDSB digital processor
- 1 Proceed MRC-671 seven-channel audio-output card
- 1 Proceed HPA-3 three-channel amplifier for L/C/Rs
- 2 Proceed AMP-2 two-channel amplifiers for sides and rears

Speakers

- 2 Vandersteen Model 5 floor-standing speakers, custom cherry finish
- 1 Vandersteen VCC Signature center-channel speaker, black finish
- 2 Vandersteen V2W subwoofers, MDF black finish
- 4 Vandersteen VSM Signature side and rear speakers, custom cherry finish

Sources

- 1 Proceed PMDT Reference DVD/CD player
- 1 RCA DTC100 HD-DBS receiver and dish

- 1 Sony SLVR-1000 S-VHS hi-fi stereo VCR
- Cox Cable digital cable, customer supplied

Video Monitor

- 1 Zenith IQB64W10W 64-inch rear-projection HDTV

Automation

- 1 PHAST Landmark Cinema Package color touchpanel RF remote control
- 1 Lutron GRX-3106 Grafik Eye lighting-control system
- 2 Tice Audio Power Block III C power conditioners
- 1 Cinepro PL-1800 power conditioner, with pull-out lights

Cables

- 3 AudioTruth Sterling terminated speaker cables for L/C/Rs
- 3 AudioQuest Coral 4m XLR cables
- 4 AudioQuest Coral 1m XLR cables
- 1 AudioQuest Custom Topaz Y-cable for subs
- 1 AudioQuest OPTILINK 1 2m fiberoptic digital cable
- 1 AudioQuest VID TWO 2m digital cable

- 1 Tributaries V-1 5m component cable
- 1 Tributaries DCV-S 5m S-video cable
- 3 Tributaries DCV-S 2m S-video cables
- 2 Tributaries Delta Stereo audio cables

Equipment Rack

- 1 Middle Atlantic ERK-4025/LRD 40 Space equipment rack
- 1 Middle Atlantic CBS-ERK-25 caster base
- 1 Middle Atlantic HBL1 1 Space flat aluminum panel, black brushed finish
- 1 Middle Atlantic RSH-2A-C 2 Space custom rackmount, black brushed finish
- 7 Middle Atlantic RSH-3A-C 3 Space custom rackmounts, black brushed finish
- 1 Middle Atlantic RSH-4A-C 4 Space custom rackmount, black brushed finish
- 2 Middle Atlantic TA 77-inch trim strips, black brushed finish
- 6 Middle Atlantic VT1 1 Space vent panels
- 1 Middle Atlantic VTF3 3 Space vent panel

To the Victor *Go the Spoils*



G. From left to right, system designer and project manager Marvin Allin, homeowner Gary Steinberg, and interior designer Lezlie Trujillo listen to some cool tunes. Lezlie designed the natural acoustic diffusion shelves on the rear theater wall.

runs had to be kept to 8½ feet—due, of course, to sound quality first and foremost but also to the fact that the cable is very expensive. To overcome this problem, the entire team pooled their creativity to design the main A/V cabinet. The cabinet unfolds, much like a butterfly's wings, to reveal a shelf above the Zenith 64-inch high-definition projection TV. This shelf holds the main Proceed HPA-3 three-channel amplifier. The amp powers the left and right Vandersteen Model 5 speakers and the center-channel Vandersteen VCC Signature speaker. This creative solution resulted in the cable runs being no more than 8½ feet. Two more Proceed AMP-2 two-channel amplifiers, located in the equipment rack, power the Vandersteen VSM Signature side and rear-channel speakers.

When it was time to decide on the right DVD player for Gary's system, the CDs came out again, and Gary and Marvin were back in

the Genesis sound room, listening. Says Marvin, "Without fail, the Proceed PMDT Reference DVD/CD player handled and delivered all of the musical nuances that Gary was looking for in the system, and the quality of the video could certainly be appreciated on his HDTV set. The upgradeable architecture of the Proceed DVD player was an added bonus." Interestingly, Vandersteen Model 5 speakers are also fully upgradeable, with a crossover that slides out to meet future needs.

The room definitely needed a dedicated electrical circuit, so Gary added a new breaker panel with four dedicated 20-amp circuits. With that, the prewire was finished in July of 1999. Eight months later, the Genesis install team, headed by Jeff Bartlett, was able to start the final installation. The job was eight months behind schedule, through no fault of Genesis; once again, Gary's patience was paying off.

System control was also of paramount importance to Gary. Of

course, ease of use was important; however, as the father of teenagers, Gary also wanted to limit all of the raw horsepower in the rack. In other words, the kids could only go up to "level one." A PHAST system was employed to handle the control. Genesis technicians Frank Moctezuma and Kevin Dry did a very creative job of programming the touchpanel and the equipment to work seamlessly. Comments Marvin, "Control of the caliber of a PHAST is necessary with a system designed to handle analog, digital, NTSC, HDTV, and the different aspect ratios available today. As far as getting past level one, a password is required to turn on the entire system. Anyone can use the touchpanel to watch TV and play games—just not through the system without supervision."

Adds Genesis Audio and Video president Bill Anderson, "Gary has a great attitude about high-performance audio. He allowed

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Marvin and Lezlie to take a form-follows-function design approach in regards to creative license. It has resulted in a very cool room with the best audio attainable."

The highest praise of all comes from homeowner Gary himself: "When I fire up my system, I hear magic. It just doesn't get any better than this." **F**