

Remodel Inspires Tech Overhaul

A massive remodeling project turns a ho-hum house into an indoor/outdoor entertainment escape complete with batting cages and a high-tech cabana.

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It's usually the location that makes a home what it is. And if the private 1 1/2-acre lot purchased a few years ago by Paul and Nancy Harod was any indication, the decade-old domicile would be just perfect for their fun-loving family. "It was a terrific piece of property ... hard to find in Southern California," says Paul. "Unfortunately, we weren't crazy about the house that sat on the land."

The property's existing Spanish style abode didn't quite fit into the family's plans for a place where they would be able to entertain hundreds of guests at a time. Nor did it offer all the fantastic high-tech features that Paul had been pining for. Still, the 4,000-square-foot home did have good bones. So rather than start completely fresh, the Harods decided to remodel the existing structure. It would be a major undertaking that would extend the floor plan by more than 1,000 square feet and would put the residence on the cutting edge of high-tech living.

Initial Plans Turn into Luxury Upgrades

A little knowledge went a long way when the Harods started the huge renovation. After learning from the sales team at Audio Video Design (AVD) in Mission Viejo, CA, about all the wonderful systems that could be incorporated into their newly remodeled house, Paul and Nancy decided to expand their electronics plans from a few plasma TVs and speakers to an architectural lighting system, an elaborate whole-house music system and a control system that would enable them to operate everything including the swimming pool and spa from touchpanels conveniently located everywhere on the property.

"We put together a huge proposal, and they went for it all," recalls Audio Video Design's Aaron Andrew. "In an afternoon, the house went from being a fairly typical Southern California residence to being a luxury estate."

Entertainment On the Court and In the Field

You don't even have to step foot inside Paul and Nancy's house to see the amazing systems in action. In fact, the backyard is probably the best place to experience the magic. Dozens of weather-hardy speakers blanket the outdoor area with music, while three 17-inch Samsung LCD TVs suspended from the rafters in the cabana offer friends and family a cool spot to watch a ball game on a hot afternoon.

When the heat gets too intense, there's a 60,000-gallon swimming pool to dive into. Everything from the temperature of the pool water to the volume of the music can be controlled from a sleek Crestron web tablet hidden inside a drawer at the cabana or from a wireless waterproof remote. In seconds, Paul can turn on the water slide and waterfall, activate the landscape lights and select a song to fire through the rock speakers. One-touch access to everything has made him the consummate party host. "We often throw parties for close to 100 people, and if I didn't have the Crestron touchpanel, I'd be continually running up and down the stairs to the controls inside the pool house to set up something for someone."

A Crestron amplifier also simplifies things. Knowing how much the Harods like to rock out, the AVD team needed to locate the amplifier as close to the speakers as possible, but in a place where it would be protected from the weather. The cabana was the perfect spot. There, the amplifier could easily drive the 22 speakers on the property. Keeping the amp and speakers in close proximity helps reduce the amount of audio degradation that naturally occurs as music travels through speaker wiring, Andrew explains. The setup isn't completely fail-safe, though. Paul did happen to blow one of the outdoor speakers during a Little League pool party for his son, but Paul and the Audio Video Design team jokingly blame that on 50 Cent, the rapper whose songs happened to be playing over the system at the time.

Little Leaguers also get the royal treatment further down the hill, where two tiers have been carved out of the slope to accommodate a variety of sports. Basketball and tennis courts occupy the top tier; batting cages are on the bottom. A quick tap on the web tablet in the cabana sends the music to these areas and snaps on the stadium lights so that practices or pickup games can continue well into the night.

Music and Lighting at the Touch of a Button

While the outdoor systems could easily keep the Harods entertained for an afternoon, the interior spaces are just as much fun. The same Crestron music system that blankets the backyard, fills the inside of the house with tunes from a Sony satellite receiver, an Escient Fireball music server or a Crestron AM/FM radio tuner. It's a sweet setup that displays the music server's song titles alphabetically on the screens of several wall-mounted and portable Crestron touchpanels.

"Picking out a song to play from a list on a screen is a much easier way to get to the music we want because we no longer have to open up CDs," Paul enthuses.

The Harods no longer have to fiddle with light switches, either. One button press on a touchpanel or a custom-engraved Lutron lighting control keypad can instantly illuminate several rooms or the entire backyard.

"If I enter the house through the garage, I usually touch the entry button, which turns on a pathway of lights to the kitchen and up to the bedroom," Paul says. While he's at that touchpanel, he can also adjust the indoor temperature, deactivate the security system, cue the music and even be reminded of a recent family vacation by looking at a few pictures. A high-speed wiring network from OnQ-Legrand can shuttle the digital photos stored on a Dell file server in Paul's home office to the screen of any wired touchpanel or TV.

Video Games: Key Part of Home Theater

One of the biggest TVs is found in the bonus room, a space that doubles as a home theater. Planned from the start as a movie-viewing environment, the room comfortably houses a 110-inch Stewart screen, a JBL Synthesis 7.1 surround-sound system, a Panasonic large venue DLP projector and plenty of seating for guests.

Movies play through a Marantz THX Select progressive-scan DVD player, or the family can choose a ball game from the Sony high-def satellite receiver. The supersize screen is also great for gaming, says Andrew.

“Paul and his son simply touch the GAME icon on the portable Crestron touchpanel, and all the necessary components activate,” he explains. That includes the couch. The sofa was custom built to house Xbox360 and Playstation2 game consoles, the controllers and all of the cartridges. As quickly as the system sets up for a video game, a tap of the touchpanel can switch it over to a DVD or a satellite program.

Tech in the Kitchen, Art in the Bedroom

As fantastic as their bonus-room theater is, Paul and Nancy didn’t want it to steal away all their time from other areas of the house. They kept the good times rolling just about everywhere by outfitting the family room, master bedroom and kitchen with their own entertainment systems, including flat-panel TVs and wireless Crestron touchpanels for controlling all the gear.

The family room sports the biggest TV: a 61-inch plasma HDTV from Marantz nestled between two gorgeous bookcases. The components, including two Sony high-def satellite receivers, a Pioneer DVD player, a Mitsubishi VCR and a B&K Dolby Digital DTS/THX surround-sound receiver are stowed inside a custom designed cabinet featuring a built-in cooling system to ensure that the equipment never overheats. The Sony receiver feeds audio to seven high-end Triad speakers (all built flush with the ceiling and walls) and a Triad subwoofer tucked into the bottom of the entertainment cabinet.

A smaller plasma—a 42-inch Panasonic model on the wall in the kitchen nook—gives the Harods another great place to watch TV. During his famous sports-watching get-togethers, Paul often tunes this set to the same station as the TV in the family room, so that no matter where his guests roam, they can see every free throw, strike out or fumble.

The plasmas are clearly the focal points of the family room and kitchen. In the master bedroom, however, it’s a piece of art that attracts the most attention. That is, until Paul or Nancy presses the TV button on the bedside Crestron touchpanel. That one command signals the Vision Art painting from Solar Shading Systems to roll up behind the frame to reveal a 50-inch Pioneer plasma TV. The Harods selected the motorized VisionArt canvas out of hundreds of images offered by Solar Shading Systems. Says Paul: “We wanted our master bedroom entertainment system to be totally inconspicuous, and this system did the trick.”

A great view and a large lot inspired Paul and Nancy to take their renovation project to the nth degree. Into their newly remodeled home and their tiered all-sports backyard, they incorporated electronic systems that would make every inch of the property feel like an entertainment paradise. Whether it’s with music from a rock speaker by the tennis courts, movies from a TV that turns into a piece of art, or joystick action from a 110-inch screen, it’s all fun and games at the Harod house.

Photos



A 61-inch Marantz plasma presents audio and video in full high-def. All of the components, including two Sony high-def satellite receivers and a B&K Dolby Digital DTS/THX surround sound receiver are stowed inside the custom-designed cabinet. Seven high-end Triad speakers stay out of sight as well, having been installed flush with the walls and ceiling. Photo by Jim Doyle.



The kitchen is command central in this home. A large in-wall touchpanel (above, right) gives them convenient control over the home's whole-house audio and video system, security system, lighting system and all of the outdoor features. Photo by Jim Doyle.



A 50-inch plasma poses as a piece of art when the homeowners aren't using it to watch a ball game or a movie. On command from a bedside touchpanel, a canvas painting descends from the top of the frame to cover the screen. Another tap of the touchpanel lifts the canvas. ("French Kiss" (c) Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC. All Rights Reserved.) Photo by Jim Doyle.



The Harod family opted to remodel an existing house, but this was no normal revamp: the project added an additional 1,000 square feet to the floorplan. Photo by Jim Doyle.



A whole-house music system feeds tunes to the hidden speakers in this dining room. Photo by Jim Doyle.