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Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
Web: www.friscostyle.com

Ad Sales: (972) 335-1306

bring home the theater

by amanda vancura



THE ROOM IS DARK. Those watching the screen can almost feel the sound rushing through them as the action intensifies. Things seem to be happening all around – it's almost as if these spectators are a part of the action themselves. Yet, at the end, the lights turn on and these television watchers are back in the comfort of their own living room. It's all a part of the home theater experience.

Home theater systems are becoming more and more common in today's households. This month, at the height of the football season, anxious consumers are doing what they can to ensure they fully experience the big game. Likewise, with new blockbuster movies hitting the DVD shelves each month, families are eager to feel the same impact as a real movie theater.

"These systems are designed to put you in the action," says Brent Neer, owner of Frisco-based Custom Audio Concepts, a company specializing in custom audio/video sales, installation and service. "With much bigger screens than televisions and high quality audio, you have a viewing experience as good as – or better – than at the movies."

According to the Consumer Electronics Association, home theater systems are quickly becoming a trend. The number of U.S. households owning one of these systems has doubled in the past five years and is up to 30% in January 2003 as compared to 16% in January 1998. In addition, more television programs are being delivered in surround sound and consumers are spending more on DVD software than on movie tickets.

But is a home theater system affordable? Experts say consumers can spend as much or as little on a home theater system as they like. "Systems can range from \$1,000 to more than you can imagine," says Tamme Leff of Frisco-based Sound Perfection, a custom home theater specialist. Leff mentions that the basic system usually includes two front speakers, two rear speakers, one center channel, one subwoofer, surround receiver and DVD player. However, some consumers choose more elaborate components for their systemse.

An option for those wanting the basic system is to start with the home theater-in-a-box, usually available at any retail electronics store. "Home theater-in-a-box

enables people to get into the theater experience without the headache of matching components," explains Tony Weiss, President and Chief Operating Officer of CompUSA. "HTIB provides a total solution in a box with nothing else to buy. You just pop it open and connect the wires." These systems come with the basic surround sound components, receiver and DVD player for anywhere from \$100 to \$1000. Of course, many retailers also provide advanced components, such as Plasma televisions, separate speakers and more.

Elite Trendz is a single-source provider of professional audio and video solutions for residential, automotive, marine and commercial customers and is sensitive to the design of the home theater. Company founder, David Huffman says, "The ultimate goal of home theater design is to blend a superior sound and video perfectly with the home décor. We work carefully with clients to ensure seamless livability for years to come."

So where do you begin? Two things to consider before purchasing a home theater system are budget and size of the room. This will ultimately determine the type of system purchased. Then, get down to the details of the system. Consider specifics such as big-screen televisions or front-projection and in-wall/ceiling loudspeakers versus floor-standing units. Leff also comments that customers can add to their systems as they go along. "Consider installing the home theater in stages if the budget does not allow for all the equipment to go in at once," says Leff. "Find a company that will be flexible and have different payment plans."

No matter the budget or size of the home, creating the movie theater atmosphere is within reach. Many people finish off basements or attics to use as a media room. Some choose to start with the home-theater-in-a-box while others have elaborate theater rooms with curtains and plush seating.

When you watch the Super Bowl this month, relax on the couch for movie night or catch your favorite musician on TV, are you truly bringing the entire experience into your home?

Amanda VanCura is a freelance writer based in Plano.

