

DIGITAL **PROJECTION**

Home Cinema



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Brandon Smith Audio Design Great Room, San Francisco

"The projector is a pretty amazing projector. It really allows us to handle that room, both in the dark and with ambient light." - Brandon Smith, Owner of Brandon Smith Audio

Making the Great Room a Great Entertainment Experience

When it comes to home theater AV, many homeowners need a lot of direction. The integrator needs to pick out equipment, explain why it's necessary, and even sometimes "sell" the client on its usefulness and price. That was far from the case with this homeowner.

Putting it mildly, this client is a techie. Although he wishes to stay anonymous and is in fact very modest, his resume explains a bit about his passion for having the best available technology in his home. "I wrote one of the first MPEG-3 encoder-decoders for the Sun Microsystems workstation, and wrote a CD ripper and uploader program that basically allowed the whole company access to the audio collection," he explained. "This was like Napster in 1997, but only inside of Sun. I also got into the MPEG-2 video encoding and decoding—just because that was a fun and interesting thing for me." Pulling some more background from the anonymous homeowner he said, "CERN uses some of the technology that I developed in terms of storing and filtering the data that came off the Large Hadron Collider (LHC)." And if you are reading this story, it's likely you'll be envious of his trip. "Prior to its opening, I actually got to visit, taking an elevator one kilometer down to see the Atlas Detector and walk around on the catwalks through the LHC."

Even a Super Tech Needs an AV Integrator for His Home

While most go to the nth degree building a dedicated home theater, the homeowner of this 12,000-square-foot house wanted something bigger, and more intimate. "If there are special events, like you want to watch the Super Bowl, movies that are still only in the theaters, or the premiere of Game of Thrones, it would be nice to have a venue where you can have a dozen or so friends over and watch something together," said the homeowner.

The grand home theater is located in the great room of the open-plan main floor with massive glass walls (without shades), 25-foot high ceiling and a floor to ceiling slab stone fireplace. He knew what he wanted, but needed help making it a reality, so he called in Brandon Smith Audio Design, an integrator based out of Scotts Valley, CA.

"He wanted it to be a big, open space, where you could watch TV, sit on the couch, relax, and feel like he was more in a home environment rather than in a theater environment," said Smith, who was recommended to the client by Heather Harrington, the interior designer involved with the project. "It was a really interesting job because I worked pretty closely with the client—because he is so technical."

The center of this \$500,000-plus system is the Digital Projection INSIGHT 4K LASER projector. This model can deliver a lamp-free 4096 x 2160 resolution, 4K 3D capabilities, and 12,000 ANSI lumens. "We looked at various projectors and he selected this one himself, which is pretty cool," Smith said. "He really liked laser technology, and I couldn't argue with that."

"Getting one of the early units of that was awesome," the homeowner said. "And then figuring out how to distribute the various video feeds and how to connect it to everything—that's where Brandon's expertise came into play."

Because it was not an option to put shades on the massive windows, the projector needed to provide a great viewing



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experience even during the day. “We’re using that projector, number one, as a light cannon,” said Smith. But it also looks great. “The color range on that projector is amazing.” The homeowner agreed, “It’s pretty incredible compared to say your standard fixed light source with DLP chips in front of it. And especially the reds and the greens on the lasers—they just pop. The color you get is just very beautiful, especially at night.”

Of course, having a laser projector also meant that the homeowner never has to worry about changing bulbs. “The physics of the situation is that lamp projectors get really, really hot, and that affects the lifetime. The last thing I want to do on a system like this is have to worry about changing bulbs every couple of years,” said the homeowner. “The laser had the advantage in terms of brightness, in terms of clarity, and in terms of longevity.”

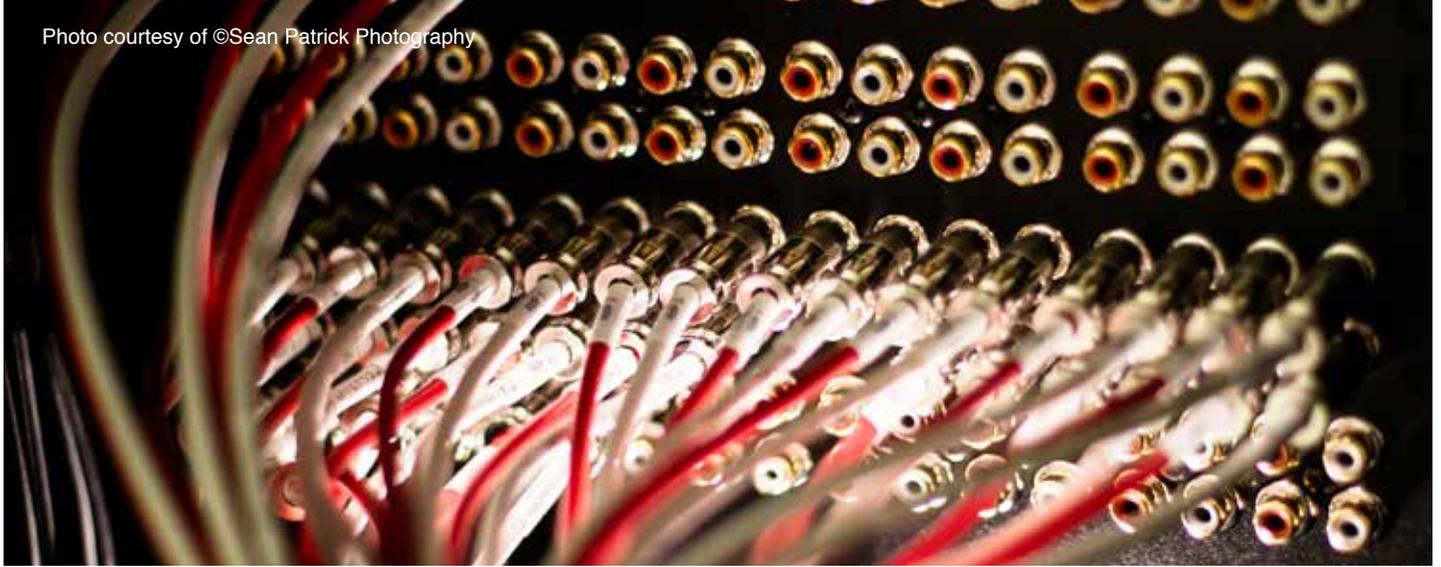
A Great Room Brings Great Challenges

The homeowner was a stickler for ensuring the cabinet for the projector, the housing for screen and speakers blended in with and met the high standards of the existing architectural elements. While intimately involved in all aspects, he credits the success of the final room to the co-design and integration between Brandon Smith Audio Design, Heather Harrington Design and cabinet maker, Wood Classics. “Not only for how the screen looks in comparison to the rest of the house architecture, but the actual design of the cabinet so it could house the 4K projector, which by no means is a tiny thing—it is kind of giant—that looks like something that belongs in the house, looks very nice, is unobtrusive, and has all the air-handling, baffling, and sound-deadening so when that thing is going crazy you don’t really hear it in the room,” said the homeowner. “The integration of the speakers and the vibration isolation for these subwoofers—all of that was just pulled off very, very well.” Cabinetry was also designed to house the speakers on either side of the fireplace. And when not in use, mounted to the stone fireplace a motorized 114-inch Screen Innovations Slate projection screen hides behind an enclosure designed to complement the wooden arches found throughout the home.

To match the eye-popping image, Smith put together a killer sound system for the room, with Dolby Atmos decoding and Genelec in-ceiling speakers for a truly immersive experience. It even has a Datasat processor, which is something that’s typically reserved for large professional venues. “The way it works is wherever the speakers are, you go through the calibration and it takes the audio input—whether it’s Dolby Atmos or pick your favorite encoding technology—and renders it for the speakers as they’re configured. That to me was a big selling point.” However, there is one part of the sound setup that the homeowner loves the most. “The subwoofers are probably the coolest feature ever. They literally will shake the couch in front of it,” the homeowner said.

Because the INSIGHT 4K LASER was one of the first 4K laser projectors on the market, and one of the first units to ship, having support from Digital Projection was crucial to the project. Smith cites the Digital Projection’s Concierge Service as being instrumental, since it provided support from beginning to end.

“Digital Projection has been really phenomenal in their support of the projector and of the installation,” said Smith. “The Concierge Service has worked with us to give us control and take our feedback to work with engineering to make changes to the projector. We’ve had some changes and some firmware updates.” That service also helped get things like specs, airflow requirements, and other essentials to the team during the installation process.



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Content Is King

A high-end AV system deserves the best content, which is why Smith installed a Prima Cinema system. This \$35,000 player can stream first-run movies that are still playing in theaters, ranging from \$500 to \$750 a pop, per viewing. This level of access to first-run content is usually reserved to cinemas. To ensure piracy is not a concern, to purchase a Prima Cinema requires an application process and background check.

Once installed, the Prima Cinema system is quite impressive. It features two power supplies and two network ports. There's also a fingerprint reader to authorize film purchases, which are then routed through the equipment rack downstairs. Prima Cinema delivers full sound and full video, without any compression.

"If you unscrew the box, it will actually self-destruct," said Smith. "So yeah, it's quite a system."

To accommodate the Prima Cinema system and other new components in the house, Smith also updated the home's entire network infrastructure, as well as the multi-room audio system and equipment racks. Everything is tied into a Control4 remote for easy control throughout the house.

It's About the Experience

"I'd say it's a superior experience to going to a theater," the homeowner said. "I would argue that my furniture is more comfortable than what you find in a theater." Of course, there's always the 'pause button' you can't get at the theater. "The sound is as good if not better, the projection is as good if not better. And when you're watching a movie in there, it's a really awesome experience, especially at night when the brightness and the clarity of the projector really comes through and shows its stuff, so to speak."

At Your Service: Digital Projection's Concierge Service

Included with the purchase of the Digital Projection INSIGHT 4K LASER projector was DPI's Concierge Service. "It's allowed us sort of a back door into Digital Projection," said Brandon Smith of Brandon Smith Audio Design, an integrator based out of Scotts Valley, CA. "We have dedicated support staff there that we work with who understand the projector, and understand the installation. We also have the ability to communicate directly with engineering at Digital Projection."

According to Smith, the service was particularly instrumental during the design phase of a recent \$500,000-plus install in San Francisco's Bay Area. The company provided information on specifications, airflow requirements, and more. That way, his company could plan out things like cabinetry and ventilation needs. The company was also there at the end of the process, in order to calibrate the projector on-site.

"If we need things, if we have a problem, or if we have a question, they get on it," Smith said. "The Concierge Program has made it much easier for us."

While not formally rolled out as a program, Digital Projection Inc. (DPI) started its concierge service 20 years ago when

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it shipped its first projector. "When we first brought our products to market they were brand new technology," said Mike Akridge, VP of Operations at DPI. "Early on we adopted this view, 'We really have got to be involved with this. If we're going to be successful, we need our dealers and the staging partners to be successful.'"

With the introduction of Digital Projection's INISIGHT 4K projectors in 2016, the Concierge Service was formally announced. "We recognized that our 4K platform represented a very similar step forward—a new technology with the introduction of the first high-def image platform." Moving into a different resolution, how that signal is transmitted, and how it is processed is a significant order of magnitude in difficulty. "A 4K signal is four times a 1080p signal," explained Akridge. "The bandwidth and the signal processing required has to be properly processed end-to-end or you're going to have a compromised image. You'll have a great, very expensive projector and it won't look good."

The DPI Concierge Service includes as much expertise a dealer/installer might need to help ensure a successful installation. "I need to say this the right way—I don't ever want us to be the ones with the light on us—that's for our dealers," said Akridge. "I want them to enjoy the visibility of the success. I want them to have that glow around them. If we can be there and support them and help them be successful, then we've done our job."

Every install has different needs, but Akridge provided an overview. "Fundamentally, when we get the order for the projector we have an initial call, we reach out to the project manager or project engineer both. We ask for as much information as they're comfortable sharing—drawings, details about the installation, expectations—and we're happy to sit down and have meetings face-to-face or conduct initial calls to review the engineering. We present information, we ask questions, and then we'll arrange the site survey. We'll either support them during the install, or at least be in very closely after that to do the system commissioning." The service is available to DPI's home cinema or commercial AV customers.

To date Akridge has been intimately involved with each Concierge Service support project. His most rewarding part? "Celebrating with them at the end and being able to share the excitement," said Akridge. Oftentimes he is with the dealer and homeowner for the unveiling and there's a collective, "Wow, that's the best image we've ever seen.'"



INSIGHT 4K LASER



Key Features:

- Full 4K resolution - 4096 x 2160 - 12,000 ANSI Lumens
- 3 Chip DLP
- 2,000:1 contrast ratio
- Compact, lightweight 4K chassis

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