

SOLID WALLS OF SOUND

Technology blends sight and sound



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL DRECHLER

Home theaters: Kris Paulson relaxes and activates a home theater projection system. Consumers have a variety of choices today when it comes to choosing sound or video equipment, from the new DVD-Audio systems, home projection systems to surround sound systems.

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK
STAFF WRITER
kabramczyk@oe.hometown.com

Home entertainment centers are becoming as important to homeowners as kitchens and bathrooms. Consumers are riding the crest of this technology wave, particularly with DVD-Audio systems. The International Recording Media Association predicts worldwide sales will reach 40 million units this year, including 12 million in North America. That's up significantly from last year's worldwide sales of 12 million and four million in North America.

"If you have one, you understand why people want one," said John Emke, owner and president of Mark Electronics in Canton. "They're calling for recessions in a lot of industries, but home theater is not one of them."

It's all part of the latest trend in home entertainment — the recent nuptials between sight and sound, so prevalent in technology today. Walk into any appliance store and the large projection screens will catch your eye, even though they're in separate rooms at the rear of the store.

But it is the sound that sells the DVD-Audio. "DVD-Audio is new, and it's up and coming," said Kris Paulson, general manager of Paulson's Audio & Video in Farmington Hills.



Getting technical: Paulson shows the input and output components on a receiver used to obtain video and audio on a projection screen.

What is DVD-Audio?

DVD-Audio is a format designed to create the best picture and sound, better than the popular videocassette recorder and a step up from the quality of sound on conventional CDs and DVD-Videos. DVD-Audio uses a multi-channel, high resolution format, using data solely for high quality sound.

DVD-Audio houses a 5.1-channel system, which adds a center channel speaker for a center image and two rear speakers for a bass channel and optional subwoofer, with what the traditional 2-channel systems include, that is the left and right speakers.

All DVD-Audio players designed as universal players will be able to play DVD-Video disks and CDs.

"It really gives you the 'reverb' (echoes) and special effects," Paulson said.

Paulson then pops in a CD and plays Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Lucky Man*. The room is immersed in Keith Emerson's keyboards and Greg Lake's vocals and guitars. The separation and depth is unmistakable and distinctive. Each note and nuance by the recording artists is expanded into a multi-dimensional soundscape.

It's as close to a live performance as you'll hear.

"Surround sound is a major focus," said Paulson. "Folks already own bigger TVs and they want the sound to go with it. They're going away from the big box to the sub-satellite systems."

Home theater systems

Front projection systems also are popular choices for people who want to create their own home theater. The projector is attached to the ceiling.

"This is installed in the lower levels, typically, because it is a light sensitive system," Paulson said. Those systems run \$6,000 or \$7,000.

Why spend so much on DVDs or front projection systems? Customers are more affluent and can afford it, Paulson said. "They have large homes and they want to enjoy it with their relatives and friends, and they want to have luxuries for friends and family," Paulson said.

Customers also want sound systems installed throughout the entire house. In-ceiling systems can be flush-mounted into the ceiling.

"The woofer and tweeter can pivot around for surround sound," said Paulson. "A lot of these were straight out of the wall, so there was no flexibility."

That helps listeners who want to move around the room or move chair locations without losing sound quality.

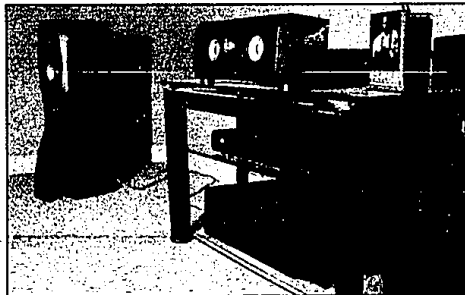
Cheap alternative

CD players remain a less expensive alternative for those who can't afford a DVD-Audio but need a new sound system. When shopping for an audio system, customers should consider their needs and room size.

A smaller 35-watt CD player unit takes up less space, but if you have a 20- by 18-foot room with a vaulted ceiling, "it doesn't have the oomph," Paulson said. "The little cube isn't going to cut it." You can get the smaller size, but "you won't get the performance."

Larger in-wall speakers generally work better for a larger, more-open room. In-wall speakers are space-savers, said Emke.

"Most people are going with more things in the wall," said Emke, including televisions in the wall and CD units stored in a closet, operated with a touch-pad. "If you have a 12-by-12 room with a 28-inch TV plus a cabinet, that can come into the room quite a bit," Emke said.



Turn it on: Homeowners want more entertainment in their homes, and they are willing to dish out the extra cash needed to purchase DVD systems like the one shown above. Gone are the days of corrugated cardboard in speakers. Today's speaker cones (below) are made from aluminum to create a lighter component.



Please see SOUND, C2

INSIDE



MARTY FIGLEY
Grasses for masses
Ornamental grasses still play an important part in landscaping and are easy to grow and maintain.
See Garden Spot, Page 3



JOE GAGNON
More trouble
Winter's cold weather can cause more trouble than just creating ice dams on rooftops, according to the Appliance Doctor.
See Home Work, Page 4



HOMETOWN LIFE:
A life together:
Bob and Betty Yackley, together 60 years, reminisce about World War II and life today.
See HomeTown Life, page 6C