

# Make your house more fun with a home theater

BY JANA SOELDNER DANGER  
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A home theater or media room can be both fun and functional. You can watch movies in your pajamas instead of dressing up to go out to a commercial theater, finding a parking spot and buying expensive popcorn. Sure, you can stream movies in the den or family room, but having a dedicated space lets you come closer to reproducing the same kind of experience as a movie theater and also contain the clutter involved.

Several years ago, dedicated media rooms lost some of their popularity. Now that's changed, said Valerie Law of Genesis Automation in Fort Lauderdale. "Home theaters are coming back," she said.

There are a variety of possibilities. Will the space be a true home theater with a fixed screen at the front and a projector mounted at the back or on the ceiling? Or will it be a media room with a large TV and speakers as well as other recreational elements? The decision will depend on desire, budget and available space.

Audiovisual equipment varies widely in quality and price, and the reasons can be complex. It's a good idea to consult a trusted expert or two so you get something that will provide the kind of experience you're looking for but won't require a second mortgage.

"Think about what you're trying to achieve," said Jaime Blomquist, an interior designer in Fort Lauderdale. "Will it be a



Courtesy of Barry Grossman

This home theater by B&G Design and HEDsouth can offer the owner many happy viewing hours.

dedicated space for movies? A place for kids to hang out and play games? Do you want a screen that takes up the entire front wall, or will it be a man cave with multiple TVs instead of a projector?"

A true home theater should shut out distractions, making it quite different from streaming a movie on the TV in the den while someone else in the room is reading and the kids are playing on their phones. Jan Vitrofsky of HEDsouth, a home entertainment and design company based in Hollywood, calls it a "psychovisual" experience. "You're trying to create immersion into the experience of watching the movie or content so you're 'in' the movie," Vitrofsky said.

## SOUND

Sound should travel around the room in ways that maximize the experience, said interior designer Josh Fein of Fein Zalkin Interiors. "If you don't control the sound, it defeats the purpose of a home theater, because the sound will bounce everywhere."

The floor should be carpeted, Fein said. "We try to go with a higher pile," he added.

Walls are important. "You need acoustical panels, some to absorb sound and some to reflect it," Law said. "We do an acoustical map of the room to decide where we want the sound to bounce and where we don't want it to bounce. You want the room to be live, but not an echo chamber." To make the panels attractive, they can be upholstered.

How many speakers are needed? It depends on the size and shape of the room. The minimum would be one on the left, one in the center of the space and one on the right, but there might be literally dozens more, depending on budget and the space.

Visuals are equally important. "Screen size depends on the size of the room," Fein said. "It goes back to scale."

"I try to make the screen as large as possible," Vitrofsky said. "It should be big enough so your eyes go from side to side like at a tennis match instead of

staring straight ahead."

When deciding where to place the screen, Law looks for what she calls the sweet spot, the place that gives the homeowner the very best view. "Not every chair will be perfect," she said. The distance from the sweet spot to the wall should be 2 ½ times the height of the screen, she added.

Technology has greatly improved image resolution.

In fact, available technology is already so good that some homeowners are forgoing the projectors that were once must-haves in home theaters. "Instead of a projector, you can keep it simple with a big TV and speakers," said Attila Kovacs, owner of Miami Wired. Even simpler and less expensive is a sound bar that's integrated with the TV. "The systems can be expandable," Kovacs said.

## SEATING

"Seating needs to be comfortable, because you'll be sitting for a couple of hours," Vitrofsky said. "It should be able to support you."

Traditionally, home theaters have had tiered, individual seating just like a real movie theater. Fein likes leather upholstery. "It's easy to wipe down," he said. "But some people choose plush fabrics. Seats now have multiple positions so you can recline or sit up, and some have phone adapters and cup holders."

But single seats aren't the only option. "We're designing theaters now with sofas and sectionals instead of individual recliners," Blomquist said. "It gives more of a lounge feeling."



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## South Florida's Quality Schools Boosting Real Estate Market

Most families with children decide on where to buy a home by the quality of local education, and South Florida boasts some of the nation's top schools.

MIAMI Realtors can provide home buyers with key information on public and private schools. MIAMI offers its members more than 225 products and services to better serve consumers. Visit [www.MiamiRealtors.com/greatschools](http://www.MiamiRealtors.com/greatschools)

### Top-Performing Public and Private Schools

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) is the largest and arguably most acclaimed urban school district in the United States. MDCPS is home to 392 schools and 345,000 students. District students speak 56 different languages and represent 160 countries. Miami Dade County Public Schools receive more National Magnet Schools of Merit Awards than any other school district nationally.

Broward County Public Schools (BCPS), the first fully accredited school system in Florida since 1962, offers 236 schools, centers and technical colleges.

Nineteen South Florida high schools ranked among the 31 top schools in Florida with the most students among the 2015-17 graduating classes of Harvard, Princeton and MIT, according to Polaris List. Ivy league diplomas are a strong indicator of future success.

The top-two high schools in Florida with the most Ivy League grads are in Broward County, and five of the top-10 are in South Florida counties: #1 Pine Crest School (private- Fort Lauderdale); #2 Cypress Bay High School (public- Weston); #2(tie) Ransom Everglades School (private- Miami); #7 St. Thomas Aquinas High School (private- Fort Lauderdale); and #8 Miami Palmetto Senior High School (public- Miami).

Eight of the 10 best private schools in Florida are located in South Florida counties, according to the 2019 rankings by Niche.com: #1 Pine Crest School (Fort Lauderdale), #2 Ransom Everglades School (Miami), #3 American Heritage School (Plantation), #4 American Heritage School (Delray Beach), #5 Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart (Miami), #6 Gulliver Preparatory School (Miami), #8 NSU University School (Davie) and #9 David Posnack Jewish Day School (Davie).

### Robust Colleges, Universities

Greater Miami ranks as the eighth-largest "college town" in the nation because of its 438,000 full-time and part-time students. Florida International University in Miami ranked as the No. 2 public university in the state, according to the Florida Board of Governors in 2018. The University of Miami ranked as the 53rd best university in the nation, according to U.S. News & World Report rankings for 2019.

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