

Goldmund's state-of-the-art media setup liberates home theatre from the stylistic confines of earlier years.

DESIGN FORMULA

High drama

Media room design turns up the volume on clean, linear styles eschewing excess in favor of sensible sobriety. Finally, technology and design merge in blissful harmony for dramatic effect. TEXT: LISA VINCETTI



CONTENTS:

- 44 Wired for sound
- 47 Flexibility is key
- 51 Hiding places
- 54 Best seat in the house
- 56 Free and easy
- 57 Movie magic



Top to bottom: Artcoustic's Diablo system is hidden behind a motorized, acoustically transparent screen; *Tongue* armchair designed by Mauro Lipparini.



There are few objects more horrendous than an unsightly tube TV, an equally perfidious surround sound system with hulking speakers and the ensuing tangle of cables and cords that used to be the price paid for a home entertainment set up.

Dare we say, there is no plausible sophisticated setting in such trying circumstances. Might we be bolder to suggest that TV and all its required accouterments, from Blu-ray and Xbox 360 hookups to the compulsory audio system, have no place in any chic contemporary design created in 2009?

The latest introductions in media rooms have been geared towards accomplishing just this feat, to make the required 21st century gizmos fade away. Whether it is the stylish new speaker designs, the almost wafer-thin TVs, or the brilliant wall systems of Europe's premier workshops, media rooms are looking at their sleek and glossy best.

"The television needs to be considered in an interior design, but not as a protagonist," notes Carola Vannini, the young star behind Carola Vannini Architecture. "It is more like an accessory that needs to disappear when it's not in use."

WIRED FOR SOUND

From Europe, polished pieces with ample storage options prove the perfect perch for flat-screens and the accompanying equipment. Now, we have to deal with not only DVD players, an audio system and cable-boxes, but Blu-ray machines and iPods as well. Stylish media room wall systems continue to raise the bar, offering discreet solutions for not only plasmas and LCDs, but also for CDs, DVDs and all the audio equipment now *de rigueur* in a home media centre. The trend is sleek, light and minimal, with supreme flexibility in composition and layout, as well as dozens of choices of finishes and material.

We have witnessed a return to more sober design, just like the dropping hemlines and no fuss fashions witnessed on the catwalks, as the global economic



Tisentanta's *Metropolis* system.



crisis continues its downward spiral. One bright spot is a return to 'Less Is More' design. Superfluous design has taken a backseat and the reductive, clean lines heralded by Mies van der Rohe have led the way at the major fairs across Europe.

Design and the absence of wires are primary criteria for those putting together media rooms, says Manuela Catelli of furnishings maker Poliform, adding that "in the past we have used more vivid colours. But now is the moment of minimalism represented by black and white".

Founded in 1942 as a small artisan's shop in the Brianza region of Northern Italy, Poliform's *Sintesi* modular wall system, design by Carlo Colombo, is typical of the company's style. With an emphasis on horizontal linearity, through the use of benches, shelves, chests of drawers and cabinets, *Sintesi* can adapt to a multitude of scenarios. It includes accessories for integrating a plasma or LCD TV, or allows for a sleek cable management system when the elegant system is used as a TV stand.

Likewise, at Molteni & C, *505*, the modular system designed by Luca Meda, gets a 2009 update with changes in form and colour, with glossy and new subdued tones of dune, lead, and Bordeaux available. Whether used as a solution for media systems or as an element to separate spaces, *505* offers a multitude of interpretations and a stylish place to stash goods, thanks to its ample storage drawers and sliding doors.

FLEXIBILITY IS KEY

As more people connect to the world in novel ways, how they live and what they demand from their home environment continues to evolve. For many, that translates into a media area as the heart of the modern home: a centralised hub of living comprised of not only a space for lounging, but the kitchen and dining room as well.

These active regions of the home must provide solace to those returning from a hard day at the office, serve as a meeting point for a family reuniting in the evening and cater to a sophisticated audience invited to a more formal affair.



Poliform's *Sintesi* wall system stresses minimalism and offers convenient features to stash media accoutrements.

Thus the media area often pulls double – and even triple – duty as a zone for relaxation, casual exchange and hostess to a room full of guests. Hence the passion for finding improved ways of disguising the mess that often accompanies media systems.

Tisettanta Design Lab of Italy has revisited some of its storage systems imbuing both with a 2009 spirit, with *Metropolis* given a new look thanks to its shiny “tuttolucido” finish and added features. Practicality, design and technology merge elegantly in *Metropolis*, sporting such options as open units, panels, bookcases, TV units designed for the latest plasma screens, containers with reversible doors for Hi-Fi systems and home offices or desks built into the shelves.

“Media rooms have become the new luxury room to have these days,” says Sharon Holm, of Artcoustic of Denmark. “Entertainment is paramount for most homes and people want to have state-of-the-art sound and cinema systems that complement their interiors. Now media rooms have become integrated living spaces that are fitted with elegant furnishings and high-end AV technology providing a lifestyle solution.”

Artcoustic, whose range of speakers are available in prints ranging from black-and-white photographs pulled from Getty Images to a library full of exclusive patterns, offers a recent high-end installation in Stockholm to bolster its point. The owners of a classic, turn-of-the-century home wanted to outfit their main entertaining space with a cutting-edge media system capable of disappearing entirely. The *coup de grace*: a sprawling Pioneer 50-inch, high-definition plasma screen mounted on a motorised lift from Future Automation and built into a

custom-made cabinet that can automatically be raised up for the owners to view and lowered when not in use – all at the simple touch of a button.

For the sound system the owners selected the Artcoustic *DFS100-75X2* subwoofer, cloaked in an elegant black-and-white image of a debutant from the Getty archives and mounted above an ornate gold-gilded antique table. There is also a set of Artcoustic *DFF120-43 X2* speakers draped in contemporary photographer Max Maladrino's *Deluxe Left* and *Deluxe Right* hanging beautifully alongside. The result is that any guests will not realise the photos are speakers in disguise, while the sleek, white media cabinet provides a cunning riff on a minimal, white credenza.

Of a similar ilk are Ox-Home's televisions, which when turned off transform into a mirror. Whether a contemporary, modern style, or hung in a 16th century ornate frame, these televisions can be used as an element of the design. Another approach to completely hiding the TV when not in use comes from Belgian-based Beamax. The *X-series Dellegno*, sees a discreet, high-style, 80-inch projection screen encased in a sleek, hand-made, high-gloss cabinet, which raises and lowers at the touch of a button. Available in piano black, white and red, it can also be custom-coloured to suit any interior.

Domus Design Collection (DDC) offers a brand new unit as part of its *Cube* system, which will house a 50-inch television. Again, at the push of a button, *Cube's* mechanics lift or lower the TV into a minimal case.

“Most people want a room within their home that not only is a cool, relaxed space for entertaining, but also contains a stunning home cinema system,” says



Steinway Lyngdorf Home Theatre.



Loewe Connect TV in black.



Holm. "Thus the room has to serve several purposes – allow for a dynamic home cinema arrangement that can be easily transformed into a cosy area and lounge with a high-end music setup for entertaining. For today's modern living, it is important to have versatile and multi-usage of rooms especially in big cities where space is premium."

HIDING PLACES

The changing topography of the home theatre and its new place in residences is easily traced by innovations in both the technological and design markets. For decades, media centres were plagued by the bulkiness of televisions, which grew deeper as the screen size became larger, and its ensuing audio setup. A decade ago, televisions and the hulking cabinets (often with pop-out doors) were the only option to hide a set when it was not in use. It posed an immense challenge for interior designers. "Those days are over, thank god," proclaims Babak Hakakian, owner of DDC, a sophisticated shop with locations in New York City and Beverly Hills, California, but with a discerning clientele that stretches across the globe.

The advent of flat-screen TVs solved earlier issues by allowing stands to be created with slimmer, lighter profiles, but it also created a few new design challenges.

"Then we are faced with a new problem we needed to find a solution for," says Hakakian, whose showroom carries contemporary European-designed goods. "Flat screens are now hung on walls – putting them on stands is easy, you can place them on any credenza, but the stands aren't necessarily the best looking solution. The ideal for the new models is that people like to hang them on the wall... So what do you do with the wires?"

This is a question also asked by clients of Obegi Home in Dubai and Poliform, who insist on a wire-free landscape, and today cable management is a *de facto* requirement for any high-end media furnishings.



Top to bottom: Samsung series 9; DS-220 armchair from de Sede.

About five years ago, DDC offered a solution to the stand with its *Frame* wall system, a unit that can be freestanding or part of a modular wall arrangement. As a freestanding piece, *Frame*, with its slender, 12-inch depth, offers a place for mounting a television, with a shelf just below for media players, and a hidden wire-management system that won't require an electrician.

Both *Frame* and *Step Vision*, designed by Norberto Delfinetti for DDC, solve another issue that crops up in places, such as Dubai, where walls are often made of concrete or in Europe where plaster walls would crumble under the weight of a large flat screen. For people who prefer the media system to be less noticeable, sinking the speakers and TV into the walls is a preferable option.

Frame, *Step Vision*, *Elevenfive*, also from DDC, and Artcoustic's panel system all feature a relatively easy

to install panel on which to hang a TV, and hide electronics and cables in an aesthetic manner.

Elevenfive goes one step further by allowing a TV to be flush with the frame, and features a mechanism that allows the TV to be pulled out and rotated in different directions. DDC's New

Concept encases the TV in a glass container that, when the set is turned off, displays only a black area with a white border. It is also available with a built-in speaker system.

Similar changes have also informed the work of Poliform. It has reconfigured its *Sintesi* wall system to make room for new audio/visual equipment, which requires more space to hide. It has also started adding columns for speakers and drawers for DVDs because no design savvy citizen wants to see boxes and wires.

But the future holds the promise of fewer tangles and less equipment, as many of the world's top audio makers earlier this year unveiled a series of wireless speakers: Panasonic showcased the *SC-ZTI* system with wireless speakers (except for the pesky power cord, of course); and Samsung, Philips, and Polk Audio among others all showed surround systems with wireless subwoofers, enabling more flexibility when placing them in the room and the added bonus of fewer wires to conceal.

Meanwhile, Polk, Samsung, Philips, Panasonic, LG and Sharp were among those showing off speakerbars, and other configurations that aim to deliver a top experience with only one, two, or four speakers. Speakerbars and other new audio systems are being touted as wall-mountable, presumably allowing them to sit underneath a wall-mounted flat-panel TV.

"More and more people are wanting to hide their televisions because the way they are living is different," says DDC's Hakakian. "They no longer have a living room, a den and dining room. Now they have a great room, where they live day by day. People are integrating kitchen and living [rooms] and that is why they don't want the TV out. Today, people are living in one big room





Roche Bobois *Quantum* sofa
and *Contact* modular wall system.

Clockwise from right: Beamax X-series *Dellegho* hides the screen in a discreet cabinet; designed by Mauro Lipparini, Atelier's Sventola contemporary lounge chair is hand-crafted and numbered; designer Carlo Colombo's Ball chair for Arflex features ample wow-factor.



– a multifunctional room – and in many instances they don't have a lot of walls or they may have a wall of glass leaving few places to hang art. But with these versatile products now available, walls can be used for art and not the TV."

BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

A starring role on this new stage has been given to seating arrangements, which not only provide high-style but also high-comfort. In bygone days, the emphasis on sofas and seating were beauty at the expense of ease, but now all the premier furniture ateliers have introduced collections that stress comfort without sacrificing on the style.

"The seating area is very important as it has to be very comfortable and welcoming," says Karine Obegi of Obegi Home. "Leather seems to be the best choice for L-shaped or straight sofas and they should preferably be deep with cushions and back that can hold the head while neck muscles are relaxed. Viewers of movies or music lovers tend to like very relaxed postures."

The latest upholstered pieces from Parisian Roche-Bobois are designed for supreme comfort. The roomy *Quantum* sofa, designed by Sacha Lakic, is made of Alpillés leather and floats above delicate chrome legs and offers an adjustable headrest and lumbar cushions filled with goose down. It debuted earlier this year alongside *Contact*, a lustrous modular system, comprised of boxes and drawers – ideal for housing a plasma TV and its accessories.

The name of Italian furnishings manufacturer Seven's newest seating collection, *Nap*, tells you of its design intent. Inviting and elegant, *Nap* takes its cues from the cushioned comfort of a meticulously crafted, luxurious mattress, which offers a contemporary interpretation of classical lines. The sofa's glamorous and generous proportions were created for what Seven Salotti calls the "relax-user". The same principles are behind the company's *Tongue* armchair, designed by Mauro Lipparini, which is now available in a range of new fabrics. With its high, padded back and a seat cushion padded with goose down, *Tongue* is no slouch.

The gentlemanly name of *Gaston*, the latest Poliform armchair born of the collaboration with Vincent Van Duysen, evokes an exclusive, inviting, masculine style. Available in leather or fabric, it is open to myriad interpretations.

In addition to the sofa, Obegi recommends the strategic placement of long and narrow tables in front of the seating area rather than large coffee tables.

"Designers are looking for a relaxed feeling rather than a 'heavy' rich feeling," she says. "Furniture will be more modern than classical, and depending on the clients, the ultra modern ones would like minimalism and subdued colours, or even only two colours like matte black and glossy white. While others prefer a warmer atmosphere opting for woods, such as walnut, and more earthy colour palette."

The addition of lighting to wall systems and TV sets also allows for a more ambient, relaxing effect. Obegi notes that she often recommends introducing LED lights to give a soft and uniform illumination around the media room. Many



Top to bottom: Rimadesio's *Zenit* wall system can be configured in a myriad of ways; *CM Lifestyle* from Archimedia.

of the new wall systems, such as *New Concept*, have built-in lighting designed to bathe a wall in a subdued glow.

FREE AND EASY

As TV placement becomes more flexible, so do the *de facto* high-end sound systems. Projection areas, seating placement and décor are no longer tethered to a strict formula – the buzzword is freedom. In fact, the purveyor of some of the world's most exclusive home theatre rooms, Goldmund of Switzerland, has noted that new advances have allowed for the creation of radically different designs without compromising on the quality of the system.

"We are working with the best interior designers in Europe to create a new style, something that says something about gaming and technology," says Michel Reverchon, president of Goldmund.

"Now we ask them to invent new concepts because we provide them with the technology to allow them to do so. Before it was too difficult because of all the technical constraints and considerations. This is a revolution because we can finally forget all those limitations."

He says that the distance to the screen, the shape of the room, the location of speakers and the use of acoustic materials no longer matter. Now, interior designers virtually have *carte blanche* to create a media area that does not conform to any rigorous criteria.

"In the living room, you had an area that was not acoustically ideal a few years ago," explains Reverchon. "Audio-video processors can now modify acoustics and videos to compensate for problems that occur in any room. We just completed a project in an immense room where a complete side was a wall





Top to bottom: DG+ cinema room provides a full home entertainment experience; Ox-Home's *La Petite Pierre* TV mirror screen transforms to a mirror when the set is off; DDC's *Eleven Five* system is designed for form and function.



of windows. Historically that would have been impossible, but with the new products, we can recreate a perfect home theatre in any room."

Similar to the advances Goldmund has achieved, Artcoustic speakers can also be adjusted to perfect the sound in a room regardless of what height they are hung at. Meanwhile, the optional speaker system of DDC's *New Concept* is mounted off to the side but project sound forward.

MOVIE MAGIC

Even the dedicated home cinema room is being swept up in the changes. Reverchon says that some customers use it only for music, some for movies, while others are now creating these rooms for gaming. Now that we are spending more time in the living room, chances are we will be working, surfing the web (on the TV), gaming and watching a movie all in the same area, meaning that home theatre needs have changed radically.

A recent installation completed by Goldmund paired a traditional home cinema room and office space. The owner can now use the room to video-conference with his employees around the globe, as a contemporary work space, fully equipped office and entertainment area, as well as a traditional home theatre.

In Hong Kong, Reverchon created a room for a client who not only wished to play games, but also needed a wall of screens in order to watch stock market movements. A third client, a software entrepreneur, writes programs while having films play on his big screen.

A dedicated home theatre room is becoming more like a retreat than just a space used on special occasions. It's a place one can escape to any time of day or night without disturbing a soul. **ID**

Audiopro's Stereoone.

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