

Everything's big in Texas, including the lifelong dream of a Dallas businessman: a custom-designed million-dollar private cinema and listening room.

DREAM COME TRUE

ZOOM INTO THE HEART OF DALLAS, JUST NORTH OF DOWNTOWN BETWEEN I-35 and US 75, and you'll find Uptown—a relatively calm center to the roaring storm of the city's 80 mph bumper-to-bumper freeway traffic. It's a sight that may take many Southerners and non-Southerners alike by surprise: ultra-modern luxury high-rise condos within walking distance of renovated turn-of-the-century homes that have been converted into boutiques, trendy clubs, and pet-friendly sidewalk cafés. Historic trolleys transport locals and visitors back and forth to some of the city's finest dining spots, museums, and theaters. But perhaps Uptown's most impressive sight remains behind closed doors.

"This is an ultimate home-away-from-home private entertainment complex," says Don Krasen, president of Krystal Clear Audio-Video in Dallas. Krasen custom installed more than \$1.4 million worth of electronics and automation in one of Uptown's newly rebuilt office buildings. The space sports amenities that are luxurious even by the district's already lofty

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SKEETER HAGLER



One of the installer's goals was to re-create the sonic characteristics of a live venue by shaping the sound with natural materials instead of professional acoustical treatments. The owner's artwork and guitar collection create the right amount of sonic reflection, while the furniture provides ample absorption and diffusion.

standards—including a sundeck boasting stunning skyline views and a two-story wine cellar, complete with wine angels similar to those found in Aureole in Las Vegas and New York. But the true heart of the space—its *raison d'être*—is a million-dollar cinema and listening room that's built on a floating foundation. Krasen describes it succinctly as “the fruition of the client's lifelong dream.”

The room's focal point is undoubtedly its pair of massive Wilson Audio Alexandria tower speakers, perched imposingly in the front corners of the room. “They were the client's first choice,” Krasen says. “He saw them in *Robb Report* and knew they were considered to be the best in the world.” This reputation is due in no small part to the Alexandrias' modular enclosures, each of which allows the drivers to be positioned forward and backward, and angled vertically to ensure that the dispersion and timing of each driver is optimized perfectly for the room.

The Alexandrias are joined by a Wilson Audio WATCH Center Channel and a pair of Wilson's Series 2 Maxx loudspeakers in the rear, along with five WATCH Dog subs. “In a perfect world you want to use five of the same speaker,”

says Krasen, “but we couldn't do it.” Using an Alexandria as the center would have meant utilizing a perforated screen, of which Krasen is no fan. “With even the best microperforated screens, you're losing [visual] information through all the little pinholes. Some people will also tell you that it doesn't make a difference sonically, but it does. There is going to be some frequency alteration. Can it work pretty well for a lot of people? Sure, but not in a purist room such as this. We also would have had to put the screen a lot closer to the seating, which simply wasn't right for the room since he entertains so many guests.”

The WATCH Center Channel rests atop a WATCH Dog subwoofer beneath the motorized screen. Another WATCH Dog between the surround speakers supplies more

Perhaps the most overlooked component of the system is the room itself. Built as a box-within-a-box with a floating foundation like those found in high-end recording studios, the room also features air gap isolation and blown-in foam rather than fiberglass insulation for soundproofing, as well as extra studs for increased inertness.

than ample bass for a room this size. But for this client, “more than ample” simply wasn't enough. “To put it bluntly, my client is a bass freak,” Krasen says. “His philosophy is, ‘there is no such thing as enough bass.’” To appease his client's voracious appetite for bottom end, Krasen designed bass traps in three corners of the room, each designed with the shape, size, and construction of the room in mind to optimize and


linearize low-frequency reproduction. The plan was to have each of the pillars consist of one bass trap at floor level, with a subwoofer in the middle and another bass trap above. But the owner wanted to feel the low notes more intensely, so Krasen moved the subwoofers to floor level and redesigned the bass traps above. “That was, shall we say, more of a modification to accommodate his ears,” Krasen admits. “But the bass sounds spectacular. It really does.”

The remaining corner of the room houses an open-air gear rack, with a side-access panel disguised as media storage shelves. The electronics within represent a veritable who’s who of high-end audio/video manufacturers: FM 811 MKII and FM 115 amplifiers from FM Acoustics, as well as a dCS Verdi La Scala CD/SACD Transport with an external Elgar Plus digital-to-analog converter and Verona Master Clock, which ensure perfectly timed, jitter-free music performance.

Perhaps most indicative of Krasen’s design philosophy, though, are the Meridian 861 Reference Digital surround processor and Halcro dm8 preamplifier. “The two front amps and speakers are being directly driven by the Halcro,” Krasen reveals, “with the Meridian as an outboard surround processor, following my philosophy that if you want the best of both worlds you base a system on a two-channel preamp—with the best analog sound for your two front channels—and then you add surround sound. That way it’s outstanding all the way around as opposed to just being as good as its weakest link, which, in terms of two-channel audio, surround processors tend to be.”

Speaking to the sum total of the ultra-high-end electronics, Krasen says, “The client wanted the best, and we delivered, but just because you install the so-called best hardware does not mean that you’re going to get the best sound. We intentionally designed the system to be an integrated system, where each component was carefully selected to complement every [other component] and that includes the cable, which is not an accessory like most people think—it’s a critical component.” According to Krasen, the system’s Transparent Opus MM speaker cables feature proprietary network technology that works to filter ultrasonic frequencies, minimize phase errors, and lower the resonant point of the cable below the critical midrange frequencies to which our ears are most sensitive.

The result is a system that brings the music to life, according to Krasen, which is exactly what the client had always dreamt of. “You hear the whole bell of the horn of a sax instead of just hearing the reed,” he says. “Or you’ll hear the resin of the bow across the string in cello or violin, and easily hear the difference between an Amati and a Stradivarius. The Steely Dan DVD-Audio is phenomenal in this room. When you hear the cymbals in the rear channel, you swear there is a drum there. There’s a level of realism on this system, with properly recorded discs, that can be positively hair-raising.”

For a full equipment list, please visit hemagazine.com 



Gear, from top to bottom: Faroudja FDP-DILA1080pHD video projector; Transparent Cable Opus MM speaker cable; and Halcro dm8 preamplifier.



“Life is too short for mediocrity. My client obviously shares that philosophy.”

—Don Krasen,
custom installer

RESOURCES

Builder:

Landes Development of Dallas, Texas (214.572.2023)

Custom Installer:

Krystal Clear Audio of Dallas, Texas (kcaudio.com, 214.520.7156)

Interior Designer:

Jennifer Haralson of Dallas, Texas (214.369.0367)

Equipment

Amplifiers:

FM Acoustics (41.44.725.77.77, fmacoustics.com)

CD/SACD transport, DAC, and timing clock:

dCS (317.841.4100, dcsLtd.co.uk)

Control system and touchscreen remotes:

Crestron (crestron.com, 800.237.2041)

Lighting/shade control:

Lutron (610.282.3800, lutron.com)

Music server:

ReQuest Multimedia (request.com, 518.899.1254)

Screen:

Stewart Filmscreen (800.762.4999, stewartfilm.com)

Speakers:

Wilson Audio (801.377.2233, wilsonaudio.com)

Surround processor and DVD/DVD-audio player:

Meridian (404.344.7111, meridian-audio.com)

Two-channel preamplifier:

Halcro (halcro.com, 702.270.9307)

Video projector and processor:

Faroudja (faroudja.com, 408.735.1492)

Wiring, interconnects, and power conditioning:

Transparent Cable (207.284.1100, transparentcable.com)