



# High Society

**Nestled in California's  
Santa Rosa Mountains  
is the dream house of  
one couple who  
wanted the old-world  
feel of a Spanish villa in  
their home and their  
home theater.**

STORY BY KRISSY RUSHING  
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Interior designers and custom installers are often at odds when designing a home theater, because every home theater buff knows that windows are practically blasphemous unless they are plastered over or otherwise hidden, which in turn is a violation of Interior Design 101. In this 10,000-square-foot estate nestled in an elite golfing community in the Santa Rosa Mountains of La Quinta, California, however, this controversy was deftly avoided.

The homeowners, an Italian couple who had been planning their dream home since 1995, wanted to evoke the old-world feel of a Spanish villa in their home and their home theater. To do this, 14,000 feet of natural Grecian stone was imported, and the home's construction—which took two years from paper to product—began. The house is the highest home in the community, overlooking the city and country club. It is centered on a courtyard in the style of the old California missions. Pocket doors fold back into the home and a courtyard is surrounded by arched columns covered with bougainvillea and decorated with geraniums. The U-shaped home not only has an exercise room, wine cellar, and circular dining room with French doors that give a view of the mountains, but a theater that fits perfectly with the style of the home and is a technical sock-knocker-offer.



Of course, one of the first things you think of when you think of a Spanish villa is sunlight bouncing off stone. But in a theater, sunlight simply isn't an option—meaning no windows—and stone can be tricky. To facilitate the melding of the old and new world without bringing these elements into the theater, interior designer Jack Knox of Jack Knox Interior Designers, Inc. created archways on the walls of the theater and, with the help of Murray Kunis of Beverly Hills-based Future Home, installed acoustical panels between them. Going along with Knox's requirement that the home incorporate art into its design, rather than decorate its design with art, Knox had an artist come in and paint one continuous scene on the panels "to give the impression you are in a village somewhere in Spain, and that you are looking out through arched windows through the rooftops, valleys and vineyards of a surrounding village," says Knox. "The effect is so real," says Kunis, "we often have people asking how we can have a theater with so many windows."



*With realistic views of a Spanish countryside, the 27- by 16-foot theater features a 140-inch Stewart screen that hides the JBL center channel speaker. JBL left and right speakers blend in with the rich burgundy walls on either side of the screen.*

Theater

Crestron ST 1550 C remote panel  
Crestron ST-CP automation controller  
Custom Programming by Future Home  
Runco VX 3C DLP projector  
Runco Vivix video processor  
Lutron Graphic Eye lighting control  
JVC HD 300000 HD VCR  
Marantz DV 6200 DVD player  
Panasonic TU HDS20 HD DSS & off-air receiver  
Marantz MA 500 rear speaker amplifiers  
JBL Synthesis Two THX ULTRA system  
JBL SDP-3 Processor  
JBL SDEC 2500 Digital EQ  
JBL 650 main channel amplifier  
JBL S800 subwoofer amplifier  
JBL S2C three main screen channel speakers  
JBL S2S two subwoofers  
JBL S2A four surround speakers  
JBL interconnect kit  
Sonance Cinema ONE surround speaker pair  
Middle Atlantic RSH custom anodized face panels  
Middle Atlantic Brush vent panels  
Panamax Surge protection Max 1500+  
Monster Cable Data Link digital audio cable  
Monster Cable Interlink analog audio cables  
Monster Cable P2P speaker cable  
Liberty Wire Component and Super-video cables  
Xantech remote control accessories  
Xantech AC1 fan trigger  
Escient Powerplay system  
Escient 200 DVD changer  
Stewart Luxus micro-perforated filmscreen  
Owens Corning speaker wall acoustical treatment



*A Runco DLP projector is out of sight in the theater's rear ceiling soffit, which it shares with flush-mount JBL surround speakers. An extensive array of components, including a Runco video processor, are also neatly stacked behind the theater's lush seats.*

Knox framed the window arches with cornice boxes in a burgundy textured fabric, and inserted panels of draperies around the windows, to complete the effect of real windows. A Stone balustrade runs through the panels, and follows the tiered seating down all three levels. Knox chose gold, chenille recliners and a burgundy rear wall (to keep screen reflections to a minimum). "We stuck with burgundy and gold colors throughout, because these are the theme colors used in the theaters of the old world," says Knox. To complete the Spanish effect, sculptures of mariachis with various instruments sit over the screen, serenading the audience.

To make guests feel invited and impressed, old Spanish homes put emphasis on the entryway. Likewise, this home's entry has more than 35 stairs leading up to a wishing well and the front door. The theater is to the left as you are climbing the stairs. "As luck would have it, the natural contour of the land beneath the theater sloped down,





allowing us to easily tier the room," says Kunis. Three tiers with three chairs each give the theater the capacity to seat nine. Because the home was built from the ground up, Kunis was able to eliminate sightline problems before they occurred. Between each chair is what Knox calls a "nest" table, allowing each audience member to have a place to set their popcorn. "Overall," says Knox, "the theater has a very rustic feeling. The ceiling has hand-carved wood beams, and it matches perfectly with the rest of the home."

But a theater with beauty and no brains isn't a theater at all. And that is where Kunis came in. Having worked on the couple's previous home, he had a history with the homeowner and knew exactly what they were going for. "The homeowners were primarily concerned with ease of use," says Kunis, "but overall, they wanted maximum performance and a wonderful room in which to re-create the motion-picture experience."

They picked a spot for the theater in one of the corners of the home, away from bedrooms and other areas that could be disturbed by the THX Ultra2 system. The room is rectangular (27x16) with the rear walls coming in at 45-degree angles. Because they had the freedom to choose the room's dimensions, using nonparallel front and rear walls and ceiling beams to break up sound, room-acoustic problems were eliminated. And, of course, any acoustic brightness was tamed with the decorative acoustic panels.

Future Home professionally rack-mounts all the equipment in their shop and even wires and

tests it before shipping it to the home, so installation of the actual audio and video was a breeze, taking only one week. "This minimizes the amount of time that we have to invade our customer's home, as well as eliminates surprises," says Kunis. For audio, he chose JBL's Synthesis 2 THX Ultra system, which includes matching amplifiers, 96-band digital EQ, and a THX Ultra2 processor. The center speaker is built into a baffle wall that is lined with acoustic material and sits directly behind the micro-perforated JBL's Synthesis 2 THX Ultra system. The left and right mains and subwoofers are to the sides, and six surround speakers, including four THX bipolar side speakers covered with fabric that matches the walls, and two rears mounted in the projector soffit, handle surround-sound effects. "In terms of overall theatrical presentation," says Kunis, "there just isn't a better system out there, regardless of price. It does things effortlessly that other speakers strain to do."





While the speaker choice was a breeze, what could have been Future Home's biggest challenge—the video—turned into one of its greatest assets. When Kunis and team first designed the theater, they had planned on using a 9-inch CRT projector. CRTs are notoriously clunky and have to be placed at a fixed distance from the screen. "Hanging this type of projector in the room would have been cosmetically difficult to integrate," says Kunis. "I was never happy with the idea." Luckily, during the course of the project, three-chip DLP high-performance video projectors matured, allowing Kunis to choose and perfectly hide a Runco VX-3, which is mounted in the rear soffit. "After completing the theater we realized that the VX-3 is so powerful, we could have installed an even larger screen," says Kunis. "Even though the current screen is a 140-inch diagonal!"

A wet bar at the rear of the theater, including a small sink, refrigerator and a counter for snacks, doesn't violate one of Kunis' cardinal rules: no icemakers and no popcorn machines; they produce



an inordinate amount of noise. If an audience member wants something a little friskier to drink, all they have to do is go next door to the wine cellar.

Crestron automation helped Kunis achieve his clients' goal that the theater be easy to use. With the touch of a button, it's movie time. The home also has a simple two-zone system (zone one is inside; zone two, outside), including an Escient TuneBase system with a 400-disc CD changer and a DSS digital music receiver. A dozen pairs of Sonance flush-mounted and exterior speakers deliver background music to both zones. Rear patio and garden area speakers are invisibly flush-mounted in the courtyard's magnificent arches, allowing background music to drift down through the bougainvillea.

After a lot of hard work by a team of experts, the home and its theater sit aloft the Santa Rosa Mountains, like gems twinkling in the Californian sun. The clients couldn't be happier with the outcome. "The wishing well is a perfect symbol of how the clients feel about their home," says Knox. "It is their wish come true. They love the house, they love the theater room, they love it all." For all intents and purposes, the home might as well sit high above Seville or Toledo, overlooking all the city's charms. It certainly had us fooled. ♦

