

# ONE HAPPY FAMILY

Inch-perfect specification, good teamwork and drawing on the power of the Artcoustic brand were key aspects of this complex project headed up by Simply Cinemas Installations' managing director Simon Swords.



■ Artcoustic loudspeakers offered the client stunning aesthetics and performance without compromising either

The children's faces said it all, which made at least one other face light up. Simon Swords, the managing director at Simply Cinemas Installations, is delighted with one of his team's most recent jobs. The home cinema for a young family combines hard-nosed engineering with softer elements of styling to ensure every face of the family is smiling.

"I know it's a cliché," he says when asked his favourite aspect of the job, "but it's the smile on the kids' faces when mum and dad put on Toy Story 2 for the 152nd time. This project is not a 'man-cave' that as an industry we are often accused of inflicting upon otherwise happy families."

It is, he insists, a "well designed, elegant yet comfortable living space that happens to have a reference standard private cinema hidden away within". During the day when the kids "are doing what they do best, being kids", the technology is stowed to avoid damage or injury. But at night, when it's time for bed, mum and dad can pop the cork and quietly unwind with a decent film.

Every bit as important as a decent film is a decent screening and past experience had wiped the smile from Simon's face and left a darker expression. Simply Cinemas Installations is an Essex-based custom installation company for bespoke private cinema rooms for the home. Simon has a passion for film.

"But I was frustrated by the substandard experience in commercial multiplexes and saw a demand in the high-end consumer market. I started Simply Cinemas and have a team with over a century of experience. It was this team that focused on the large property of a client who already had an inkling of what he wanted having checked out the image library of Artcoustic on flickr.com."

Fortunately his interior designer, Rebecca Wells of Little White Box, is a friend of Simon's. She knew he could deliver, while Simon knew Tom Butler of Artcoustic UK would be keen to tackle such an ambitious project.

It was important nothing would be permanently on show as the client's inquisitive young children might damage equipment or, worse, injure themselves. Wall-mounted loudspeakers and a drop-down screen, therefore pricked the interest of the client. Storage was another issue. The property is vast, yet no area lent itself for a central rack location.

"For this reason, low-level closed cabinetry was incorporated into the design to look discreet but offer enough space to store all of the AV equipment. We had to overlay positional information on loudspeakers, projector and screen. Technical drawings detailed each of the four cinema walls, cable schematics and schedules for infrastructure cabling."

This included speaker cabling for the cinema room and elsewhere plus Cat. 6 for the HDBaseT and data distribution. Planning was complex, says Simon of a project fast becoming a masterclass in subtlety and nuance as well as technical prowess. The refurbishment of the property took over a year to complete, throughout which the three maintained regular contact.

The client specified Artcoustic loudspeakers because of their aesthetics but made no mention of specific models. He wanted a sound system that was as faithful to 'true' cinema spec as possible and visited the Artcoustic showroom near the Chelmsford base of Simply Cinemas Installations.

"When we spoke about how cinemas achieved sound pressure levels as high as 105dB at peak, he wanted his to be able to do that, too. Luckily it was a detached house. The efficiency of the speakers proved to be of paramount importance.

"Because of the distance the client would be sitting from the front three channels, we calculated the 8-4 variant of the Artcoustic range would be appropriate. This offers 101dB/



■ This is not a 'man-cave', which the industry often inflicts on otherwise happy families



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w/m efficiency, meaning that achieving 105dB would be effortless, in fact they only needed about 15W. This particular drive unit array is available in three sizes.”

The client chose the 65-50 variant, while the Architect 2-1 SL in-ceiling model was used for the surround and rear channels as no wall space was available at the correct positions. A JVC DLA-X35 projector was combined with a Screen Research drop-down screen. This went into the ceiling void and was specifically chosen because of the size of its carcass - far smaller than others available.

Meanwhile a Yamaha AVR ‘ran the show’ from the low level cabinetry. This left the subwoofer to round off an unparalleled cinematic sensation for a project every bit as good as the sum of its parts.

“We used the Artcoustic Linax Sub which looks identical to their cabinets, so what you look at as you enter the room is actually two subwoofers with a cabinet in the middle. You’d never have known but it sounded superb.

“I think the reason the client loved the kit was that otherwise, as the stereotype has it, his wife would have outlawed such an elaborate system in what is their main lounge. Floor-standing speakers wouldn’t have worked aesthetically or practically; in-walls meant unsightly metal grilles. The speakers went behind the screen, not around it - fundamental for home cinema performance.”

Perfect harmony in the home cinema relies on a strong customer-client relationship, but no less crucial is the installer-supplier relationship. Tom Butler and Paul Cummin at Artcoustic, according to Simon, “just get it”. They are dedicated to ensuring system designs are perfect, which goes way beyond the point at what their products are specified, adds Simon.

“It’s very much a holistic approach; they help with the throw ratio of the projector, the decision on which control system is used, the lighting scheme, anything and everything that has a bearing on the client being pleased with the end result.”

There were, however, technical challenges. Installing the AV equipment in low-level cabinets rather than using a ‘proper’ equipment rack tucked out of the way elsewhere meant ensuring sufficient mechanical ventilation in a small loft space above the cinema room.

“I avoid mechanical ventilation when the equipment is located in-room as the noise can detract from the overall experience. But

by using the loft to hide the motors, nothing could be heard from the room below. Nothing overheats, it is all proving very reliable.”

Not just reliable but fun. The last couple of times Simon has returned he was pleased to see hundreds of CDs scattered across the room’s floor. This was not, as Simon first suspected, the children wreaking havoc. The client eventually confessed he had been up the night before enjoying music ‘turned up to 11’ while the kids were away with mum.

“It’s great he uses it for more than just film and squeezes out as much enjoyment as possible. I’ve since installed a Sonos Connect and introduced him to Spotify. Key elements to designing and executing a home cinema are many and varied. The first question we always ask is ‘how far away will you be sitting from the screen?’

“The answer determines how far apart the loudspeakers should be. From this, the rest falls into place. Throw ratio, surround speaker placement, everything is based on the answer to that question. This is, after all, about civilised enjoyment with high-quality audio and video. The client has already clocked up 1,000 hours on the projector’s lamp and it’s only been finished since January.”

### Essential kit list

Artcoustic 65-50 SL 8-4 (x3) front left/centre/right loudspeakers

Artcoustic Architect SL 2-1 (x4) surround left/right and rear left/right loudspeakers

Artcoustic Linax Subwoofer (x2) subwoofer

Artcoustic Linax Cabinet (x1) cabinetry

JVC DLA-X35 projector

Yamaha RX-A1030 AV receiver

Sony BDP Blu-Ray provided by client

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