

Orchestrating an AV Revolution

Recently the UK's leading journalist of extreme audio, Adam Rayner of *Home Cinema Choice*, reviewed two of the finest home cinema systems available.

The first featured the world's most expensive audio equipment in a highly designed and treated room costing a remarkable **£1,000,000**.

The next month Adam reviewed an entry-level in-wall system from Steinway Lyngdorf in a completely untreated room with a total cost of **£100,000**.



You might be surprised to learn which system Adam called

“probably the single finest audio system he’s heard in his entire life”



The owner of this astonishing rural-based home theatre (and the estate that goes with it) is a silver-haired retiree and self-confessed uber geek. He used to work seven days a week for a slightly bonkers company; wake up mid-morning, go to the office and work until two or three in the am, then repeat. He wore sandals and jeans - a colleague wore a cloak...

His share of that enterprise, once it had gone suddenly exponential, was enough to retire on in comfort, so now he's happily CAT6 networking his whole property, which comprises quite a few rustic stone buildings as well as the main residence. While the brickwork is unashamedly *Homes And Gardens*, there are astonishingly high-end separate audio systems in the breakfast room and the annexe house, and a motorised plasma to accompany the hillside hot tub, which overlooks a neighbour-free wooded valley. In short, it's our kinda place.

Playing the game

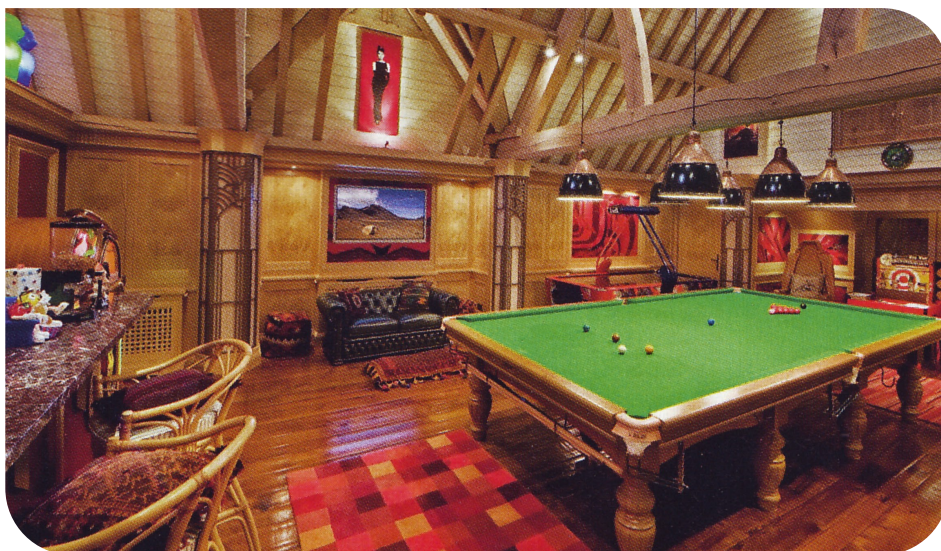
The cinema room, which is the main reason for my visit, was excavated to order beneath another pretty barn. Inside, the upstairs has a competition-sized snooker table, Foosball, darts, Wurlitzer jukebox, air hockey table and a Panasonic plasma near the marble-topped bar. Oh, and a real popcorn cooker trolley.

As I journeyed down the stairs to the bespoke theatre, I could feel the atmosphere rising to squeeze my adrenal glands. I was about to enter an AV fantasy world. All carved wooden panels and sumptuous, powered leather chairs. A low wall behind the seats houses a disc-library of 1,600 DVDs and some 120 BDs. I felt I could be here for some time.

After a demo of the AMX control system, it became clear that the owner (who, incidentally, is fully ISF-trained) is incandescent with love for the 50,000 lines of code needed to enable control with a few finger dabs of the touchscreen.

He wrote the flowcharts.

Impressive, but a mere appetiser.



The calibre of home entertainment here is mind-blowing. To do the system real justice I'd need to wax lyrical in a dedicated forty-page supplement.

This is the first time I've encountered a professional digital projector in a home cinema. This industrial-looking behemoth can project a 60ft image and is rated at 12,000 ANSI lumens - more than currently needed as the screen is only 13ft. However, naturally, it's a Stewart Filmscreen high-end job with motorised aspect ratio adjustment.

"The sound is large, speedy and accurate, delivered from a 7.2 array of Wilson Audio speakers hidden away behind panels. The room's acoustics were specified by Norman Varney, who designs rooms for the great and the good of the AV trade in the USA."

Content-wise, the cinema is hi-def a go-go, with top sources from Sky and Humax, as well as HD DVD, Blu-ray, and DVHS decks, and even an incredibly rare HD LaserDisc player. And there's a Kaleidescape server (with tens of Terabytes of storage) thrown in for good measure. The resultant hi-def images can peel your retinas loose.

The design of the interior was done by CEDIA award-winner Theo

Kalomirakis.

Kung Fu Panda was imbued with awesomeness as Jack Black's character Po could have wished; Die Hard 4.0's chase scene was suitably mental; and Clint Eastwood's deliberately grainy cinematography in *The Changeling* was perfectly rendered. All things considered, I'd rate the pictures as the best I have ever seen projected, bar those from a Texas Instruments DLP digital cinema event.

Home cinema heaven

The owner, his wife, their offspring and grandkids all utterly love this cinema and I can entirely understand why. Not only is it technically brilliant, it has atmosphere. The result is far more than just a pile of pricey engineering, it's an experience ripped straight from the owner's soul. It may have cost a million quid, but I think it's priceless.

**Adam Rayner,
Home Cinema Choice Magazine,
June 2009**



The image is iconic: a concert pianist takes the stool with a flourish of long tails. In the piano-black gloss, hands reach towards themselves. Expert fingers are placed upon the ebony and ivories. There, hanging in space, are the gilded words, Steinway & Sons. For 156 years, Steinway has made the world's finest pianos. As an object of desire, a Steinway Grand is up there with all things super-posh; like Rolls Royce, Riva and Rolex, the name evokes perfection.

But what if Steinway & Sons decided it wanted to make music by way of speakers rather than strings and soundboard? What on earth would, or indeed could, Steinway create if it made hi-fi?

“Probably the single finest audio system I’ve heard in my entire life.”

Stereo symphony

To bring its AV dreams to fruition, Steinway & Sons partnered with Lyngdorf to create the electronics. Owner Peter Lyngdorf (see below) is a polymath audio genius, recognised by some commentators as one of the true fathers of high-end hi-fi, and the resulting collaboration between the two operations is art fused with science. The upshot is an emotional experience that can take you by surprise and literally make you weep. (While feeling a bit of a tit, if in company.

The stereophonic Model D system (two speakers and head unit) sells for around £150,000. It's built to meticulous methodology and demonstrates levels of craftsman-like beauty rarely seen in consumer electronics.

Each towering floorstander weighs in at a monstrous 174kg, and boasts the most incredible set of open baffle transducers, finishing in a square Airmotion membrane tweeter. The central head unit houses the CD transport, the Lyngdorf digital amplification and, most crucially, the incredible Lyngdorf RoomPerfect



auto EQ system, which can make even an open space sound like an intimate music venue.

This system can adjust itself to any room, and uses over 500 bands of EQ to +/-1dB.

“Powered up, the whole experience left me awestruck. I’ve heard some really expensive kit in my time, but this blew me into pieces of sheer joy. Any thoughts that Steinway might not have genuine AV chops were stomped to the ground.”

Demo material was ancient pomp rockers Pink Floyd. They always made albums with awesome analogue production values, something brought dramatically home when the band's best-loved works were replayed via the Model D system. I was left speechless, and my evangelical demonstrator, Gecko's Rob Sinden, admitted the same thing had happened to him.

I wasn't surprised to learn that Hollywood A-listers are numbered amongst the client base – the Model D has to be the ultimate stereo solution in the world.

Architectural wonders

Of course, Steinway Lyngdorf isn't just about two-channel greatness; the The Model M architectural system uses boundary or corner-mounted

woofers to obviate room boom, while the R/L M surround speakers marry the fabulous Airmotion tweeter membrane to paired mid-rangers. These aluminium sealed boxes go in-wall. Just add as many of these and subs as you wish.

For the audition, a stack of Lyngdorf-made power amps and hi-res audio processors sat off in a boot room powering the whole shebang. The system used eight boundary woofers and ran seven channels.

The standout moment came with bombastic actioner Pearl Harbor, and the astounding Japanese attack sequence. Via the Steinway Lyngdorf array, it was incredibly potent, yet clean, tight and accurate. The path of every bullet was searing and each myriad explosion completely distinct. This was movie mayhem as art.

“As strange as it may seem, the biggest name in grand pianos has entered the often gonzo world of home cinema and effectively redefined it. This kind of kit could actually give home cinema a good name...”

**Adam Rayner,
Home Cinema Choice Magazine,
July 2009**

