

Serious about sound

Mark Craven checks out a dedicated cinema room with reference-grade audio and a passionate owner







The room has space for nine film fanatics

The home cinema is part of a complete smarthome makeover

KIT CHECKLIST

STEINWAY LYNGDORF: P1 processor; 6 x A1 digital amplifiers (2 x 400W each); 7 x S-15 speakers; 4 x Model LS Boundary Woofers; RoomPerfect calibration/correction

OPPO: BDP-105EU Blu-ray player

STREAM: EVO media server

SKY: Sky+HD PVR

SONY: VPL-VW1000ES 4K projector

IMAGE SCREENS: 4.3m acoustically transparent projector screen, with automatic masking and custom vector artwork

EDMUND OPTICS: Custom-made projector 'window'

FRONT ROW: 9 x leather cinema chairs

HODGSON & HODGSON: SilentDoor timber acoustic door

CONTROL4: System control via 4in touchscreen and iPad

RAKO: Lighting system programmed with four scenes, plus individual lighting circuit control

THIS STUNNING CINEMA room is slightly unusual, in that it's the pride and joy of a passionate AV-holic, Nigel, but is part of a wider property that he is renovating to sell. In short, whoever buys the house gets a dedicated movie den thrown in. And they don't come much better than this.

The cinema is on the ground floor of a South London property with industrial heritage that's in the process of being converted into a 21st-century Smart apartment. During my visit, I was shown around, taking in everything from a mirrored gym room with in-ceiling Triad speakers, a glitzy kitchen with a hidden in-wall subwoofer(!) and a master bedroom and bathroom suite with a private jacuzzi flanked by a waterproof flatscreen – all with integrated control. As makeovers go, it's an

absolute knockout – but it's the high-end theatre I was most interested in.

Time to Marvel

The room is entered via an unassuming door along a well-lit corridor with only a *Thor* poster hinting at what's to come – stepping into it is like entering another property altogether. It's a big space, with dark walls and carpeting contrasting with light-coloured leather recliners and a subtle blue lighting scheme.

The focal point of the cinema is the 4.3m-wide acoustically transparent screen from Image Screens. When the room isn't running in movie mode, it displays a bespoke *Toy Story* vector artwork (on a separate electrically-controlled canvas) lit with pin-point accuracy by a trio of lights from illumination expert Anthony Juer. Both this



and the ivory seating help make the room seem a little less tech-heavy to potential buyers, says Nigel. He also tells us he considered getting a *Predator* artwork instead of the Pixar fresco...

Creating images for the screen is Sony's VPL-VW1000ES projector – at the time of specification the only commercially available 4K model around. It was chosen not only for its groundbreaking resolution, but the value for money it offers – I was told that more expensive Full HD models were considered.

The Sony is actually housed in a ceiling recess in the room behind, firing inwards but through an anti-reflective window, designed for the task by Edmund Optics. This has been done at considerable cost to ensure one thing

'The front soundstage was huge – Steinway Lyngdorf's speakers may look small, but they're ever so potent'

– that none of the projector's fan noise is audible within the cinema.

Sound, it transpires, is Nigel's big passion. It's evident as soon as he begins explaining the construction of the room itself: 'It's essentially a box, within a box, within a box, using concrete breeze blocks, MDF and fabric, with different levels decoupled. The doors alone weigh 250kg each, and there's an 85dB drop from here to the room next door. The neighbours say they've never heard a thing.'

The latter is surprising, as the audio specified is very high-end – a 7.4-channel

Steinway Lyngdorf array. This, Nigel reveals, was chosen only after an extensive, year-long 'road-trip' where he travelled around Blighty auditioning systems from the likes of MK Sound, JBL Synthesis and Artcoustic. In the end, he says, the Steinways easily came out on top.

Mostly this is due to their astonishing performance, but there's a cost benefit, too: with Steinway Lyngdorf's P1 processor and A1 digital amplifier employing the brand's Room Perfect correction/calibration wizardry, Nigel reveals he's been able to eschew traditional acoustic room treatments altogether, and therefore save an estimated £40,000. The only work that he thinks might be necessary is tightening up a loose doorknob on the kit cupboard.

Source equipment includes an Oppo BDP-105EU Blu-ray player, Sky+HD PVR and Stream EVO media server. These all sit in the AV rack alongside the electronics that drives the rest of the house – as such, opening the door is a dizzying experience, with multiple Sky boxes, Onkyo AVRs and Control4 processors blinking away. It's noisy, too, but with the door shut, no sound escapes. The rack can also be accessed from the cupboard outside, making rear-panel maintenance easy. And, in a neat touch, some of the whole-house source components face the other way, meaning no one has to enter the cinema room to swap a disc.

Sitting comfortably

After my initial tour and chat, I sat down in the front row (on Front Row seating, as it happens – another area where Nigel kept his budget down. 'You can spend five grand on a chair, but when you have nine of them



Steinway Lyngdorf's S-15 is used across the front soundstage and for all four surround channels

that soon adds up!'). I was prepared to be impressed, but ended up being blown away. Despite having heard the Steinways in action before and spent quality time with Sony's 4K upscaler, neither experience had matched the one offered by this precision-engineered setup.

Visually, *Bolt* on Blu-ray looked perfect, with the VPL-VW1000ES crafting a sharp, smooth and above all beautifully bright image on the massive screen. Yet the 7.4-channel audio was the real star. Steinway Lyngdorf's S-15 speakers, employed here for all seven channels, may look small but they're astonishingly potent – the front soundstage was simply huge, with dialogue delivered with real punch. Crystalline clarity and perfect steering may be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the Danish marque, but in tandem with the proprietary amplification and processing, this is no gently-does-it array. Nigel ramped up the volume and the speakers just egged him on to go further.

The quartet of subwoofers certainly adds to the fun. Each armed with two 12in drivers (so eight in total) and capable of hitting 120dB, they moved so much air I could feel it in my face. When Disney's super-hound is given the order to unleash hell ('Bolt! Speak...'), the seismic ripple unleashed by his bark thundered into the room with brutal intensity, yet sweetly integrated with the rest of the array. It's a full-range performance, with breathtaking scale, dynamism and accuracy.

And, yes, it's only seven channels. The room is certainly large enough for height and width speakers, but Nigel isn't yet interested, because Steinway Lyngdorf isn't interested either. He has a love affair with these cabinets and their matching amps and processor – and I don't blame him.

Punk rockers

We moved on to *Tron: Legacy*. Even in its regular 2D guise, the upscaled 4K image provided tangible depth, while Daft Punk's inventive electro score swelled and throbbed with menace. Again, the scale of the soundstage, the invisible nature of the speakers and the finesse of the higher frequencies proved astonishing. Further demos – from *Oblivion* on Blu-ray (see the Disc Pick box, top right) to Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* on multichannel DVD-Audio – were equally jaw-dropping, while watching the climatic battle sequence in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* proved once and for all that Warner's sound mix is woefully short in terms of LFE. The vertically-stacked Steinway woofers, which had been so impressive, were here given little to do. This is the benefit of a high-end setup, of course; the ruthless clarity that enables you to pick out details in soundtracks that you might not have noticed before also reveals their limitations.

There's more to this cinema's appeal than its AV prowess, however. It has some neat tricks up its sleeve, beyond the natural-at-this-price use of an integrated control system (in this case, Control4), complete with a wall-mounted iPad. For instance, an anteroom behind a hidden door offers a drinks-stocked fridge and shelving for Blu-rays and DVDs, while the roof houses a bespoke star ceiling installation that surprises with intermittent shooting stars, courtesy of runs of closely-packed fibre-optics that fire quickly in sequence. Even the rear-room wall-lighting is rather clever, with Nigel using an off-the-shelf patio light fitting, replacing the existing white LED lamp with a blue bulb, and housing it in a black-painted backbox. The effect

DISC PICK – OBLIVION

Nigel reveals his favourite Blu-ray platter

'Aside from being an excellent film, the recording quality of this Blu-ray is second to none – it is as close to perfection as I have ever come across. Not only is the picture quality absolutely stunning, especially when viewed through the Sony PJ, the sound quality is phenomenal, with full-range audio well down to single-digit frequencies and incredible dynamic range. An absolute must for demonstrating the capabilities of an audio system;

being that the lighting seems to float in front of the wall.'

Nothing lasts forever

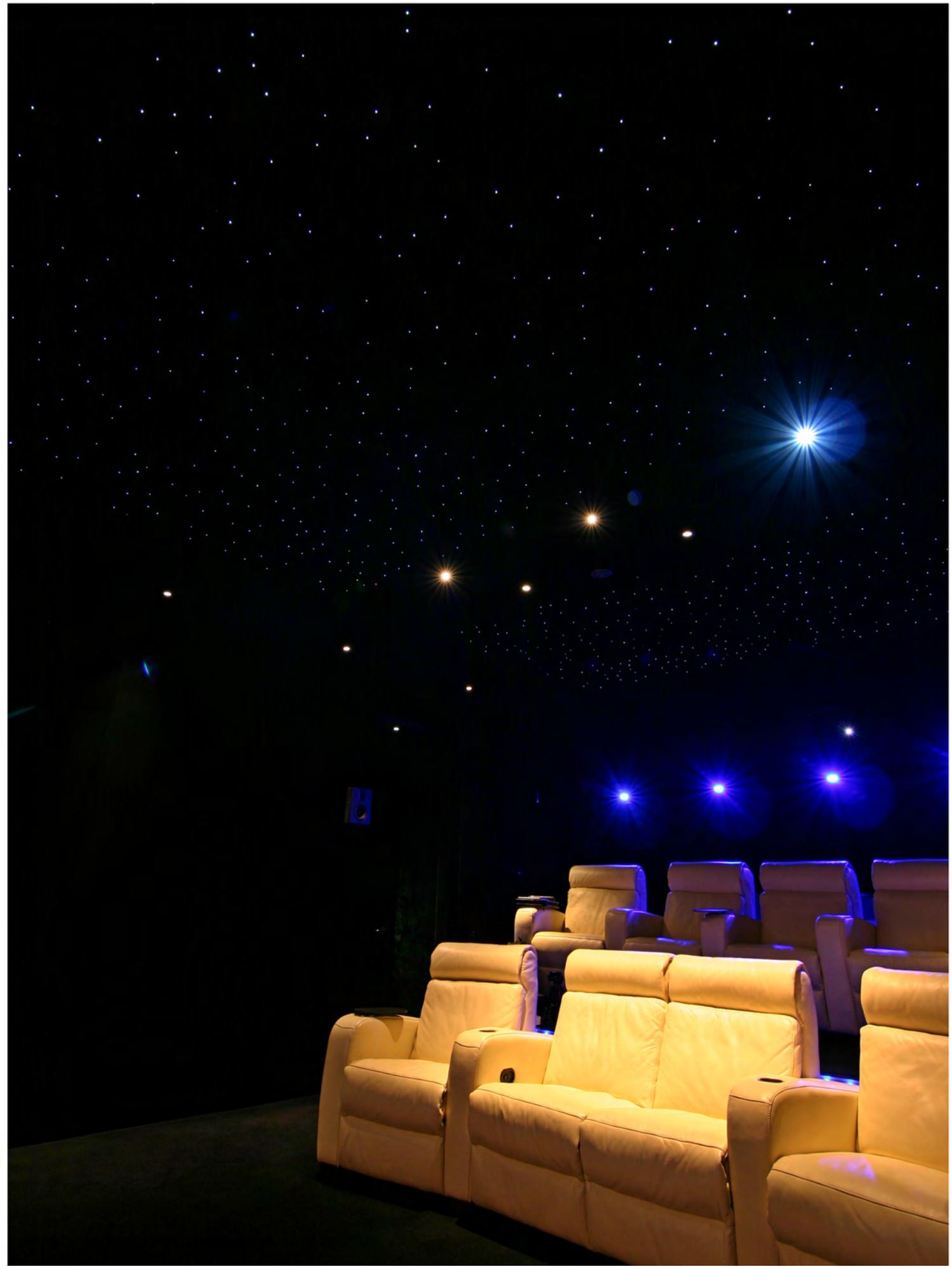
So this room represents the culmination of Nigel's painstaking research and some classy construction, aided by Essex-based install outfit Sensoria AV. And he knows it won't be his to play with forever – with the work elsewhere in the property soon to be finished, a buyer will no doubt be found, and they'll

or indeed a system's limitations, as the demanding soundtrack is sure to press the majority of systems to the maximum (and beyond). I already know of several setups that are unable to handle playing this particular film at reference level without clipping/distorting. Also, be prepared for everything and anything in your home cinema room that is not nailed down to shake, rattle and roll when those ultra-low frequencies kick in!'

then be the ones plopping a platter in the player and swimming in surround sound supremacy. The good news is that he'll then be able to focus his attention on the setup in his own house, where he tells me he's eyeing up Sony's 84in Ultra HD TV – or possibly the same company's new VPL-VW500ES projector – and, yes, another Steinway Lyngdorf system. So, similar electronics but just on a slightly smaller scale. I'd like to check that room out, too... ■

The AV rack controls all the zones in the house as well as the cinema room







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This is what the members of AVFORUMS.COM, the UK's leading authority on the audiovisual (AV) industry, have to say about the Cinema & Music Room at The Sausage Factory:

- “They should award it ‘home cinema of the century’ or there is no justice in the world of AV.”
- “It’s a home cinema to dream of. The sound is mind blowing. I’ve never heard anything so powerful and so clear, you can feel your insides rattling with the thundering bass; and the clarity of the speakers... every instrument is crystal clear; it feels like you are actually there!”
- It’s the ultimate cinema. What blew me away literally is the music reproduction. I can honestly say that I have never ever heard any audio system reproduce music so accurately like that before. I’m speechless.”
- “Absolutely lost for words. The clarity at high volume was stunning... The sound was so good there was no ear fatigue whatsoever. Absolute perfection.”
- “I’ll have to echo what’s been said here... undoubtedly one of the best systems I’ve ever seen or heard!”
- “Perfect audio clarity, a vast soundstage, true immersion, and flawless crystal clear visuals.”
- “Picture quality from the 4K UHD Projector on a screen about 4.5 metres wide was amazing. Better than any commercial or home cinema I’ve seen. Fantastic!”
- “Absolutely stunning picture... so clear and vibrant. Coupled with the perfectly black room and you just disappear into the movie.”
- “The Steinway Lyngdorf audio system excels in terms of quality and sonic performance, and the eight 12" woofers can easily make you wonder whether there’s an actual earthquake. The whole setup is very, very well done.”
- “I couldn’t believe speakers so small were producing the sounds I was hearing. Never mind the subs...The detail is mind blowing.”
- “The combination of clean, perfectly balanced sound with that picture makes for an epic room.”



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- “I have been into home cinema for 20 years now and have heard some stunning setups in my time. I can assure all that this is the best cinema I have ever experienced, period.”
- “All the positive comments are highly accurate. Makes other home cinema systems pale into insignificance. Really this is a top end system that sets a very high benchmark of Everest proportions. The cinema and music room is simply incredible. Spoils you for anything else.”
- “It has to be experienced to be believed. Attention to detail is first class. You could almost believe the band or orchestra were actually in the room with you!”
- “Stunning cinema! It is simply breath-taking. Not only the kit is stunning but also the room is a work of art. Very impressive!”
- “If Carlsberg did home cinemas...”
- “In all honesty it easily outperforms a commercial cinema.”
- “Simply stunning. The clarity, dynamics, and sheer impact were astonishing. But it’s the detail and realism that is truly special. I sat there with my eyes closed and my spine tingling in sonic heaven.”
- “Everything the cinema does is exceptional. Couple that performance with the meticulously detailed room and you are in AV nirvana, it’s as simple as that.”
- “Occasionally property developers have a cinema room in their developments, but they are usually pants. Couldn’t hold a candle to this one!”
- “The rest of the house is equally impressive with some awesome AV solutions in every room. Where else would you see two audio systems in an open plan kitchen dining room without seeing a single speaker?!”