

DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

CHRONICLING MONEY AND POWER IN SOUTH FLORIDA

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His high-tech touch keeps wealthy clients entertained

BY BRETT GRAFF

Review Staff

Jan Vitrofsky's job is pure entertainment. Back in the late 1970s, Vitrofsky was a Sound Advice stockboy turned big-screen television salesman when he learned to install the cutting edge equipment.

His career soon broke through the sound barrier.

Now, his business, HED South Inc. — which designs and builds systems to control the audio, video, windows and lighting environment of homes and offices — generates revenues of about \$7.5 million a year. It also has a client list that would put any Hollywood talent agent to shame: Gloria and Emilio Estefan, actor Robert De Niro, Academy Award winning producer Arnold Kopelson, the New York Stock Exchange, and even the White House (Yes, the one at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.).

Vitrofsky's systems are integrated through a Palm Pilot-sized, touch screen computer, which can control the stereo system, lighting, television and any other electronic device in a home or office, including a dishwasher. Clients have paid as much as \$700,000 for one system.

But even with a dazzling client roster in hand, Vitrofsky, 41, seems to have remained as grounded as he was 20 years ago. Sure, his Fort Lauderdale office is draped with autographed black-and-white celebrity photos, but none are more prominent than a bright orange finger-painting, which is an original work of his 7-year old son, Jake. And Vitrofsky, who speaks with a warm, deliberate tone, goes to work dressed in khaki shorts, a T-shirt, and a pair of Top Siders, which he slips on and off while he talks on the phone.

"I'm a stereo guy," he says when asked what his company does.

But one thing has changed drastically since the late 1970s, when Vitrofsky was stocking equipment at a Fort Lauderdale Sound Advice — and it's his perspective on his career.

Back then "people asked me what I did for a living," recalls Vitrofsky. "I couldn't say I was a doctor. But now I'm in the technology business."

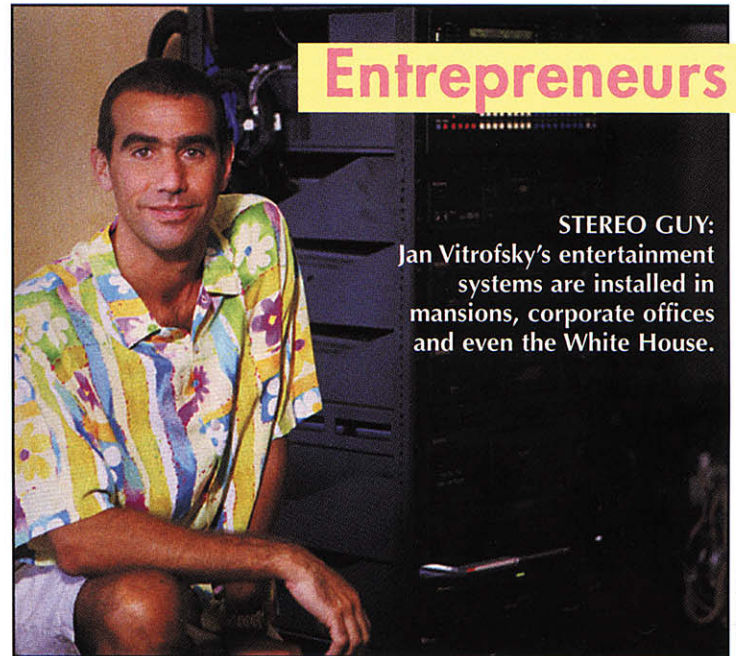
Shortly after Vitrofsky worked his way up to management level at the stereo store, he moved to Boston, where he got a \$16,000-a-year job at Kloss Video, a pioneering company of the big screen televisions that are so popular today. He began stocking boxes but eventually became a sales representative. That, however, involved traveling two weeks of each month and visiting 10 cities each trip.

At age 23, Vitrofsky and his wife, Suzanne, moved to New York, where Vitrofsky began to market himself as a subcontractor for stores, which at the time were hard-pressed to find people with the skills to install the big projector screen televisions.

"I started building up a following," says Vitrofsky.

Eventually, a friend who worked as the facilities manager at the "Black Rock" building in Manhattan, the CBS Corp. headquarters, introduced Vitrofsky to the broadcasting company. After getting it as a client, he quickly became friendly with the executives at CBS Records and became even further involved in the recording unit's operations when it was purchased by Sony Corp. in 1988.

"If Sony had a major artist who wanted a sound system or a new home entertainment system, Jan would install it," says Robert Zito,



who is a former vice president of communications for Sony, and is now an executive at the New York Stock Exchange.

Soon, his client base expanded to big-time names in television and movies. Motion picture producer Kopelson, who made "Platoon" and "The Fugitive," has had two audio-visual systems installed in his home, which he calls "highly sophisticated." Vitrofsky "was always there for me and I rely on his tremendous expertise," Kopelson said through a representative.

There is one home Vitrofsky worked on which was so high-profile that even guests are required to have security clearance. In a letter dated Oct. 10, 1996, Gary Walters, chief usher for the White wrote:

"The President, Mrs. Clinton, and their guests have certainly enjoyed the pleasure that the touch panel system has brought to their big screen television watching."

Vitrofsky moved to Florida just two years ago, after making frequent visits for work. But after his relocation, he had trouble finding employees "with the New York mentality," that could provide the fast-paced service his clients were used to, says Vitrofsky. The problem was solved when he decided to transplant six of his New York workers to the Sunshine State with him. Currently, there are 17 HED South employees in New York and 10 in South Florida. Now, he's hoping to buy bigger space in Hollywood — the one in Florida — to house his expanding business.

And while Vitrofsky continues to work inside mansions and for multi-million dollar corporations, he swears that he won't turn down any job opportunity — no matter how small.

"We'll do anything for anyone," he says. "Because our whole business is word of mouth and you might tell someone we're the good guys." ■