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special effects

BY ROBERTA KLEIN



Imagine yourself in a comfortable chair in your own soundproof den. There are no other sounds but the Chicago Symphony Orchestra playing Beethoven's Ninth. From the rich tones and acoustical brilliance, it must be a live performance. But it's not – it's a perfect technological simulation. And it doesn't stop there. As the symphony ends, you touch a screen the size of a small picture frame and – voila! – it's movie time. Lights dim and two large cabinet doors part, exposing a giant screen. The Last Emperor begins, in vivid color and clarity. Suddenly you realize you've been engrossed for hours with this audio/visual feast. By now it's dark outside, and you've forgotten to set the alarm or turn on the exterior lights. Not to worry – your security system has been remotely activated with surveillance tight enough to protect the U.S. Mint. As "sci-fi" as this scenario may seem, it is not the wave-of-the-future. It's today's cutting edge in home technology, which many

Advances in technologies can turn home-entertainment centers into show places at a price



ON THE JOB: Jan Vitrofsky, right of HED South Beach. He has wired Gloria Estefan's mansion and the White House for entertainment.

South Floridians already own. Of course, it takes experts to design, engineer and install such intricate systems, each of which is highly customized. Jan Vitrofsky, founding partner of HED South Inc. based in Hollywood; and Peter McGrath, Vice President Director of Development of Cello Technologies in Fort Lauderdale, are two such masters.

Vitrofsky, who as a kid, "took everything apart and put it back together," has always been a hands-on guy. A music lover, he was the soundman for a rock 'n' roll band at 17. Although the band won recording time through a local radio contest, Vitrofsky dropped out when he landed a "real paying job" as a stock boy at a Sound Advice store. "It was another avenue of me enjoying music," he says. He now boasts clients that include Barbra Streisand, Robert DeNiro, Tony Bennet, Placido Domingo, Bruce Springsteen, Gloria and Emilio Estafan – and President and Mrs. Clinton.

It's an impressive list, but Vitrofsky says he's more focused on technological "solutions" than the celebrities who own them. In fact, he's always been interested in the technology of home entertainment systems. When he was 20 he left Sound Advice for Boston, where he worked for Henry Kloss, the creator of the acoustic suspension system and big-screen TV. He eventually became co-national sales manager for Kloss Video. "The people I met [then] were 10 and 15 years older," Vitrofsky says. "Down the road the experience gave me the knowledge to start my own business."

At age 23, Vitrofsky moved to New York and opened his own company, Home Entertainment Design. From his Brooklyn apartment, he began installing projection televisions for dealers. "That was before there was really a home theater business and [before] surround sound [systems] as we know it today."

After marrying Suzanne in 1986, the couple moved to a house where he built a theater in the basement and turned a bedroom into an office. He later moved the firm to Long Island City and shortened his company's name to the initials "HED."

Through a subcontracting arrangement with Park Avenue Audio, he met the facilities manager at CBS Records, who referred clients to him. From there, he became a consultant to Michael Schulhof, Chairman of Sony USA. "That's how I got networked into the high-profile types," Vitrofsky says. In fact, Schulhof

and Peter Goober, head of Sony Pictures, introduced him to President Clinton.

After evaluating the system and learning that the president was "big into films," Vitrofsky designed and installed a new easy-to-use "real theater for video" at the White House in 1995. It replaced one that included a 48-inch rear screen projection TV, a VCR and a 35-mm projector from the Reagan era.

Another referral from Sony was for Gloria and Emilio Estefan's personal entertainment building next to their home in Miami Beach. Not long after working on that project, Vitrofsky opened a HED South in Hollywood in a warehouse off Dixie Highway, replete with offices and showrooms.

One of his earliest clients here was Miami Dolphins tight-end Troy Drayton, who had just bought a new home in a gated Plantation community. The new house came furnished, he says, but it didn't have an audio/visual system. Drayton, a jazz and & B fan, says, "I'm a gadget guy and I like to stay on top of electronic stuff. What Jan gave me is one big gadget."

The system includes a computer-controlled lighting system, keypads in all rooms for remote access, a media area with large-screen projection TV, telephone system and surround sound – all controlled from a central data base. "You touch the screen and basically tell the system what you want," Drayton says, "like if you want three televisions on at once."

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In Vitrofsky's home, which he shares with his wife, 7 year-old son, Jake, and two dogs, there is a similarly customized audio/visual/security system. All the components are hidden behind sleek modern cabinetry, with little visible except a touch pad on the cocktail table. "I love to come home after a long day of working to my own theater," he says. "After having to think all day long, the simple one-button operation makes it so I can clear my mind of anything other than entertainment."

