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He's Got The Hook Up

*Consultant has
something
for everyone.*

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From setting up turntables as a Sound Advice stock boy to setting up a sound system in the White House, audio-visual consultant Jan Vitrofsky has come a long way since he started out in the hi-fi stereo business.

Vitrofsky, then a teenager, turned a passion for percussion and big-screen TVs into profit. Now 41, the Hollywood businessman is a founding partner in HED North – a \$4 million a year business in New Jersey. He also is president of HED South, a South Florida company he founded in 1997 that already has annual revenue of \$3 million.



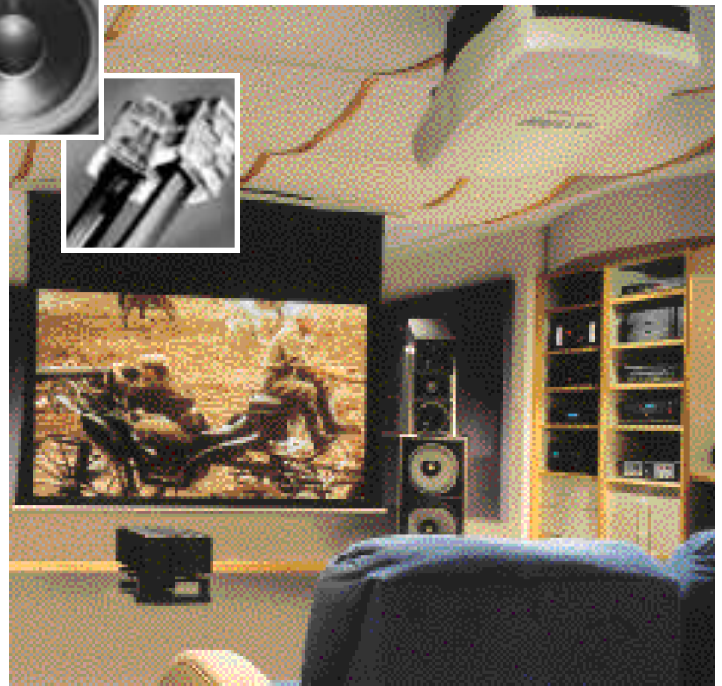
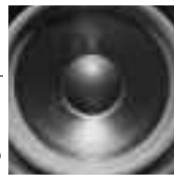
Home theater, a growing trend among Americans, is particularly hot in South Florida, where the nouveau riche toss money around like Frisbees. Vitrofsky has tapped into that demand by wiring homes and businesses with heart-stopping sound systems, eye-popping digital video and elaborate but simple-to-use lighting systems.

NO JOB TOO SMALL

With no formal business training or college degree, Vitrofsky credits much of his success to a relentless work ethic and a firm belief that no job is too small.

When working in New York, for example, Vitrofsky was called in to fix a maid's television set. The Park Avenue client turned out to be the Hess family of Hess Oil. And a friendly relationship began that led to numerous large jobs down the road.

"I'll do anything for anybody at any price point because small things can lead to big things," Vitrofsky said. "Out of fixing this



ON THE JOB: Jan Vitrofsky has wired Gloria Estefan's mansion and the White House for entertainment.

TV, which I didn't even sell, came hundreds of thousands of dollars in business."

Vitrofsky got his start in the stereo business when he moved from New York to Tamarac with his parents at age 17 and purchased a stereo from Sound Advice. A self-described geeky high school graduate who liked to put together entertainment systems, Vitrofsky hit it off with employees and secured a Christmas job stocking equipment and setting up turntables.

The position quickly turned into a full-time job and the soft-spoken kid from New York became the resident expert on big-screen TVs.



He became so adept at selling Kloss Video systems – the premiere system at the time – that the company offered Vitrofsky a job. At age 20, Vitrofsky relocated to New England to work for Kloss.

After eight months fetching coffee and files, Vitrofsky worked 3 1/2 years selling Kloss systems coast to coast. Wanting to make more money, he then founded HED North and went to work as a subcontractor, setting up systems for retailers. Work was plentiful amid New York City's high rollers, and Vitrofsky's client base grew. A connection at CBS Records, which later was purchased by Sony, led to jobs for corporate executives and celebrity clients such as Michael Jackson, Billy Joel and Barbara Streisand.

Then one day the call came from Sony: "Get Secret Service clearance and report to the White House." Bill Clinton's staff had decided to wire the nation's premiere home theater for the 21st century.

"It wasn't the most elaborate system. But the White House was the most prestigious job I have done," Vitrofsky said, who declined to pinpoint how much he was paid but said it exceeded \$50,000.

GAMBLING MAN

Vitrofsky returned to South Florida about three years ago when Gloria and Emilio Estefan hired him to put the home theater in their Miami-Dade mansion. Keying in on South Florida's growing Populence, celebrity homeowners and a dearth of qualified installers, Vitrofsky decided to open HED South in 1997.

His gamble paid off. After working out of a 1,000 square-foot warehouse space and his home for two years, Vitrofsky purchased, gutted and moved into a 7,000 square-foot building last month.

Nationwide, home theater sales increased 18 percent from 1994 to 1998. According to Consumer Electronics Manufacturers Association. While no statistics are kept on South Florida home theater sales, Forrester Research analyst Bruce Kasrel said local sales – particularly of the high-end systems Vitrofsky covets –

likely outpace the national average.

"Any time there's a high concentration of wealth, you'll see home theater do very well. Miami, Silicon Valley and Seattle are great places because there are a lot of younger people with money," Kasrel said. "People there also are much more entertainment oriented."

Auto mogul Alan Potamkin hired Vitrofsky a year ago to integrate sound, video and lighting in the 10,000 square foot home he is building in Gables Estates. A neighbor, who had spent months researching sound systems as part of a multimillion-dollar home renovation, selected Vitrofsky on the advice of manufacturer's representatives at a Las Vegas trade show. But Potamkin's chief reason for choosing Vitrofsky was that he tailored the system to his needs.

That meant top of the line equipment in Potamkin's media room and living room and one-touch lighting systems throughout the house and four-acre yard. But at the front door and in the children's playroom where top-notch sound quality wasn't critical – Vitrofsky installed less costly components and saved thousands.

"It's just foolishness to have an excellent sound system in my closet," Potamkin said. "I don't mind spending the money, I just don't want to waist it.

"So far, Jan's done the system in a way that I know how everything works, and it sounds fabulous to me. I'm ecstatic.

THE COMPETITION

Vitrofsky's mix-and-match approach and his proclivity for getting the most bang for the buck may earn him points with customers, but it raises the hackles of high-end competitors. Jim McGowan, owner of Good Sounds Home Theater in Margate said he has lost bids to HED South because some clients don't realize the difference in quality a few thousand dollars can make.

"They do things like take a \$4,000 touch screen and put in a \$399 receiver. That's like me putting on a \$50 shirt and a \$1 tie. It doesn't make sense," McGowan said. "We try to do everything on the same level."

But Alex Wallau, president of ABC Television, said he knew a dozen people in New York who had paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for such high-end systems. In almost every case, either the systems didn't work or the service fell short. Wallau said he has been a Vitrofsky client since 1980 because he always delivers.

"Jan understands that nobody who pays for a high-end audiovisual system wants to call twice. He will do whatever it takes to get these things installed. That's huge," Wallau said. "Versus his competition, and believe me, I've dealt with a lot of them, he just is at another level.
