

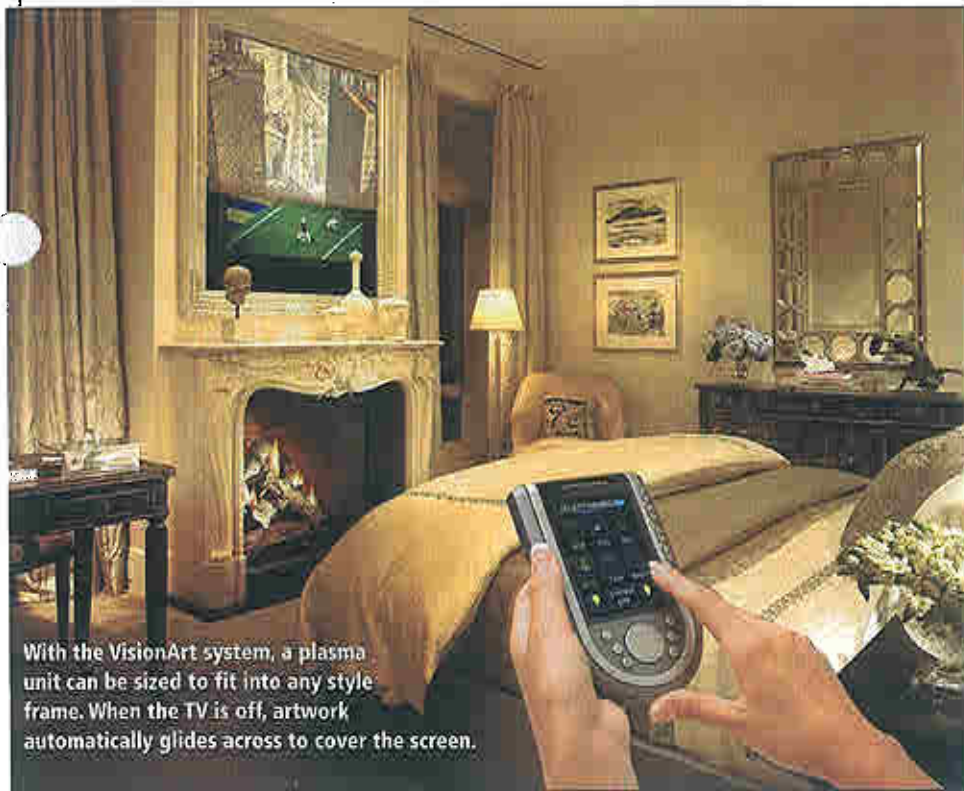
# Custom Home

The Art and Craft of Custom Home Building ■ January/February 2007

Trend Lines/Technology

## Disappearing Act

Must-not-see TV.



With the VisionArt system, a plasma unit can be sized to fit into any style frame. When the TV is off, artwork automatically glides across to cover the screen.

### The Digital Home

By Rebecca Day

It's on every homeowner's wish list, and it's the interior designer's dream. The flat-panel TV—plasma or LCD—has become both status symbol and style statement. What's more, a TV thin enough to hang on the wall eliminates the need for awkward furniture and frees up precious floor space. Still, to many, a TV is still a TV, no matter how thin. Today's custom electronics challenge? How to hide the plasma TV.

TVs measuring 4 to 5 inches deep offer woodworkers and entrepreneurs possibilities that never existed in the tube-TV world. Innovative lifts store a flat-panel TV in the ceiling, beneath the floor, or in customized credenzas. A roll-down canvas unfurls to cover a plasma TV and then morphs into a

60 ■ Custom Home ■ January/February 2007

framed painting when the TV isn't in use. A hutch with a revolving center section stores a flat-panel TV on one side and bookshelves on the other.

"People don't necessarily want to show off their flat panels," says Dave Tovissi, president of Criteria of Naples, an upscale electronics and interior design firm based in Naples, Fla. "They want to get rid of their big TV and the bulky piece of furniture that used to hide it. I don't care if it's a high-gloss Pioneer Elite or a standard Fujitsu model, it's still a black box. When the TV is on showing a stunning 1080p [high-quality resolution] picture, it's beautiful, but when you turn it off it's a piece of metal and glass hanging on the wall. There's nothing attractive about that."

Criteria of Naples sells the Vutec ArtScreen, a masking system for plasma and LCD TVs with screen sizes of 32 to 65 inches diagonal. When triggered by remote control, artwork descends to cover the TV screen and retracts again for viewing. The company has an image library of more than 280 reproductions from a variety of periods and styles, and consumers can also choose

their own custom artwork or photographs. A wide selection of frames and liners is available to match the decor. Frames can be mounted to the surface of the wall or installed recessed into the wall.

For interior designers, concealment solutions like ArtScreen and Solar Shading Systems' VisionArt complete the cycle started by the flat-panel TV. Marcia Van Liew, managing director of Lawrence & Scott, a Seattle-based interior design firm, says a product like VisionArt's shading system frees the interior designer from having to deal with the TV as an appliance. "We can basically make it go away," she says.

Instead, Van Liew says, "designers are now free to think in terms of the traditional tools of interior design—and that's art."

VisionArt's masking system allows designers to fit the plasma into any style frame so the TV no longer dictates the overall size of the mounting solution. "Because you don't have to conform to the size of the plasma you're completely free—as you were before television entered the picture—to design the interior with a work of art," she says.

VisionArt offers several features that are appealing to Van Liew as a designer. The VisionArt system doesn't require a separate remote control, for instance, but has power circuitry that's triggered by the TV's on/off button. "You turn off the TV and the artwork automatically glides up to cover the screen," she says. Despite the repeated wear and tear on the canvas, Van Liew says the giclee technique used to reproduce artwork is top quality and professional. She has speced artwork both from the VisionArt

PHOTO: TONY SOLURI

collection and original artwork from clients.

Art frames from both companies come with provisions for sound for TVs without speakers. Vutec's solution is the SoundScape 360 option, a bar-shaped speaker compartment that's positioned near the base of the

able to put in a system that's going to let the architecture speak."

Leidig finds himself able to be more creative when meeting the wishes of his clients. One customer didn't want to mount his plasma in the typical way

42-inch plasma TV has plummeted to \$1,000—and a 50-inch to sub-\$2,500—the cost of designing and building a flat-panel housing solution can far outweigh the price of the product itself. "The overall cost of concealing a TV has come down because plasmas are now so inexpensive, but people have to ask themselves whether they're going to spend \$5,000 for a painting that will house a \$2,000 plasma TV," he says.

Another consideration is space. If you want to use a VisionArt system flush-mounted in the wall, you may want to make the wall artificially deeper. "A product like VisionArt has a back box with a frame and roller attached to it and then the TV is about 5½ inches deep in addition," Leidig says. "So we like to create a false space that's 8 inches deep."

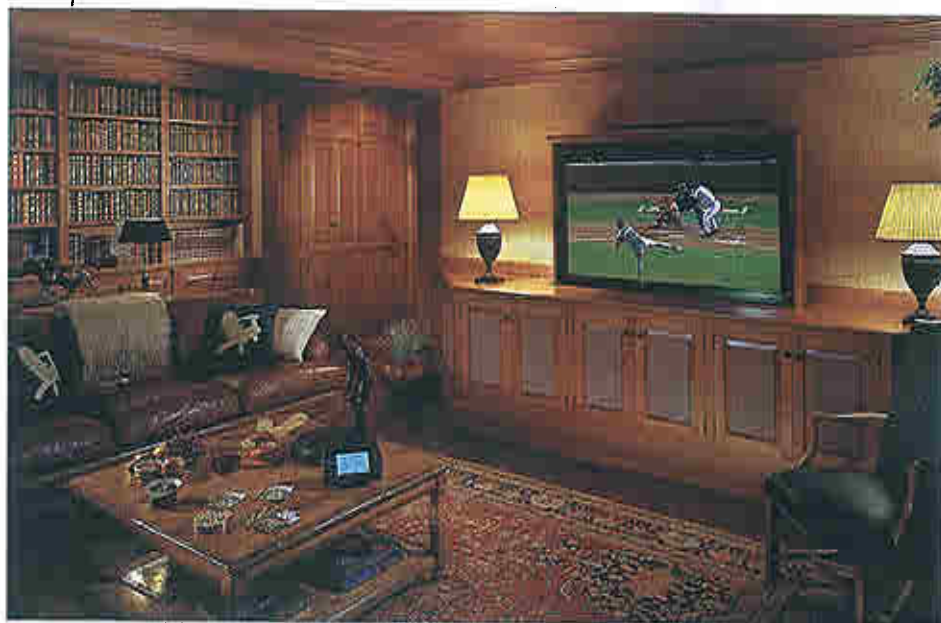
For ventilation, Ambiance Systems uses kits that exhaust the air to the basement or to the attic. "The death of most equipment is not keeping it on all the time but the on/off cycles of going from really

warm to room temperature," Leidig says. "The expansion and contraction of components is what leads to premature death."

Hiding TVs and speakers isn't the only consideration. These days a TV typically requires an external box for programming. "You also have to figure out where the equipment will go," Leidig says. Clients typically want a clean look so where possible Leidig will centralize all equipment at an equipment rack in the basement.

In a New England weekend home, Leidig built a custom cabinet that rises out of the floor hoisting a 50-inch plasma TV. The cabinet was

built to look like furniture but is actually a façade with cutouts for speakers beneath the display. When the TV is off, the entire mechanism goes into its hiding place beneath the floor. "When they turn the TV off it goes away," Leidig says. "There's something inherently cool about that."  
—Rebecca Day specializes in writing about home electronics. She can be reached at [customhomerd@aol.com](mailto:customhomerd@aol.com).



Plasma and LCD TVs are shallow enough to be hidden inside cabinetry when not in use and then appear at the touch of a button when needed, as in these installations by Ambiance Systems.

frame. Installers can specify their own speaker options to fit the compartment.

VisionArt recommends that installers who want to offer clients more dynamic sound opt for a larger-size frame—a 60-inch frame for a 42-inch TV, for instance—and use the extra space for custom-mounted speakers. Remaining space and speakers can then be covered by a masking system and acoustically transparent fabric.

The shallow depth of plasma and LCD TVs has helped installers with built-in solutions as well. "We're doing everything from hiding them with paintings, dropping them out of ceilings, and popping them up out of floors and pieces of furniture," says Marc Leidig, president of Ambiance Systems in Clifton Park, N.Y. "We love hiding plasmas. We're in an area that's pretty conservative and we serve a large number of clients with second homes. The architectural vernacular of those houses is very traditional: Catskill, Vermont, Berkshire-style. We love being



behind standard doors because he knew the doors would always stay open when not in use. "So I devised a plasma facing backward in the cabinet, and the cabinet slides out and then the TV rotates around," he says. The magic trick itself becomes entertainment for the room.

Leidig cautions that the cost of these custom installations can be steep. And at a time when the price of a name-brand