

THE CINEMA CONNOISSEUR

A Paradise Theater Publication



Tale of Two Cinemas

Sam Cavitt



“I get more excitement” is the owner’s response when asked why excellence over compromise is worth the effort to pursue in those things he loves.

The question posed to the owner of not one but two Paradise Theaters is particularly relevant. A consummate connoisseur of a life well-lived, he exudes the enthusiasm of those amenities he loves and, in turn, shares with those he loves. “To me, it’s all about the ability to have these really beautiful shared experiences. If you watch a great movie together it’s a great shared experience. You get a sense that you’re alive and you’re engaged and you’re doing things with people. You’re enjoying that engagement with other people.”

The owner first contacted Paradise Theater in 2015. Although in planning for his “Five Shadows” residence in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, his immediate concern was the revision of a media room space in the Malibu home he had acquired mid-construction. His journey began, however, long before Malibu.

As a teenager in Upstate New York, the owner was influenced by a local musician who was also his cousin. From the Beatles, Led Zeppelin and Genesis to the Brecker Brothers and Stanley Clarke, an appreciation of sound emerged. He sought a shared experience from the start and funded by his father, assembled a system that the whole family enjoyed. “Just gathering together and listening to an album as an experience” the owner recalls those early days. “I think that is why

cinema is so interesting to me” he explains, “I used to listen to an album like we were watching a movie, right?”

Back to Malibu and 2015, when he met with Paradise Theater President, Ryan Brown, to explore the possibilities. Ryan introduced the Paradise Theater engineering process and the approach to achieving excellence and the owner engaged the Paradise team on the spot. The team consisted of Paradise’s own architecture, interior, CAD designers, acoustical engineers and project managers. Ryan also recommended Fantastic Theaters as theater construction specialists to ensure the successful implementation of their work. Says Gideon Perry, Fantastic’s President, “Malibu is a good fit (for their services) because it wasn’t a blank canvas to start with, explaining the value of his company experience overcoming “challenges to create a high-performance chassis in consideration of the physical limitations.” Rounding out the team: the project general contractor, subcontractor and, finally, interior designer, Philip Nimmo.

The Malibu house wasn’t the owner’s first go-round with a home theater. He enjoyed his Chicago home and theater and, in fact, had a speaker company design and provide the system for the Malibu house. But this represented a stage in his cinema connoisseur journey. He recalls “I had the opportunity at first in Malibu, say, okay, this is something I’ve always enjoyed, let’s do it the right way. Let’s do it with engineers.” Paradise Theater got right to work gathering engineering data on the specified equipment and conducting acoustical modeling and analysis of the space and systems. Collaborative iterations resulted in a final, upgraded specification. In the meantime, theater functional design and feasibility collaboration proceeded with Paradise, Fantastic the project GC and subs. Typical of theater engineering launched midstream, some things to be sorted out. It was no small task, but the resulting solutions serve as a testimony to collaboration, creativity and experience all an



Contemporary Theater in Malibu, California

true to his values of the shared experience, aesthetics mattered too. Comfort and calming grace were the guiding tenet of the **'made for the family'** interior. Philip Nimmo worked around the engineering requirements of the Paradise Team to deliver a custom commissioned chenille sofa, bespoke Jean Michele Frank inspired club chairs, bespoke lighting and a fun feeling space that is hard to leave! A room the family enjoys every day they are in residence!

For many, this contemporary cinema in Malibu would represent the culmination of a successful journey. A destination worthy of a private cinema connoisseur, certainly a very nice place to share some quality sights, sounds and socialization! But for the owner, the journey had only begun.



From the beaches of Malibu to the majestic mountains of Jackson Hole

Back to the future and Jackson Hole Wyoming, where the *'Five Shadows'* project was in early design. *'The owner approached us with strong ideas about the desired home design,'* explains Sam Ankeny of CLB Architects. *'The owner envisioned simplicity of materials, detailing, and hidden symmetries, which resonated with our team.'* One item that was initially set aside was the theater. *'We were bumping up against some square footage restrictions,'* Sam recalls. *'After spending some time on a second home project in Malibu, which included a home theater, the owner came back around to the desire to have a theater in the Teton Village home as well.'* The owner adds, *'I was excited. It's been a long journey, a long quest for me to find a group of partners like you guys to indulge, to get the right acoustic environment constructed.'*

Again, Team Paradise gets right to work. Coordination of a very sophisticated private cinema within a complex residential architecture that had progressed without the Paradise Team's input stretched creativity and engineering alike. At *Five Shadows*, named for the five separate structures visually connected by glass-walled passages, these structures were also connected by converging mechanical systems that passed through the space designated for the owner's dream theater. *'It was like a perfect storm'* recalls Paradise President Ryan Brown. *'Our client had developed a very keen desire to attain a truly extraordinary private cinema, but the space designated for that cinema just happened to be at the crossroads of all the mechanical systems for the home. Add to that, the structural engineering for the building had been completed prior to our involvement and the opportunity to excavate further had passed us by.'*

Undeterred by the proverbial *'rock and a hard spot'* Paradise designers and engineers put the PT

process through its paces. Brown recounts, *'the PT process takes all the guesswork out of getting the desired results.'* PT engineers work with project engineers to determine precisely how much noise mechanical systems will generate, reworking ducting to further reduce in-room noise and confirm these myriad calculations to assure successful implementation. *'We have learned to get the engineering right before too much design has transpired'* Brown continues. Paradise

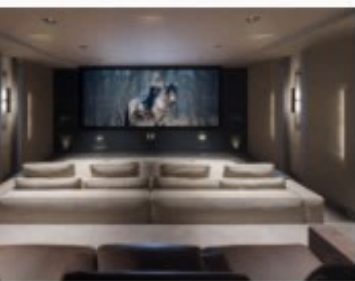


Winter sunset above Jackson Hole, WY Photo by Danny Holland on Unsplash

engineers found that systems located just outside the theater and required to pass through the theater space represented serious noise potential. At the same time, one of those noisy systems needed to enter the theater for its own ventilation requirements. Paradise designers were called on to solve that dilemma within an already limited and rapidly shrinking space. Brown credits his team of designers for creatively nesting the internal ducts with the pass-through ductwork conserving vital space. *'We needed to balance noise, space and ventilation without redundant penetrations of the acoustic envelope. Our team pulled off a miracle from my perspective!'* »

Solving the mechanical was just act one. Adds Ankeny "Everything on the lower level is slab on grade, in order to get ergonomics of the theater right we had to build up the floor. To thoughtfully introduce the steps, the design for the stair to the lower level incorporates an elevated landing. The stair comes down to meet a raised platform, that then steps into the theater." Sam goes on to say, "The theater, and adjacent lounge space, gives the basement a lot more purpose. It is a beautiful space that makes the basement more of a destination within the home." Relates Ankeny, "What's interesting about the home," Sam continues, "are the layers of separation and isolation, the amount of technology, and the amount of sophistication behind the scenes. What looks simple, is anything but simple."

Such covert qualities resonate with the owner. "Same thing" referring to his 1973 Porsche 911 which he proudly shares "has been on Jay Lena's Garage" and "named one of the top six restored, modern Porsches in the world". He adds "We did stitch

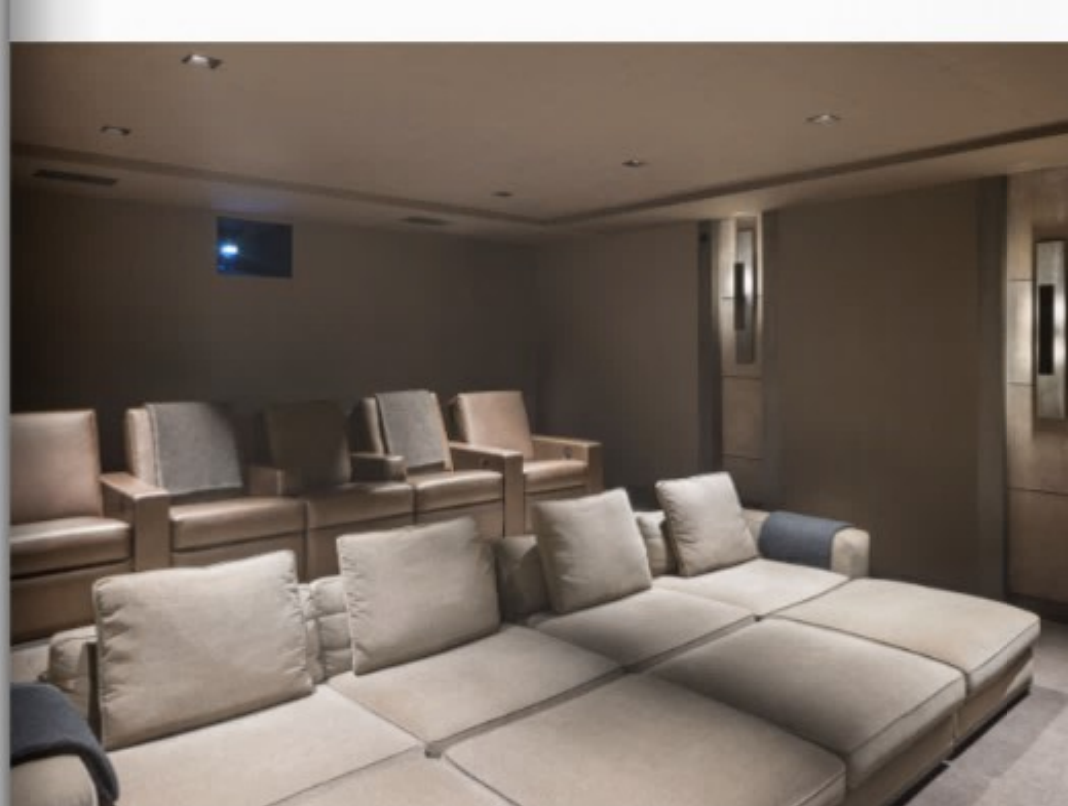


welding. This has only been done where they used to take Porsches in the early seventies making race cars." In a specially equipped workshop, the chassis is placed on a select bench where the car is kept perfectly aligned and every metal connection is precision



welded at 2-inch increments, maintaining the stiffness and precision of a race car. The owner shares "Porsche race people, true connoisseurs, have come to see my car and drive and they say there is something extraordinary, really amazing about this car. They'll look underneath or open the back and say, oh my God, this has been stitched!" Comparing this to his theater he explains "there's this unbelievable attention to detail, but then it gets covered up."

Having enhanced the theater chassis Team Paradise shifted attention to the balance of the room's performance engineering. Brown explains, "high-performance cinemas are engineered from the outside in and inside out. In either case, the Paradise process has been developed to assure Excellence Always." Viewer/listener positions, loudspeaker positions, screen size, projector specification and interior acoustical devices are the "gears" that must be perfectly aligned to result in what Paradise Theater calls Experience Nonpareil. Brown goes on to say, "there is a



5 Shadows Private Cinema in Jackson Hole, Wyoming

a persistent tendency to look for easier ways to design and engineer a private theater, configurators, AI, templates, kits and the like. We've investigated them ourselves. At the end of the day, we realized the process we had developed, and continue to refine, is the key. Instead of trying to squeeze a client's unique theater into something that doesn't really apply, our process looks at all the variables, all the performance criteria and enables us to reliably produce excellent results. That's what we did for our client's theater."

At this point, the "Five Shadows" theater had progressed to the next stage. In performance automobile parlance the precision-engineered chassis, engine and drivetrain were ready for the aesthetic artistry to commence. Articulation of an artistic vision compatible with the performance engineered configuration is a critical commission. "I take responsibility for how it looks" affirms Philip Nimmo who relates that the owner wanted a theater that would be a contender for the best of

the best and was committed to that on every level. Nimmo speaks to the importance of the aesthetic saying, "Theaters used to be an event location" and as such the environment should be elevating to those experiencing the event. "They (the family) use it daily." That frequency of use and such high expectations created a high bar for the team, a design that elevates the audience, despite daily use, "every time". That mandate resulted in what Nimmo describes as a "cool Italian contemporary interior" that maintains the "colors, motif and tranquility of the home". Pulling it off, says Nimmo was made easier due to a "nice collaboration between Paradise, CMB and (specialty builder), Fantastic Theaters." Nimmo concludes, "it really was a collaborative project."

Speaking of pulling it off, often overlooked is the integrity in the construction of a home theater room. Gideon Perry, President of Fantastic Theaters explains, "I think the main reason it's rare is that traditionally in home cinema, it's all about the audio and video, and nobody has really

put a lot of emphasis on the room itself." Perry continues, "Technology is fleeting, always changing. One thing that doesn't change is physics. If you build a good foundation for the room, you can swap out electronics. That room can stand the test of time." Kyle Brown, VP Operations and Quality Assurance for Paradise Theater, chimes in, "Our engineering, design and documentation teams devote a lot of time and effort, and it can all be for nothing if the plans aren't followed." Brown continues to say, "We provide

QC but nothing beats experience." The owner agrees, "I love Gideon's and your team, guys who were just so passionate. I'm excited talking about it." Perry reports, "It worked out really well. Open communication made this project a success. A kickoff meeting early on to establish everyone's scope is absolutely the difference-maker." Success doesn't come easy however as the Fantastic team was called on to execute the aforementioned miracles of engineering in the physical construction of the room. Perry relates, "It's



important to have a contractor that knows how to put all that together, can adapt and accommodate changes in the field without compromising the performance." At Five Shadows, however, one change had nothing to do with compromise and everything to do with performance. The owner's pursuit of excellence was no secret. So when he was presented with something that would dramatically improve his experience it was no surprise he embraced it. It did however pose some challenges! Robert Bracero, Chief Science Officer at Roberts Audio &

Video relates the story, "I met the owner in Malibu where he wanted some pretty advanced programming. I showed them what can be done." He was impressed and flew Bracero out to Jackson Hole to see that project as it was being built, exclaiming "I waited years for this!" Seeing Five Shadows in construction made one thing clear "He believed in good theaters." Bracero recalls and he promptly set up a meeting with the owner to visit the Professional Home Cinema (PRO) experience center in Lake Forest to receive an immersive audio demonstration. Paul Hales,

Owner and President of Pro Audio Technology recalls, "I really liked him (the owner). He cared, he asked questions. He wanted to have an exceptional room that would be at state-of-the-art." Hales talks about that demonstration, likening it to the experience of a wine connoisseur. "They have to taste the wine and then go, 'yes, I like that'. The owner is the best example of that, he appreciated the whole process from the very first sip of wine through building the wine cellar to stocking the wine in it and then enjoying it every day." And stock it he did!



A very powerful audio system ready to install.
Photo Credit: Robert Bracero, Roberts Home Audio & Video, Inc.



A photo illustrating the system in place prior to acoustics and finishes.
Photo Credit: Robert Bracero, Roberts Home Audio & Video, Inc.

Bracero recalls "He ended up going with the all-in package!" A PRO system comprising 58 channels and just shy of 40,000 watts! Those 58 channels comprising dual 15" 3-way screen-wall speakers, 8 - dual 12" 3-way speakers, 8 - 8" 2-way immersive speakers, 2 - 24" subwoofers and 4 - dual 12" bass management subwoofers. Such a significant change at the eleventh hour had engineering, design and construction members of the team scrambling. Ryan Brown explains, "it would be like pulling into the last pit stop of a formula one race and changing engines. First off, we have to make sure it will fit, then analyze the effect on the room's acoustics. Since every loudspeaker is a very specific instrument with unique characteristics and Paradise refuses to stake our client's experience on luck, that is non-negotiable." The owner appreciates the attention to detail saying "One day I was talking to your team about how to manage all that sound energy in the room and how we were going to place the sound traps. That to me was fascinating. I just love it". Design and

construction was stretched as well. Kyle Brown recalls, "We needed to determine the impact of the changes on documentation and details then collaborate with Fantastic on what was absolutely necessary in light of the timing." Perry sums it up with "We were called on to fit giant speaker boxes in the room with minimal impact and without compromising the performance. The interior designer doesn't realize anything is different. That was good!"

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RESOURCES

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Fantastic Theaters • Theater Construction
Robert's Home Audio & Video, Inc • System Integration
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"I'll never forget tuning the theater," remembers the owner. "We got to 155 DB with zero distortion. We were feeling the energy; my hair was moving on my head and my ears weren't hurting. It was just this unbelievable euphoric feeling." It wasn't all about playing loud though as Hales recounts, "The room is almost too quiet! The high-frequency drivers are so sensitive, and the room is so quiet that the softest high frequencies can be heard. A lot of attention was given to gain staging to get the right balance of output and detail." Brown adds "It is very satisfying when we conduct our Performance Verification. We test for background noise, acoustic accuracy and ambience which includes room reverberation. When the results are like this room, it means everyone did a great job!" Says the owner, about the audio experience, "It just transports people. Both the video and the audio experience is fantastic. The connoisseurship is really through the audio side of the experience because trust me when a person hears the audio in my theater, they haven't heard anything like it before."



Photo Credit: Robert Brown, Robert Home Audio & Video, Inc.



When asked what he liked most about his theater the owner had plenty to share. "Audio performance, for sure. And when I say audio performance, it's a combination of resolution and fidelity. The ability to play loudly without distortion, but also play softly with resolution. That full spectrum of audio performance. That's very, very impactful. Then obviously the video performance. It is very film like. Then there is the aesthetic quality. It's a beautiful design, it's very welcoming when people come into the theater, they like being there. It's aesthetically a very pleasing place. That's a combination of the materials, the layout that a lot of people do comment on. A hidden feature is that it is a room stacked full of technology. Gideon installed hidden lights at strategic locations around the room and at the end of a movie, Robert's programmed that backlighting to come on, showing all the speakers. It is a revelation of the technology behind the aesthetics. It looks like a simple aesthetic space but then, OMG, there's all this technology!"

I had the opportunity to enjoy a private showing of Five Shadows. The owner, the consummate connoisseur of living well, started me with a walk around the structures, pointing out discrete but essential elements of the architecture. My delighted docent then shared the massive pivot entry, monolithic sculptures and calming tryptic that had entranced a visiting architectural class (as it did me), then shared much more before escorting me into the hidden level that included a surprisingly light and airy lobby. Finally, after suitably building my anticipation, I was invited to enter the cinema itself. Hours later, after reveling and celebrating the aesthetics, sights and sounds, and most importantly, as he puts it, "particularly beautiful, shared experiences" we enjoyed a pleasant dinner at the foot of one of the Grand Teton ski slopes. In thirty-plus years in the business, this was an afternoon that will be often and fondly recalled. This is why I do what I do. This is Cinema Connoisseurship.

