

# HOME ENTERTAINMENT

THE FINEST IN AUDIO/VIDEO TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

# 25

## ways home technology can help you

- > get rid of those remotes
- > control lighting and security
- > simplify your lifestyle

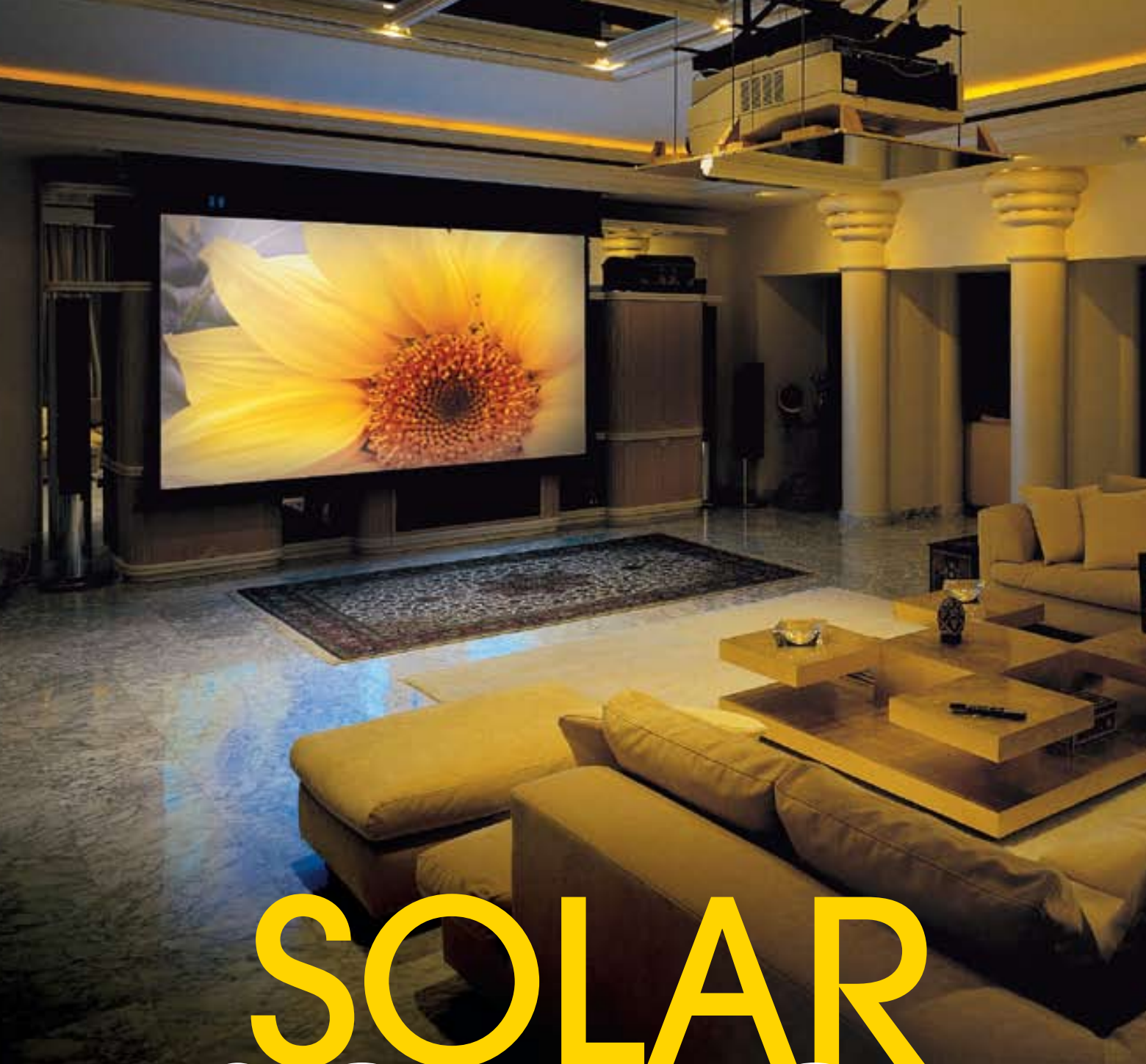


### masterpiece < theater

Yes, that's a skylight—and the walls change color, too!  
*See page 88*

Meridian's Ultimate Home-Theater-In-A-Box  
 High-Tech TVs from Hitachi, Mitsubishi & Brillian  
 Summer Sound: Our Favorite Outdoor System





# SOLAR SOLUTION

**High-tech** window treatments can help tame an "over-exposed" **media room.**

> BY SCOTT WASSER



>>> using shades and drapes to control natural light, you can convert a sun-filled living room into a casual media room or a serious home theater in seconds



It was a bone-chilling 36 degrees outside, but a cozy 73 degrees inside as a realtor guided her clients through a newly built home. The realtor noted that the home's furnace was turned off, and pointed out that the house's southern exposure and floor-to-ceiling windows would help keep heating costs low. What she failed to mention was the adverse effect those factors would have on the home buyers' planned media room.

But that effect became painfully obvious as soon as the buyers moved into their new house. The streaming sunshine that kept the home warm in the winter also wreaked havoc on their year-round television viewing. With the windows uncovered, the new homeowners' rear-projection TV screen was totally washed out from mid-morning until nighttime. Covering the windows with conventional shades and blinds made on-screen images visible, but sunlight seeping through spaces in and around the coverings created blinding solar flares that erupted from the screen. Blocking the sun with opaque drapery was out of the question because of the air ducts and high-backed theater seating in front of the windows.

Fortunately, Lutron Electronics has a solution. In the last couple of decades, Lutron has evolved from a maker of electronic dimmers into an automated lighting systems giant—but since 2001, it also has been offering ways to control natural lighting. Its Sivoia QED roller shade system, available in more fabrics and materials than a gypsy caravan, is an elegant and effective way to take total control over the light entering virtually any window in any home.

"Lighting control is essential to every home," says Lutron market development manager Stacey Kim. "Part of that is controlling heat and ultraviolet light, but it also completely changes the way a home looks. And when you're talking about controlling natural light, you can't overlook that."

Lutron's Sivoia QED products impact a home's appearance in two ways: by enhancing its decor with elegant and decorative window treatments, and by using those treatments to control the amount and intensity of light passing through its windows. This form of passive lighting control is so effective that with the press of a button it is capable of turning a living space from operating-room bright to subterranean cavern dark.

The benefit to home theater lovers—particularly those using plasma, and front- and rear-projection displays—is obvious. By employing Sivoia QED window treatments, any room or living space can be turned into a media center. It gives occupants of even tiny apartments the ability to instantly convert their precious floor space from, say, a bright living room to a glare-free media center. And homeowners no longer have to confine their theaters to a naturally dark space in a seldom-used corner of the house.

Or, as Lutron channel marketing manager Will Gonzalez puts it, "It can bring the home theater out of the basement."

Only someone in Gonzalez's line of work would know that there are over 1 billion windows in America's homes, and that the window covering industry produces around 25 million shades a



<< Most passive lighting control systems combine shade/drape control with conventional lighting control. The systems may have specific controls for each shade (above left) or scenes that combine certain shade/drape and light settings under a descriptive moniker, such as "entertain" or "late night" (above right). The shades and drapes may also be controlled through touchscreens.

» Passive lighting control is especially appropriate for rooms with multistory windows. The shades can be dropped in seconds to keep the room comfortable despite intense mid-day sun, or drawn just as quickly to admit soothing natural light at times when the sun is not streaming in. Raising and lowering so many large shades manually would prove cumbersome—and quite tiring.



year. Yet in most cases conventional shades and blinds are inadequate for home theater needs, “and a lot of people just don’t know what they can do about it,” Gonzalez says.

Of course, they could easily block out the light coming through any window with a can of black Krylon spray paint from the hardware store. But Lutron’s Sivoia QED systems offer an efficient way to control the light, not merely eliminate it. The company recently provided a remarkably effective demonstration in a conference room at its Coopersburg, Pa., headquarters.

One wall of the conference room was lined with uncovered windows that bombarded those seated around a large table with a harsh and unyielding glare. After subjecting me to this for a few minutes, Lutron’s Kim walked over to a wall switch panel and, while still engaged in conversation, pressed a button. Suddenly and silently about a dozen previously hidden window shades lowered with the precision of a military parade drill unit, then stopped at exactly the same spot about three-quarters of the way to the bottom.

The glare disappeared. That, in conjunction with the decorative nature of the shades, which featured a multicolored geometric pattern on a translucent white fabric, changed the entire ambiance of the room. Minutes later, Kim pressed another button and a second tier of shades—these opaque—lowered from behind the first set. This time the shades did not stop dropping until the windows were completely covered, effectively turning what had been a dazzlingly bright conference room into the perfect environment for a PowerPoint slide presentation.

I had difficulty deciding which was more impressive: the room’s magical transformation or the shades’ eerily silent operation. The latter is the result of Lutron’s proprietary QED (Quiet Electronic Drive) system, which replaces conventional spring-loaded shade rollers with a precision motor and gear assembly and computer processor tucked into a composite tube.

These rollers are available in three diameters that can fit in pockets ranging from 3.5 to 7 inches square. The smallest rollers can hoist and lower as much as 64 square feet of fabric, while the larger ones can handle up to 225 square feet. The rollers are designed to operate conventional or Roman-style shades, which are offered in more than 100 fabrics, materials, patterns, and degrees of opacity. Drapery track systems also are available. All Sivoia QED systems can be operated independently or integrated into a Lutron home lighting system and can be controlled automatically or manually through an electronic keypad or IR remote.

Kim says the Sivoia QED system has benefits beyond making living spaces more conducive to home theaters. It can help reduce cooling costs and protect furnishings and artwork by filtering ultraviolet rays, and it can enhance security by keeping prying eyes at bay.

Those may be practical and appealing benefits of using Lutron’s window treatments, but for me they are merely fringe benefits. Having seen the way the Sivoia QED system can totally tame natural light, I feel its greatest attribute is an almost magical ability to turn any room into a home theater at the touch of a button. HE

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