

Robb Report

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HOME ENTERTAINMENT

THE FINEST IN AUDIO/VIDEO TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

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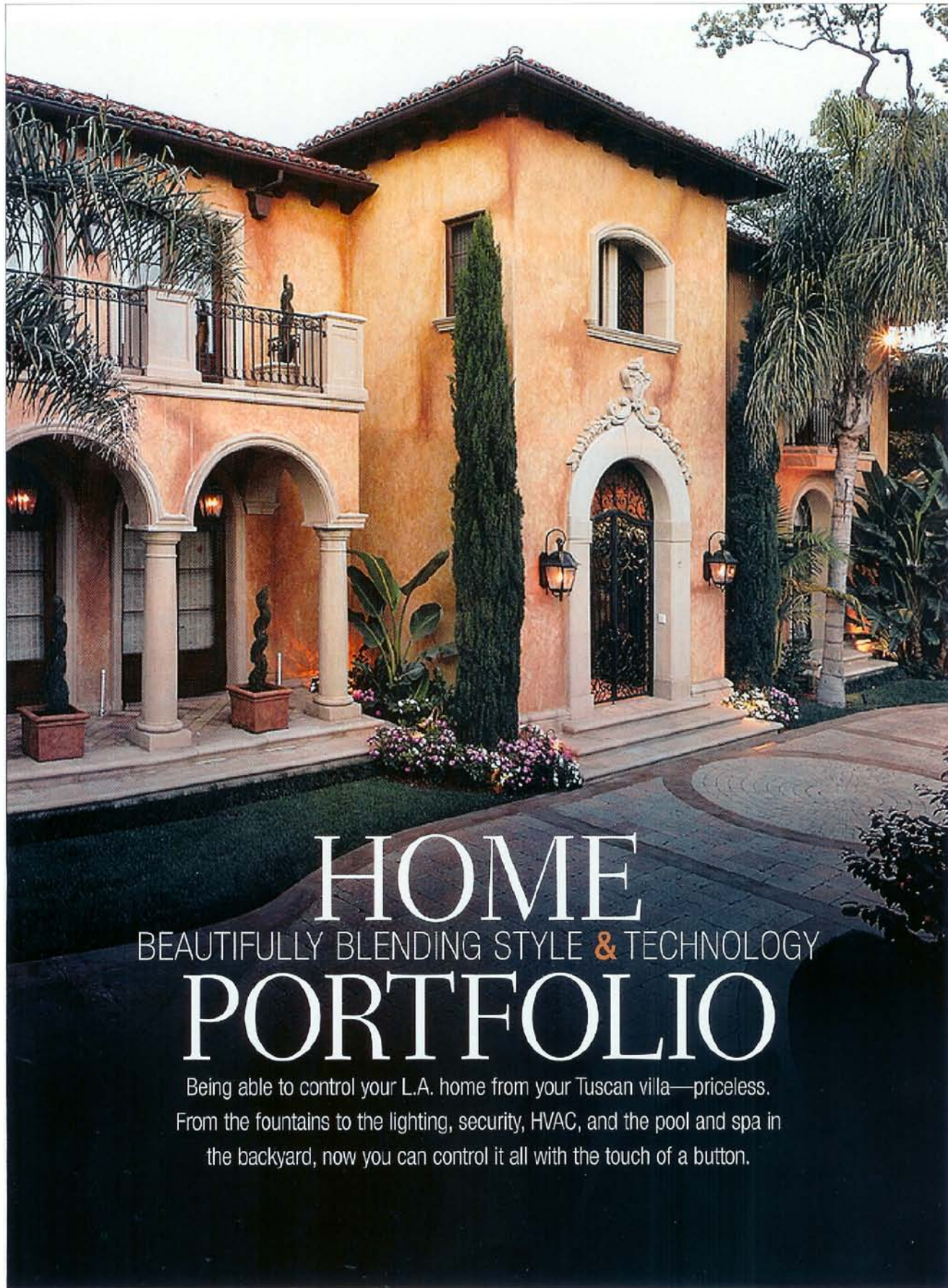
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HOME

BEAUTIFULLY BLENDING STYLE & TECHNOLOGY

PORTFOLIO

Being able to control your L.A. home from your Tuscan villa—priceless. From the fountains to the lighting, security, HVAC, and the pool and spa in the backyard, now you can control it all with the touch of a button.



Just one MAGICAL TOUCH

A MODERN ITALIANATE home, set behind imposing forged-iron gates and faux-painted in a subtle terra-cotta finish, stands out in its Beverly Hills neighborhood. "Every day, I see cars slowing down so that people can get a better look," the homeowner observes. "And they don't even know what's inside."



Put away those star maps, rubberneckers. This isn't Madonna's house. In fact, it doesn't belong to any Hollywood starlet, although the home has piqued the interest of its celebrity neighbors. The owners are Joseph Akhtarzad, president and co-founder of Just One Touch/Video & Audio Center

of Santa Monica, Calif., and his wife. This is a dream home for the young couple and their three kids—and a living showroom for the fully automated electronics that Akhtarzad's company offers. But don't expect to see any of the home's \$2 million worth of technology.

All of the gear in the house is hidden and is magically operated via one-touch Crestron control panels. Akhtarzad can even operate his home from Italy if he chooses. "If I'm out of the country, I can access the house by computer to change the sprinkler system or watch what's going on in the house through 16 remote cameras," he says.

Living in an elaborate working technology laboratory is no hardship for a young Beverly Hills couple and their three children.

BY JEAN PENN PHOTOGRAPHY BY RANDALL MICHELSON



In the cocktail lounge (above), a screen drops down from the ceiling in front of a mural that depicts a party scene—the focal point of the lounge. Here, padded upholstered walls are of the same plush fabrics as the high-backed sofas and chairs. Details, from the wall sconces to the pillows on the velvet banquette beneath the mural, repeat the Art Deco theme in a palette of blue, melon, and gold. In the pool cabana (right), a plasma TV is disguised by a VisionArt painting of Portofino. Guests often congregate in the cabana, which overlooks the water show beyond.





“At least two clients who had no intention of building a home theater decided they had to have one after seeing this theater.”

—Dave McAdam, project manager

Several years ago, Akhtarzad added a high-end custom systems business to his Video & Audio Center (thus, the Just One Touch name). “If a client wanted to see our work in action, it was difficult to arrange because our clients are so private,” says Akhtarzad. Now he just invites them to his house. To accommodate his wife’s privacy request, he limits client tours to Tuesday mornings. From 9 a.m. to noon, qualified customers, and their architect and interior designer, are invited to tour the premises. These potential clients are also invited, along with longtime customers and the couple’s friends, to one of the Akhtarzads’ large, catered affairs on Super Bowl Sunday or for the Academy Awards—parties in which the couple pulls out all the stops.

THE HOUSE DID NOT START OUT as a showcase home. When Akhtarzad purchased the property about four years ago, he and his wife intended to remodel the existing home. Los Angeles architect Hamid Gabbay and interior designer Reginald Adams worked with the family for 18 months on a remodel. Everything was in place. The city permits were in hand. The team was ready to roll.

“Be honest,” Akhtarzad suddenly asked Gabbay during a meeting. “Am I doing the right thing?”

The architect responded: “Joseph, if you tear this house down and build a new one, you’ll be a lot happier, and you’ll end up with a better house.”

“OK, let’s do it,” said Akhtarzad. At that moment, his private residence became a

home not only for his family, but also for all of his future clients. “I decided if I was going to build a brand-new house, I would make it so unique that anyone who walked in would fall in love with the design—and would see how electronics can be concealed and controlled with just one touch.”

From the award-winning dramatic Art



Deco home theater in the basement to the Bellagio Hotel-inspired edge-lit pool, complete with its own water show, this capacious showplace dazzles in every way. (The water, which dances to the music at hand, is controlled by a central touchpanel that also controls the pool and spa.) Gabbay and Adams were instructed to spare no expense in making the Akhtarzads’ manse “wonderful and glamorous, but also comfortable for the family.”

The nearly 9,500 square feet on the first and second floors are composed of hand-applied Venetian plaster in hues of pale cream, ivory, apricot, Pompeian red, and terra-cotta; windows are covered in taffeta, silks, and linens. A mix of traditional and contemporary pieces—upholstered in striped taffeta in tones of bronze gold and red antiqued leather, silk damask, velvet, linen, and mohair—round out the furniture, which comes from the newly introduced Reginald Adams Classic Collection. The collection’s furniture and custom cabinetry are based on real antiques that are adapted to modern proportions.

The 4,500 square feet of the home’s underground entertainment space in the basement—also orchestrated by Reginald Adams, with the help of designers Stephen



While the golden age of movie palaces was the inspiration for the theater—which was the winner of the 2005 CEDIA award for best home theater architecture—the wood stage was added with the kids in mind. Raised 18 inches above the floor and covered with Deco-patterned carpeting, the stage is ideal for dancing and children's performances.

Stoner and Mark Hickman—is pure eye candy.

Dave McAdam, the Just One Touch project manager and system designer, added his magic in the form of one-touch custom audiovisual controls. All the latest in fully automated electronics and appliances are here—all easily accessed and concealed from view, all Crestron networked and controlled by one-touch buttons on strategically placed LCD panels. Two of the home's rooms, the theater and the family room, garnered CEDIA awards last year.

ON ANY TUESDAY MORNING, MCADAM CAN BE found leading tours through the house, demonstrating its six surround-sound systems, 290 lighting zones, five miles of low-voltage cabling, nine zones of HVAC—controlled by Crestron, of course—nine satellite receivers, 16 video displays, two VisionArt motorized paintings, a Jandy pool control, and 200 alarm contacts with motion detectors. “The

video sources are centralized, so you can record TiVo on one television and watch [the recorded program] on any other of the 16 in the house,” McAdam says of his favorite feature, adding that the home theater system alone cost about a half-million dollars.

While the electronics may be the home's main attraction, they're easy to miss because everything is invisible. At the dramatic entrance to the house—anchored by a sweeping cantilevered staircase and a partial rock crystal chandelier, which can be automatically lowered for cleaning and maintenance—there is not a single alarm keypad or light switch in sight. Akhtarzad, who earned a master's degree in electronics in London before coming to the United States, has been selling electronics for some 25 years through his Video & Audio Center. Now he makes much of his living by dreaming up ingenious ways of hiding those retail items within a home's decor. There are 16 or so flat-screen TVs—LCDs and plasmas—scattered throughout his house, including two in the master bath. The home is a working laboratory, a continual exper-



The gilded pilasters, a starry ceiling, and the decorative treatments on both sides of the screen—all Art Deco-inspired—hide the gigantic speakers. Interior designer Reginald Adams chose a palette of brick reds and mirrored the starburst ornamentation after one he saw in a historic theater. Walls are bathed in velvet of the same red, which also covers the leather lounge chairs and plush sofa.

iment with the fine art of technology camouflage.

“Now you can have the fireplace as the focal point of the room and still have a television,” says designer Adams of the cozy family room, which is topped with a domed plaster ceiling. Above the hand-carved Italianate marble mantle, a 19th-century Flemish tapestry conceals a TV screen.

This TV-tapestry setup was a first for McAdam, who was charged with making the historic fabric rise above the TV and descend back into place with the touch of a button. “A recess had already been built in the wall for a motorized roller,” he says. “The challenge was figuring out how to roll the tapestry up and down on the roller without binding it or damaging it, or hitting the plasma screen.”

The stylistic contrast between the downstairs entertainment zone and the rest of the house is intentional. The designer, whose work is often published in design magazines, is fond of incorporating surprises into every room. “In this case, the

whole Art Deco downstairs is a surprise.” Here, as throughout the house, Akhtarzad displays clever ways of concealing audiovisual equipment. In the posh cocktail lounge, for instance, the screen retracts into the ceiling to reveal an Art Deco-inspired mural that depicts a party scene. With one touch of the TiVo button on the touchscreen, the 120-inch screen descends from the ceiling, the lights go off, the projector drops down from a motorized lift, and the high-definition video begins.

The bar area, awash in melons, persimmon, beige, and gold, transports you to another world with a dramatic faux-painted sky-blue ceiling and luxuriously padded and upholstered walls. Sconces, antique mirrors, and plush high-back chairs upholstered in a velvety fabric add to the Art Deco theme. A plasma TV tucked behind a VisionArt painting is wrapped in a blue frame. Press a button and the painting vanishes via the retracting canvas and the show begins.

The three-tier theater, entered through 22-karat gold-leafed



The family room (above), features a smaller audiovisual system for everyday use. A motorized tapestry conceals the 50-inch plasma TV. A cabinet—in Reginald Adams' "Régence Bibliotheque style"—houses technical equipment. Reclaimed terra-cotta tiles in soft brownish creams and ivories, with smaller insets of slate/greenish blue, form a pinwheel pattern in the inviting kitchen (right).

doors with etched glass portholes, reveals tones of clay red. A 20-foot starburst ceiling ornament, also gilded in 22-karat gold, was inspired by the Wiltern Theatre in Los Angeles—a 1930s Art Deco landmark. Eight motorized leather lounge seats and a sofa in the back, where the family can cuddle, provide seating for 16. Handpainted gold stars glitter on the ceiling, and hand-carved gold-gilded pilasters are topped with capitals.

A demonstration of the home theater's technology is usually the dealmaker, according to Akhtarzad and McAdam. The client is handed the controls and instructed to touch various buttons, including the DVD button. Immediately, the lights dim and the orangey silk curtains part to reveal a custom-painted



12-by-10-foot canvas backdrop. By the time the curtains are fully open, the mural canvas is creeping up the wall via a roller and disappears, revealing the 150-inch diagonal screen. The projector comes on and the surround-sound experience begins.

Amazingly, the architect and interior designer agree that the technology in this showcase home is just about right for their clients. "It's a very interesting trend that while people like to have traditional houses that go back centuries in style, for amenities they want to project into the future," Gabbay says. *For a full resource list and a list of preferred architects and interior designers previously featured in the magazine, please visit our website at hemagazine.com.* **HE**



Art Deco-etched glass fronts a walk-in wine cellar that's tucked behind the cocktail lounge's stylish bar. A blue-framed 42-inch plasma television at one end is recessed into a mirrored wall, and is fronted with a print in the spirit of the Deco design.

"People who live in Beverly Hills do not want to see speakers or screens."

—Joseph Akhtarzad, homeowner and Just One Touch owner



"Joseph was really into the home theater, which is the most elaborate I've ever done. The reason we won the CEDIA award is that we spurred each other on."

—Reginald Adams, interior designer

TECH TALK: THE "ONE TOUCH" HOME

With the main theater in the Akhtarzad installation, Project Manager/System Designer Dave McAdam of Just One Touch not only had to assemble a true reference system, but he had to do so within the aesthetic criteria of the interior designer. That meant that, aside from the six Revel Ultima Embrace surround speakers visible around the theater's perimeter, all of the equipment had to remain out of view.

McAdam and his team concealed the main gear, including the Lexicon MC-12 processor and amplifiers, behind a hidden door. "It was tough keeping that room cool enough," he says. "We had to design a system to pull hot air out the top and eject it into another room." They also had to install two fans and ducts to keep the Sony Qualia 004 SXRD projector cool within its tight soffit enclosure, as well as temperature sensors that display warning messages on the Crestron touchpanels in the unlikely event that the equipment still gets too toasty.

Even the gorgeous floorstanding Revel Ultima Salon speakers up front are enclosed, but for McAdam, no other loudspeaker would do for this installation. "They have a rear-firing tweeter that we can turn on to put more high-frequency energy into the room. And since this room is so large and has so much acoustical treatment, we needed it. Believe it or not, this theater is the first time I've had to turn that rear tweeter on."

For a full equipment list, please visit hemagazine.com. —Dennis Burger

RESOURCES

Architect: Gabbay Architects of Beverly Hills, Calif. (310.553.8866, gabbayarchitects.com)

Custom Installer: Just One Touch of Santa Monica, Calif. (justonetouch.tv, 310.451.6200), and Redondo Beach, Calif. (justonetouch.tv, 310.214.0081)

Interior Designer: Reginald Adams & Associates of Los Angeles, Calif. (310.659.8038, reginaldadamsandassociates.com)

CD and DVD changers: Sony (800.222.7669, sony.com)

D-VHS VCR: Marantz (630.741.0300, marantz.com)

High-definition satellite receivers: DirecTV (directv.com, 800.DIRECTV), Sony (800.222.7669, sony.com)

In-ceiling, in-wall, outdoor, and rock speakers: Monster Cable (monstercable.com, 415.840.2000), SpeakerCraft (800.448.0976, speakercraft.com)

LCD TVs: Sharp (800.BE.SHARP, sharpusa.com)

Lighting control: Vantage (vantagecontrols.com, 800.555.9891)

Media servers: ReQuest Multimedia (518.899.1254, request.com)

Multiroom CD players/FM tuners: SpeakerCraft (speakercraft.com, 800.448.0976)

Plasma TVs: Fujitsu (973.575.0380, plasmavision.com), Pioneer Elite (800.PIONEER, pioneerelectronics.com)

Projector lift: Chief Manufacturing (chiefmfg.com, 800.582.6480)

Surround-sound processor, amplifiers, and theater DVD player: Lexicon (781.280.0300, lexicon.com)

Surround-sound receivers: Marantz (marantz.com, 630.741.0300); Pioneer Elite (800.PIONEER, pioneerelectronics.com); Sony (800.222.7669, sony.com)

Theater seating and wall panels: Acoustic Innovations (acousticinnovations.com, 561.995.0090)

Theater speakers: Revel (781.280.0300, revelspeakers.com)