

# Time to Call in the Techorator

The art of integrating sophisticated design and state-of-the-art technology.

By Nate Chapnick

You've seen the tangled web of cables hanging below the television: speaker wires sprawled unceremoniously across the living room and peeking out from beneath the oriental rug; speakers haphazardly placed on bookshelves; and DVD players, amplifiers and cable boxes stacked below the television. Some offenders are worse than others, but if you're even remotely into electronics and home theater systems, then you no doubt have been scolded for this technological clutter. It need not be a relationship-ender; your love for electronics can happily coexist with the interior-design ambitions of your significant other. To find out how, *TR* sought expert opinions for a complete guide to techoration.

## Out of Sight, Not Sound

Some things are better heard than seen, as is the case with most home audio and theater systems. Because of the floor space they occupy, they create unsightly wire clutter, dangerous obstacles and unwelcome interior distraction—a techorator sin.

Enter the in-wall speaker. While wiring a residence with home audio for a client who didn't want speakers blocking their amazing view, Scott Struthers and Geoff Spencer devised a clever solution—obvious now but revolutionary in 1982. “They took the speakers off the ground and mounted them in the ceilings and walls to preserve the home's unique interior design, expansive views and to reduce the clutter in the home,” says Ari Suprame, acoustician and chief marketing officer for Sonance, the company founded by Struthers and Spencer that remains a leader in creating discreet audio solutions for homes and businesses. Few changes have been made to the in-wall and in-ceiling speaker since Struthers and Spencer created them in the 1980s. Most in-wall and in-ceiling speakers still have those wide flanges and perforated grilles that were common then. Until now, that is.



Finding the speakers in this living room area requires a magnifier. Sonance's Architectural Series speakers (barely visible above) are installed into your home's drywall to create a flush, nearly invisible sound source. At left is the Sonance Visual Performance speaker with its unique magnetized micro-flange grille—a discreet audio solution for spaces without dry-wall. (Ultimate Theater Systems 404.467.0066, Lux Media Systems 770.631.2660).



Interior designer and techorator Doug Wilson, host of TLC's *America's Ugliest and Moving Up*, says that "often when couples are designing their homes, the husband wants the high-performance sound system and the wife typically just wants something that she can't see or that at least blends in with the aesthetics of the home." The in-ceiling and in-wall speaker does both, allowing a high-performance sound system without compromising interior design.

Superior sound also should be enjoyed outside the media room. "Once you've showered with music, [you] will never be the same,

Wilson says. "Speakers in the shower are now possible and can blend into the bathroom's tiling design." He recommends Kohler's SoundTiles, which have a sleek, low-profile design that mimics Kohler's WaterTile body sprays—a textbook example of techorating, which Wilson describes as "technology [that] adapts to interior design without detracting from it." \$295, at The Home Depot, Lowe's and Apex Supply Company in Buckhead (404.262.0562).

Don't forget about the great outdoors. A well-techorated home includes exterior sound that is as discreet as the speakers used inside

## Quick Techorator Tips:

**SPEAKERS:** In-wall and in-ceiling speakers bring audio to the ears without taking up space or cluttering a home with wires and floor stands.

**OUTDOOR SPEAKERS:** Look for speakers that blend into the environment, such as Sonance's C-Series rock speakers.

**BATHROOM SPEAKERS:** Install a sound system that's waterproof and complements fixture selection, such as Kohler's SoundTiles.

**MUSIC SOURCE:** If you use an iPod in the car, at the gym or at work, play it via a home sound system with iPort, an in-wall iPod dock that charges and plays through a state-of-the-art, barely visible sound system.

**WIRING:** Don't skimp on wiring. Expensive components perform only as good as the wire used to connect them. Budget at least 10 percent to 15 percent for premium wiring that's hidden inside the walls.

**POWER PROTECTION:** After spending thousands of dollars on amplifiers and speakers, protect the investment with a high-performance power management system such as Tributaries' TX500. Without it, you're one power-surge away from a fried system.

**EQUIPMENT RACK:** Audio, home automation and entertainment systems should be stored out of sight in an equipment rack, such as Middle Atlantic's Slim5. Consider a built-in fan to prevent overheating.

**HOME AUTOMATION:** Eliminate remote control clutter with a home entertainment and automation system, such as Control4's HC1000 paired with its 7-inch in-wall LCD touch screen.

**TELEVISION:** When selecting a new television, pick one with a thin form such as LG's 1.7-inch LCD HDTV. It will minimize protrusion into the living space, allowing the television to seamlessly blend with the interior design. If placed on a wall, balance the television's location with photographs or other artwork.

the home. Sonance's C-Series is a landscape architect's dream. Say goodbye to big, black outdoor speakers that dot the pool and patio area, and say hello to Sonance's weather-resistant CRK20 speakers (\$375), which are concealed in a rock to stay out of sight. These discreet, natural-looking rocks quickly and easily enhance the landscape and supply excellent exterior sound.

### Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Some things are best enjoyed when out of sight, as with most home entertainment systems. Effective techorating puts home entertainment electronics (amplifiers, home automation processor, AM/FM tuner, CD player, digital cable boxes, digital video recorders, power conditioners, etc.) in one hidden central location. Doing so, Wilson says, "can reduce clutter in a room and free up living space." He says that too many electronic components can become distracting, with their flashing lights, LCD screens and numerous cords. "If you have a 17th-century French interior design, placing your home's electronic components in a rack system that's away from sight is an important step to maintaining the authentic feeling that you want in your space," Wilson says.

Rebecca Trautner, an equipment rack expert and veteran marketing associate with Middle Atlantic, a leading rack manufacturer, provided insight into these rack systems. "Racks not only [serve as] a home for all your equipment, but a means by which to protect your investment from the dangers of heat, theft, degradation to cables and to help keep all your electronics organized in one space," she says. A variety of rack systems are available. "Racks can be built into custom pieces of furniture," Trautner says. "They can slide out of the wall, go right behind a door, be put on wheels for easy transportation or can really go just about anywhere."

In addition to serving aesthetic purposes, racks also can help prevent valuable equipment from overheating. "At its most basic, you want to make sure that however



Kohler's SoundTile Speakers bring discreet, tasteful audio to your bathroom and shower. Available in polished chrome, brushed nickel, gold, brushed chrome, bronze and polished nickel, they're designed to match your bathroom's fixtures and décor.



much heat your system [emits], the rack can then pull that much heat out," Trautner says. Middle Atlantic offers built-in fan options that come on automatically once temperatures inside the rack reach a pre-set temperature, ensuring that equipment stays cool and energy is conserved.

### Don't Forget Wires and Cable

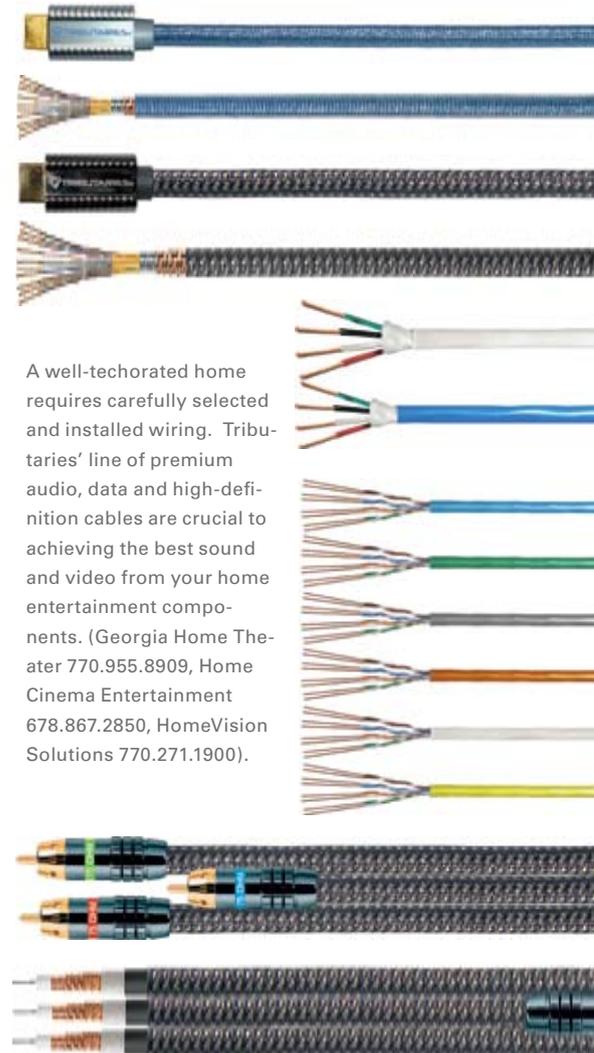
The best home entertainment systems are only as good as the wires that connect them—a basic tenet to good techorating. As Wilson says, selecting premium wire and audio cables is critical because "once they're in the wall, you don't want to be stuck fishing them out again." Point taken. *TR* sought out Joe Profeyto, an industry veteran and member of the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association (CEDIA), to discuss the relationship between wiring and techorating. He also is president of Tributaries Cable, a privately owned, Orlando-based company that manufactures high-quality wire and cable.

"The performance of a costly high-definition LCD television can be traced directly to the type of wiring you use to connect it to your signal-producing components back at your equipment rack," Profeyto says. The

signal-producing devices he refers to include Blu-Ray high-definition DVD players and high-definition cable boxes. "If you want the clearest picture that your television can produce, then you need an equally high-performance cable that can deliver optimal signal from your hi-def components to your screen, free from any signal interference," Profeyto says. He cautions that a lot of inexpensive HDMI cables are not HDMI-certified, meaning they could contain inadequate shielding and cheaper aluminum instead of copper wire, and thus fail.

Tributaries Cable manufactures specialty cables and wires at on-site facilities, which allows the company to test every cable that leaves the factory. It's a policy that has built a reputation for quality for which CEDIA members and installers, including Georgia Home Theater of Roswell and Home Cinema Entertainment of Alpharetta, can attest. This critical pre-shipping test procedure ensures that once you put the wires in the wall you won't have to tear it apart again after discovering a faulty wire. Plus, the high-quality wires ensure that your entertainment system performs at its highest levels.

When it comes to speaker wire, Profeyto recommends 14-gauge wire or better. To



A well-techorated home requires carefully selected and installed wiring. Tributaries' line of premium audio, data and high-definition cables are crucial to achieving the best sound and video from your home entertainment components. (Georgia Home Theater 770.955.8909, Home Cinema Entertainment 678.867.2850, HomeVision Solutions 770.271.1900).

## Home Life



before after

TLC's Doug Wilson provides this before and after image of a home that he techorated. Note the placement of the thin LG LCD television above the mantle; all the wires and cables are hidden behind the television and out of sight. Wilson recommends balancing the placement of any television on the wall with photos or other artwork to the left and right of the screen.

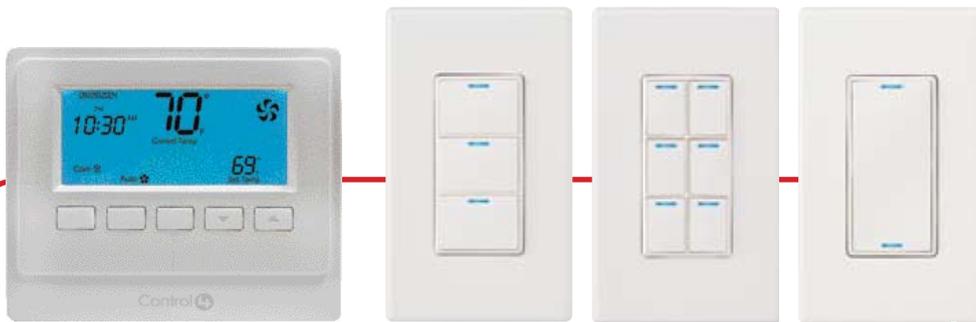
understand the importance of the wire's gauge, Profeyto offers this analogy: "Take a garden hose with a 2-inch diameter and one with a 3-inch diameter. It would be far easier for the water pump to push the water out the larger hose. It works the same for wire, where the amplifier is analogous to the water pump and the signal is analogous to the water. The gauge of the wire is analogous to the size of the hose's opening. Thus, the lower the gauge, the easier it is for the amplifier to do its job." Tributaries' speaker cables are UV stabilized to prevent cracking or drying when exposed to direct sunlight, making them ideal for outdoor installations, too.

### Controller Clutter Solved

"There's nothing worse than walking into a living room only to see a large box on the coffee table overflowing with A/V controllers," Wilson says. Eric Smith, chief technology officer of Control4, says the average home contains approximately 42 devices with some sort of microprocessor; that figure doubles for the average high-tech home. With time, Smith believes that there will be even more controllers, making it even more important to find a system that can easily integrate all of your devices into one easy-to-operate controller. Such techorating faux pas are easily fixed with a home automation system such as Control4's HC1000 controller and portable touch-screen controllers.

The Control4 system communicates with home entertainment system components, including amplifiers, tuners, DVD players, cable boxes and televisions. Even lighting, climate, blinds and ceiling fan remotes can be operated through this single smart controller, meaning duplicate remotes used throughout the home can be eliminated. "The configurations are literally endless, but, most importantly, the system allows you to streamline the operation of your home's electronics," Smith says.

This goal, while lofty, is at the heart of techorating. There is no reason a home can't be a well-techorated space. All it requires is careful planning, thoughtful design work and an expert CEDIA-certified installer. ▶



A Control4 home automation system streamlines the operation of your entertainment, lighting and climate-control systems throughout your home. The system replaces all the remote controls in your house with one, easy-to-use system that operates via an LCD touch pad or wireless keypads. From left to right, clockwise: Control4 intelligent thermostat, wireless 3-button keypad, wireless 6-button keypad, wireless 1-button keypad, 7-inch LCD touch screen and HC1000 media controller. (HomeVision Solutions 770.271.1900, Total Home Entertainment 770.442.3161).

