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HOME OF THE MONTH



A NEW VANTAGE POINT

It's the simple conveniences afforded by Elan and Vantage control systems that impress Chicagoland homeowners the most. *by Lisa Montgomery, photography by Adam S. Jablonski*

Inside, two 42-inch LG LED TVs create a sports bar atmosphere in the rec room, while a 2-inch Elan TS2 touchscreen provides easy control over various home systems. Outside, a 46-inch SunBriteTV displays content from a slew of A/V components.



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SYSTEMS DESIGN AND INSTALLATION

Audio Video Specialists, Gilberts, Ill., www.audiovideospecialists.net

BUILDER Smart Group, Mount Prospect, Ill., www.thesmartcompanies.com

INTERIOR DESIGN Marshall Morgan Erb Design, Chicago, Ill.

An articulating mount from Chief allows the family to see a 42-inch LG TV clearly from the island in the kitchen or the table in the dining room. A portable Elan WT84 touch-panel can display their entertainment choices—and serve as a dashboard for the Vantage whole-house lighting system, Jandy pool and spa system, GE security system and Aprilaire heating and cooling system. A 60-inch LG plasma TV, Elan E72 speakers and Velodyne subwoofer bring entertainment to the great room.



SOMETIMES IT'S THE SIMPLE THINGS that have the biggest impact. That's a philosophy rooted firmly in the home life of the owners of this 10,000-square-foot Chicagoland residence. The home design reflects this philosophy, too, as a good chunk of the square footage is devoted to their three school-age kids and in creating an environment where they can make the most of their free time. "We really wanted to make this house be the place where our kids and their friends want to hang out," the owners say.

It would be hard for anyone, young or old, to tear themselves away from the comfortable, inviting confines. In addition to a sports court on the lower level and a game room on the second floor, there's an "invisible" home theater, a killer outdoor entertainment area, and an impressively equipped gym and bar.

LGs Rule the Video Roost

With 11 LG flat-panel TVs (two of which are 3D) and 54 speakers peppered throughout the house, there's more than enough video and music to keep everyone happily entertained. Sure, having a big, beautiful TV around every corner and access to tons of video and audio content may not be what most people deem basic or simple. But the way the TVs and speakers are incorporated into the design make them surprisingly understated and easy to enjoy.

The home theater, for example, looks nothing like a theater when you first enter the room. There's no sign of a screen, a projector or speakers. It's not until a MEDIA button is pressed that the equipment reveals itself. The button, whether found on a Vantage EasyTouch II keypad mounted to the side of a custom-crafted cabinet, a handheld Elan HR2 remote or Elan WT84 wireless touchpanel, signals a 106-inch motorized Screen Innovations display to roll down from the ceiling and a ledge-mounted Optoma HD8600 projector to fire up from behind the couch. The command also dims the lights, tunes to Dad's dedicated DirecTV high-def satellite receiver—Mom and the kids each have their own as well—and closes a pair of draperies across the entry. The seven speakers, a combination of Elan and Sunfire models, plus two Velodyne subwoofers, are built into the ceiling and the cabinetry around the fireplace hearth—all finished with grilles that blend with the surfaces.

In other areas, like the kids' playroom, pressing the MEDIA button launches an entirely different string of



commands. Since the kids' primary form of entertainment in this space is video games, the button activates the 55-inch 3D LG TV and the Xbox console. In other rooms, the MEDIA button might tune to a different source, dim the lights and close the window treatments. It all depends on what the Elan g! system was programmed to do by custom electronics (CE) pro Dan Cochenour of Audio Video Specialists in Gilberts, Ill.

Automated Effects

It's easy to get wrapped up in the A/V excitement in this house, but the most impressive effects are so subtle and seamlessly integrated into the homeowners' routines that they often don't realize they're happening. Closet lights snap on automatically when the door opens. Bathroom fans deactivate 15 minutes after

EQUIPMENT

Control: Elan
Lighting: Vantage
Security: GE
Surveillance Cameras: Speco
Audio/Video Distribution: Elan
Speakers & Subwoofers: Ambisonic, Elan, Sunfire and Velodyne
TVs and Screens: LG, Screen Innovations and SunBriteTV
Video Projector: Optoma
TV Mounts: Chief
HVAC Control: Aprilaire and Tekmar



The lower level of the house features a well-equipped gym and a sports court. A Chief PAC501 In-Wall Mount allows the 42-inch LG TV in the gym to sit flush with the wall. A Speco surveillance camera in the sports court feeds video to every TV in the house so Mom and Dad can keep an eye on the kids. Two Elan outdoor speakers are rugged enough to withstand a few stray shots.

Right: A custom-built cabinet in the master bath is home to a 32-inch LG TV. The display is accompanied by two Elan in-ceiling speakers and a water-resistant Elan speaker in the shower. Control of the electronics in this room can be handled by either a wall-mounted 7-inch Elan TS7 touchpanel or a Vantage EasyTouch II keypad.



someone has left the space. When the elevator door on the ground level opens, lights activate to lead the way down a hallway to the kitchen. Should the kids leave their bedrooms after 9 p.m., motion sensors in the upstairs hallways signal the fixtures to turn on to a 30 percent intensity so the children can find their way safely to Mom and Dad's room or the bathroom.

The Vantage InFusion and Elan g! systems are responsible for the small day-to-day stuff, though they perform plenty of other chores around the house. When the doorbell rings, every TV and speaker mutes temporarily and a view from the Elan door station camera is displayed on any TV that is on. Should the sump pump fail, the Elan g! system sends a text message to the homeowners notifying them of a possible problem.

Tailored Touchpanels

Even the design of the g! touchpanels has meaning to this family. From menus displayed on any of seven in-wall 2-inch TS2 Elan touchpanels, two 7-inch TS7 in-wall touchpanels and a 8-inch WT84 wireless tablet, the family can monitor and control every aspect of the house, including motorized sheers and curtains, the irrigation system, the pool and spa system, and, of course, lights and A/V gear. Although the family will usually grab a remote to turn on a TV and Blu-ray player, the touchpanel offers a broader, more comprehensive view of their entertainment and control options. For example, they can see a list of available DVRs (his, hers and the kids), movie titles (categorized by genre) that have been stored on two Sony 400-disc Blu-ray changers,

Breaking It Down

Chief PAC501 In-Wall Can Mounts were used to hang many of the home's 11 LG TVs. The mount allows the TV to be recessed into the wall.

To minimize "wall acne," many of the home's 11 Aprilaire thermostats are hidden inside closets. Small, flat, quarter-size Aprilaire temperature sensors, which can be painted or wallpapered over, measure the room temperature and send the readings to the thermostats.

Motion sensors from Vantage trigger on the hallway lights when the kids leave their bedrooms any time after 9 p.m.

Pressing the MEDIA button on a Vantage keypad fires up the home theater, which features a 106-inch, drop-from-the-ceiling display from Screen Innovations, Elan and Sunfire speakers, two Velodyne subwoofers and an Optoma video projector. All of the components are stored in an electronically controlled cabinet (see sidebar for details).



UNDER LOCK AND KEY

CABINET FEATURES UNIQUE LOCKING SYSTEM TO KEEP EQUIPMENT SAFE.

All of the equipment responsible for gathering and distributing the entertainment content—as well as choreographing the operation of more than 192 loads of lighting, motorized curtains, security system, surveillance cameras and pool and spa controls—are tucked neatly into a custom-crafted cabinet in the home theater. "Most people want to have their equipment racks stored out of sight in a closet or utility room," says custom electronics (CE) pro Dan Cochenour of Audio Video Specialists in Gilberts, Ill. "But these homeowners wanted to be able to show it off . . . and, just as importantly, protect their investment (pictured above).

The custom-built cabinet holds four racks from Middle Atlantic. To keep the gear cool, Cochenour installed a couple of temperature sensors inside. Should the temperature rise above 85 degrees, the sensors signal the homeowners' Elan g! home automation system, which responds by activating fans inside the cabinet. The builder, Rich Bondarowicz, president of Smart Group in Chicago, constructed the cabinet with small, inconspicuous slots at the bottom to promote airflow.

What makes this cabinet truly unique, though, is its electronically controlled lock from TZ Radial (pictured right). The doors only open when the owners press and hold the A/V button that's displayed on an Elan touchpanel. The same goes for the liquor cabinet, only in this case, the button to unlock the doors is CORONA.



and music from a dual AM/FM tuner, a three-terabyte Netgear NAS drive, two iPort iPod docking stations, Shoutcast Internet radio and XM satellite radio. The Elan g! system also gives the family a choice of where to have that content play. They might choose to have a kids' music station play through the 12 Ambisonic drivers and two subwoofers around the swimming pool, while tunes from a friend's docked iPod pumps through the in-ceiling speakers in the kitchen. And when they're on their way out the door or headed up to bed, a tap of an AWAY or GOODNIGHT button turns off all the A/V gear, plus most of the lights.

Commands like this—where one press of a button adjusts the settings of multiple electronic devices—demonstrates the real power of a carefully tailored and custom-programmed automation system. "It doesn't have to be fancy or elaborate, just provide real value to the end users," says Cochenour. "The g! and Vantage systems are capable of pulling off just about every high-tech trick in the book, but these homeowners, with the help of their CE pro, focused on what matters most: quick, convenient, practical controls and automation of the systems and devices that impact their day-to-day lives. **EH**