Virtuoso Performances

Expressions of perfection create an ideal entertainment space—for special nights in.

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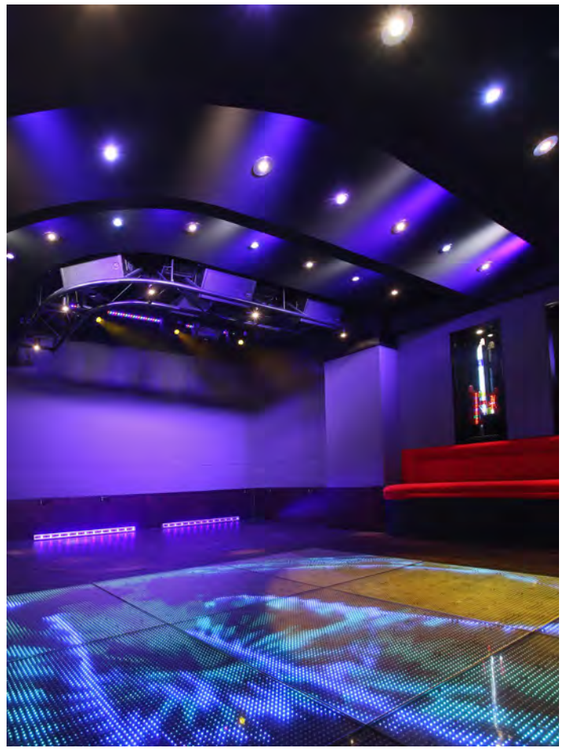
Splendor in the Night

Imagine a night of unforgettable entertainment, from an exciting movie or concert to an Italian dinner, nightclub dancing, and arcade games. Now imagine doing all of this in an Italian piazza, within a home.

Steve Tsubota lives this dream in his Southern California house. His family's outdoor entertainment piazza looks as if it has been imported from a Tuscan village. A theater, arcade, nightclub, and trattoria embrace the space, with a guest suite above.



Guests sway to the movie action with motion-activated seating in the theater, enjoy a brick-oven pizza in the trattoria, strap into a life-size flight simulator in the arcade, and dance on a floor that lights to the beat in the nightclub.

Behind these wondrous elements are the true *wow* factors, imbued in the highest quality design, craftsmanship and authentic materials—in spaces used for an array of entertainment. "Various events can be going on simultaneously," says Steve Haas of acoustical and audio design firm SH Acoustics, who worked closely with design firm TK Theaters and other creative contractors.

"One usually can't have spaces that are good theaters and lecture rooms, concert halls and jazz nightclubs all in one," explains Haas, who has designed major performance spaces for the likes of Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center.

So the theater is separate from the nightclub. Each, however, can be used for various purposes—and all sound superb.

The piazza is framed with a nightclub, theater, arcade, and pizzeria.

Raising the Bar

A retired technology executive, Tsubota originally wanted a themed theater in a basement with 7-foot-high ceilings. He called on renowned home theater architect Theo Kalomirakis of TK Theaters to provide the design, but before the plan was completed he phoned Kalomirakis with good news and bad news. The basement theater was nixed, but Tsubota had purchased the lot next door and gave the designer a blank slate.

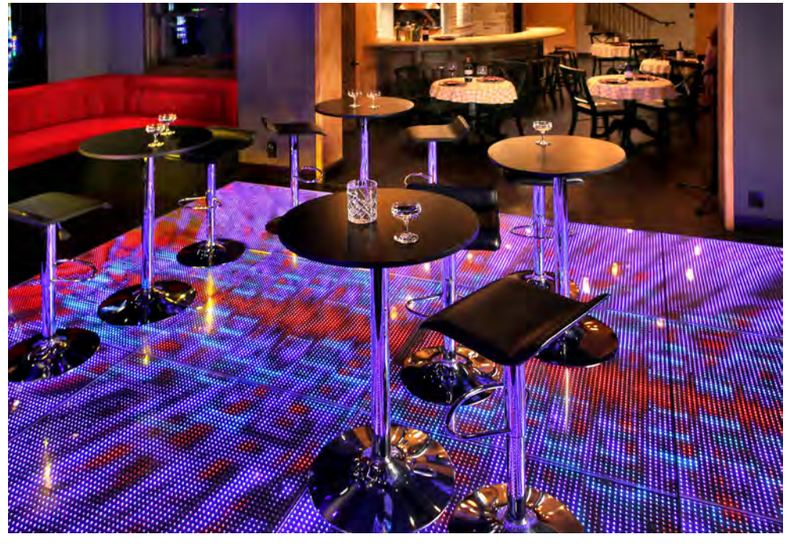
Tsubota's property was in a neighborhood with Italianate designs, so Kalomirakis flew to Italy, and took thousands of photographs of storefronts, rooflines, cobblestones—and proposed an authentic piazza, with a stone courtyard and fountain surrounded by buildings of varied styles.

The theater recalls an intimate opera house with an eclectic Beaux-Arts design. The pizzeria is country artisan, the nightclub contemporary, and the arcade packed with gaming fun. "We wanted all the tradespeople who worked on this project to express themselves in ways they hadn't before," says Tsubota.

In all, the project took more than a decade to complete, starting in the late 1990s and stretching to 2012 before the first party was thrown. The biggest delays were in getting homeowner association approvals for constructing a three-story Italian piazza in a house, with its own restaurant, and digging down for the basement. It hadn't been done before.

Each step of the project brought something new. "We had to figure out how to make things work," Tsubota said.

You're invited to sit, relax, and see what happens.



Movie Palace Drama

Enter the doors under the *Paradiso* marquee, and you step into a lobby framed with stately limestone columns. Something special is about to happen. Then the theater doors open and transport you to a fantastical world.

The theater room is actually rectangular, its shape concealed within another room, which itself was built within the shell to help isolate the sound from the rest of the house "It looks a lot bigger than it is," says Kalomirakis. "I love to manipulate the scale that way." The space feels both palatial and intimate, with a vine motif in the grilles and murals produced with Venetian plaster overlays. Molded gypsum Formglas panels fit together precisely to form the dome above.

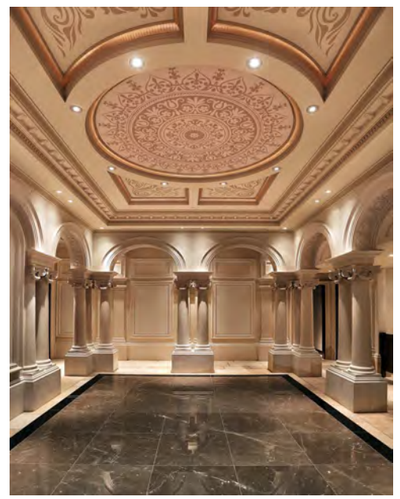
The space feels both palatial and intimate.

Great theaters produce memorable events.

Here a design flaw threatened the entire project. The Formglas is supported by spring hangers in the structure above. However, load calculations conducted by the original acoustician who worked on the project had been underestimated. As the entire Formglas dome was being hung, contractors realized the structure might fall.

Tsubota brought in SH Acoustics to review the load calculations and specify the necessary support, which included counterweights. Haas also re-evaluated the acoustic treatments used throughout the theater. Subwoofers for the low bass effects were lowered, the baffle walls around the theater's Steinway Lyngdorf speakers were redesigned to diffuse their sound properly, and the frame of the screen was perforated to allow audio from the speakers through.

SH Acoustics designs slightly more reverberant theaters that diffuse sound without affecting the intelligibility of audio.



Haas and Kalomirakis worked closely to ensure the concave curves of the dome were considered in creating a sonic balance.

"Theo's architecture and our final acoustic design achieved the optimal quality of natural sound for movie playback," says Haas.

Acoustic Agility

The acoustics can change for live performances.

The theater performs as a world-class cinema—and more. "We had a strong desire to use it for live performances from musicians to lecturers," says Tsubota.

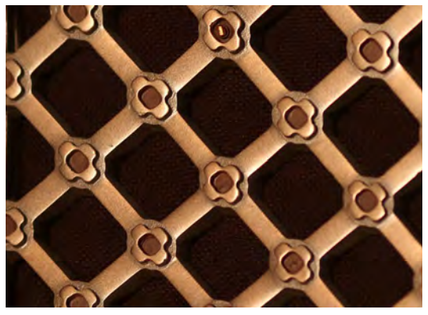
The acoustical environment of the space changes to allow a speaker or string quartet to sound perfect, thanks to SH Acoustics' proprietary Concertino system. Concertino uses a unique processor along with an array of microphones and speakers to alter the room's natural acoustic signature to match that of a larger venue.

To implement Concertino, the designers concealed the system's 25 speakers and eight microphones within the decor. "We had to be very cautious about implementing acoustics without overcoming the architectural design," says Haas. "A lot of tweaking and customization wrung the optimal performance from the space."

Concertino brings performances to life with the proper sound for the occasion.

In all, six Concertino settings cover spoken presentations, a small jazz room with "presence," a rich and resonant chamber hall for string quartets and opera singers, small and large concert halls, and reverberant cathedral sounds. "Some performers benefit from a rich, reverberant room, and Concertino provides that at the press of a button," through an elaborate control system, says Haas. The Tsubotas have hosted string quartets, a guitarist, a cellist, and others to perform in the space. "The experience of being connected to the music and feeling all of the nuances that the musicians have worked so hard to develop is really special," Tsubota says. "The nicest thing is that people don't notice it. Yet when we demonstrate the different acoustical environments, you should see their faces!"

Microphones and speakers are concealed in and behind the grilles.



"It's not just a theater. It's an environment. It's a whole entertainment world," says Kalomirakis.

The arcade, nightclub and pizza kitchen amp up the fun.

Cooking up the Fun

At many of the piazza's gatherings, the host can be found toiling at the commercial-size clay pizza oven in the trattoria. "I probably spend more time there than anywhere else. There's a magic connection that happens between people in a kitchen."

The trattoria is designed in country artisanal style, with earth-toned Tuscan walls and floors, but with a ceiling that's printed fabric hiding the acoustic treatments and another Concertino system shared with the adjacent nightclub.

The nightclub features a sound system both for a disc jockey or a band, or the Concertino system for more intimate performances. Kalomirakis designed a contemporary space with a curved fabric ceiling elements packed with lights, speakers, acoustical treatments, and Concertino gear. A floor lights up with LEDs to the beat of the music, a stage rises on a hydraulic lift for performances, and a fog machine billows when the party gets going.

The nightclub has its own control room and the ability to show video behind the performers. Audio and video is routed throughout the piazza.

Lastly, the arcade houses Tsubota's extensive pinball and video game collection. Many go straight for the life-size Sega flight simulator, while others enjoy classic pinball and video games. Colored LED lamps illuminate the rough stone walls in abstract effects. Tsubota points out the floor, built in dampered layers for comfort.

Steve Tsubota and his family still enjoy going out to movies and concerts, but there's nothing quite like the highest quality entertainment in their home for fundraisers, family get-togethers, or fun with friends.

"It was a long and arduous process, but it was a great experience working with all of the incredibly talented people on this project," says Tsubota. "When I see people here having a good time, I know we did the right thing."