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## At home with cinema

Why go to a multiplex if you're rich? You can build one at home. That's what many rich Indians are doing. It's convenient — and helps you keep up with the Sharmas, says **Varuna Verma**



Ranjith S. has just one grouse with his job. "My work schedule is so tight that taking out time to watch a movie in a multiplex is out of the question," says the Thiruvananthapuram-based marketing manager of Tata Docomo.

So the Hollywood film buff has done the next best thing — he's brought the theatre home. Earlier this year, Ranjith got a room constructed on the first floor of his house and fitted it with a 3D projector, two Blu-ray players, a 120-inch motorised screen, two recliner seats and a media player. For movie hall-like sounds, he got wall-to-wall carpeting and acoustic treatment for the room. To complete the picture, Ranjith adorned the walls with posters and frames from films. "I have a collection of 700 films. I don't miss going to the movies anymore," he says.

The way some urban Indians watch movies is changing. After splurging on fast cars, foreign vacations and designer apartments, upper-class Indians are now forking out upwards of Rs 25 lakh — the cost of an Audi — to bring the grand cinema experience home.

Dins Paul, director (marketing) at the Kochi-based Metro Digital Media (MDM) — a one-stop shop for home theatre solutions — says watching movies, multiplex-style but at home, is now No. 1 on the rich Indian's wish list. "Most of our clients have multiple cars and gadgets. They are now on the lookout for the next thrill," he says.

MDM's client list is seeing a steady ascent, claims its director. In 2011, the company provided home theatre solutions to five clients. "This year, we already have eight clients, whose projects are at various stages of completion," says Paul.

In the West, a home theatre is a regular feature of a high-end home. "Globally travelled Indians who've been exposed to sophisticated audio-visual experiences want this in their homes," says Paul. And with Indian film producers planning to release movies directly for home theatres, he believes these are set to become the new personal multiplexes.

What's more, while a DVD or Blu-ray player (for discs with higher storage capacity) and a 48-inch, high-definition TV should give you a decent movie experience, that is simply not good enough for the new stay-at-home film buffs.

"Consumers want to replicate the complete movie hall environment," says Paul. So, besides the audio-visual equipment, MDM offers full turnkey theatre solutions to buyers. These include theatre-style seating, low-noise air conditioning, LED lighting for the movie mood, acoustic treatment for the ceiling and walls, special sound-absorbing carpeting, doors and windows that prevent sound leakage and a touch pad automation system. The automation system switches on the lights and starts the air conditioning and projector as soon as the door to the home theatre is opened, explains Paul.



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projector as soon as the door to the home theatre is opened, explains Paul.

For most, catching a movie is synonymous with a tub of popcorn — and home theatre vendors seem to know this well. “Most consumers like to add movie hall frills to their private theatres. Remote-controlled reclining seats, movie posters, a popcorn machine and exit signs complete the cinema experience,” says N. Raghunath, managing director, Decibel — the art of sound, a Chennai-based audio-video solutions provider.

Decibel built theatres in 200 homes in the last one year, says its managing director. “The numbers have been rising steadily. Two years ago, we had half as many clients,” he adds. Raghunath believes that increasing disposable incomes and the difficulty in getting tickets in multiplexes are spurring the sales of home theatres across urban India.

It’s also about keeping up with the Sharmas. “Home theatres have become a fashionable must-have in the high end market. People now host movie watching parties at their homes,” says Gagandeep Sapra, who writes a technology blog, The Big Geek. Sapra adds that with increasing travel time and crowds at multiplexes, people now prefer to put their feet up on their motorised leather recliner, dim the LED lights and watch the story unfold, at home.

Also, with an array of home theatre products hitting the shelves, Indian consumers are now spoiled for choice. Take the sound system. Decibel’s Raghunath says he’s had some clients who like to see the speakers and want them big. Then there are others who want them hidden. There’s a third kind that prefers savvy-looking designer speakers. “For those who want visible speakers, we have a range of floor standing speakers. We install in-wall and in-ceiling speakers for those who want them concealed. For the flashy kinds, we have an on-wall range of designer speakers,” Raghunath says.

The variety, of course, comes at a price. “While a basic home theatre set-up costs about Rs 25 lakh, the sky is the limit for those who want to splurge,” says Kumbha Young Grenier, chief executive office of the Pondicherry-based acoustics and AV design consulting firm, Sound Wizard. The price includes the cost of equipment, acoustic treatment, interiors, furniture and frills. Grenier gives the break up: “For a basic personal theatre, the cost of the audio and video equipment is Rs 12-15 lakh. Add Rs 8 lakh for acoustic treatment and about Rs 5 lakh for furniture. With increasing awareness of technology and appreciation for quality, people are willing to spend on elaborate home cinema rooms,” he adds. The company, which started in 2000, has provided audio-video solutions to 50 clients till now.

Madhu Xavier opted for a no-frills set up when he got a home theatre installed two months ago. “I skipped the carpeting, movie posters and the luxury recliners. But acoustic treatment for the room and sound absorbing panels are a must for theatre-style sound effects,” says the Kochi-based senior engineer with HCL Infosystems, who can experience the sound of battle tanks rattling while watching a war movie at his home theatre.

With the nearest multiplex 40km from his house, movie-buff Xavier doesn’t need to take a whole day off to watch a film with his family any longer. “We are transported to a cinema hall in seconds,” he grins.

The old slogan — showing in a hall near you — has just been given a new definition.

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