

Natural Flow

The owners of this riverside home wanted the latest smart technology — but without impeding the architect's clean lines and extensive water views.

Here's a nice problem to have. You are building a riverside home that has been architecturally designed so that from most rooms, you have stunning water views. With a northerly aspect, you plan to have concertina doors onto entertaining areas in every ground-floor room. Now then, where can you place big entertainment screens without intruding on the serenity?

It was a challenge welcomed by Antonio Messina and his Sydney company The Silent Butler.

"We were introduced to the client by the builder; we'd worked together on many projects before," says Antonio. "They knew they wanted home automation together with distributed audio and video, but they were by no means up on how it might be done."

But they did know *how* they wanted it to work.

"He told me — 'Tony, keep it simple to use, or else!'," says Antonio. "And he's right. Without ease of use, smart systems defeat their purpose."

So the owners wanted a system that was simple to use, and one that was not only up with the latest technologies, but also able to adapt to new technologies in the future without need for running extra cabling in the future.

"These are always key priorities, of course," says Antonio. "Simplicity, performance, and maintenance. And simplicity most of all."

Structured solution

This was a new project, not a retrofit, so The Silent Butler was able to design the system "the way it should be."

"A structured cabling design is always paramount," says Antonio. "Every cable installed in the house was installed by us. And handling all this, we're able to give the client a clear choice of different systems to suit his needs and budget."

As well as the AV systems, The Silent Butler's cabling brief extended to all the power and lighting circuits, the data network, antenna distribution, the phone system, automated blinds, and security, including a camera system with a recording system.

"To show the clients how it would all work, we take them to a showroom," says Antonio. "You can tell them about it, you can show them products, but it's when they touch and play with a working system, they get more of an understanding. Otherwise it's like putting an automatic driver in a manual car and telling them to drive off..."





Wot, no theatre?

Hardened videophiles may be shocked by the lack of a dedicated home theatre.

“Oh I know,” laughs Antonio, “and I did try. But I couldn’t convince the missus to give up the gym and let me convert into a dedicated theatre... it was the perfect space.”

Not that the home is short of entertainment spaces as it is.

“In the living room, which is the main ‘media room’, if you like, we were able to wall-mount the main television, a 50-inch Pioneer plasma, in an ideal position, and recessed into the timberwork,” says Antonio. “Aesthetics did come first, I have to say, and the room was very open, and had a lot of hard surfaces. And they didn’t want to see anything, they wanted it all concealed. We worked with the interior designer and with the cabinet makers so that we could incorporate the twin Velodyne 8-inch subwoofers into the cabinet, along with the Integra AV receiver. All the other loudspeakers were mounted in the ceiling.”

Sonance Visual Performance in-ceiling speakers were used in all the internal rooms, with Boston Acoustics SoundWare speakers chosen for more exposed locations. In the family room, The Silent Butler opted for square Visual Performance units each incorporating a nested eight-inch woofer and 25mm silk-dome tweeter. As the name suggests, these in-ceiling speakers are designed for minimum aesthetic impact, their grilles having very small outer trim (micro-flanges, if you will), and sitting almost flush to the ceiling. The tweeters are pivotable, so that optimal imaging can be achieved.

Control in the living room is via an RTI T2C handheld remote, which controls the lighting, video, audio and even the fireplace in the formal living room.

In addition to the RTI remotes around the house, there are three large Vantage wall-mounted touchscreens — one inbetween the kitchen and family rooms, with two more upstairs — one in the master bedroom, one at the top of the stairs.

“I’ve been dealing with Vantage for a long time — six years or more,” says Antonio, “and one really cool thing is how we use the touchscreen as intercom units. When anyone outside hits the button on the intercom, all the screens change to show the front-gate camera, and there are touch-buttons for ‘Open Gate’ and ‘Open Door’. It means you don’t need an extra intercom handset cluttering the wall next to your screen.” ➤



ABOVE: The main living room features a 50-inch Pioneer plasma TV recessed into joinery. The Integra AV receiver and Velodyne subwoofers are hidden inside custom cabinetry, while midrange and treble comes from in-ceiling Sonance Visual Performance speakers

RIGHT: The dining area has clear views to the living room plasma, while the kitchen benefits from the eight-zone multiroom music distribution





Screens rising

So, back to the issue of keeping the big TV screens out of the way of those water views. With all the main rooms opening onto the river-facing pool and deck areas, outside entertaining was always going to be an important aspect of the house. Through the use of some cunning cabinetry and an Ultralift Titan riser, the Sony Bravia 46-inch HDTV in the family room (a less formal living room, main image left) can emerge from a hidden position within a cabinet — and swivel 180 degrees to face outside.

“So you can see it from anywhere in the backyard,” says Antonio, “especially from the cabana area (p27 bottom right image), where we’ve put the Boston SoundWare speakers so you can hear everything loud and clear. And you can bring out any of the RTI remotes, because they’re radio frequency and everything is RS232 interfaced — it’s brilliant.”

Outside, even the pool mechanics and water feature are integrated with the home control systems. Water flows down over three red urns, into a moat with uplights and onto the pool. LED lighting was chosen both for effect and for its energy-saving potential.

“We used LED throughout the house, for inwall lights and cove lighting — and by using the Vantage system it’s all dimmable as well, which is a big issue with LED lighting.”

The main bedroom (far left) also gets the rise and swivel treatment. The Silent Butler installed another Ultralift riser to bring a 40-inch Sony Bravia out of cabinetry, while audio here, as in the family room, is supplied by more ceiling-mounted Sonance Visual Performance speakers. The Vantage wall-mounted touch-screen and remote in the main bedroom provide a ‘Goodnight’ button, which turns off all non-essential equipment throughout the home, and lowers all blinds except those in the bedroom. ▶





Central sources

Keen readers will note that we have mentioned no sources of any kind in the main entertainment areas. And that's how it is, with all sources centrally located in a roll-out cabinet on the ground (middle) floor near the study. From there, any screen can access Foxtel IQ and DVDs from a networked Integra DPS 6.9 DVD player, while eight discrete multiroom audio zones can tune into these plus FM radio from a Xantech dual tuner. All the equipment is under RS232 control, meaning not only can it be operated from any of the remote controls or touchscreens in the home, the gear can communicate its status back to the controllers.

"That's the benefit of RS232 control over, say, a system using IR squirters", explains Antonio. "Because RS232 is two-way, you can see what the volume level is, whether the TV is on and so forth; all this information gets returned to the system controllers. It's probably the longest part of the job, integrating all the RS232 control."

The structured cabling also distributes the roof antenna signal to all rooms via RG6 outlets, "as a secondary system," says Antonio, "given that the Liberty five-core already provides Foxtel IQ to every screen".

There are still a few components to be added.

"The last thing will be a server for music and video," says

Antonio, who shares this magazine's search for a competitively-priced but rock-solid server. Blu-ray will likely be added at the same time.

The rack holds more than just the AV equipment, also being the location for the Vantage and RTI control systems, plus the multiroom switching components, and a digital video recorder for the security camera network. The cameras and recorder can all be viewed from any point through the distributed video system.

A final technological treat is the use of Bio Scan fingerprint readers for keyless access to the property.

"The first scanner opens the front gate, and the second one opens the front door," explains Antonio. "But equally usefully when you're leaving, if you hold your finger on the scanner for three seconds or more, it arms the whole house as you leave." (Full kit list: see p34.) +

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33



The Silent Butler is a provisional CEDIA member and a C-Bus Approved Installer, achieved when a company's installers have been accredited by Clipsal as a specialist in its C-Bus home and building automation system.

"Using an Approved Installer will ensure that your C-Bus system has maximised functionality and performance," says Clipsal's Simon Weir. "The close relationship they have with Clipsal means that they have the latest product knowledge and expertise.

Antonio agrees: "It gives the customer some peace of mind that they're not using some cowboy sparkie who is just turning his hand to a bit of home installation," he says. "We've got our years of experience in the industry using C-Bus, and our Approved status is an effective way both of staying up-to-date for us and providing that extra reassurance to clients."



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35

Kit list +++ kit list +++ kit list +++ kit list +++ kit list +++ kit list +++ k

BASEMENT

Sonance Visual Performance 6.5-inch square speakers x 2
Audioquest 4-core speaker cable

GYM

Sony 40-inch Bravia XBR LCDTV
Liberty 5-core mini RG59 video cable
Audioquest 4-core speaker cable
Sonance Visual Performance 6.5-inch square speakers x 2
RTI T1 remote control

FAMILY ROOM

Sony 46-inch Bravia XBR LCDTV
Ultralift Titan motorised lift and 180-degree manual swivel
Sonance Visual Performance 8-inch square speakers x 2
Audioquest 4-core speaker cable
Liberty 5 core mini RG59 video cable
RTI T2c remote control

LIVING ROOM

Pioneer 50-inch PD50hd plasma wall mounted
Integra DTR 6.9 AV receiver
Velodyne SPL8R subwoofers x 2
Sonance Visual Performance 8-inch square speakers x 5
Liberty 5-core mini RG59 video cable
Chord UK carnival speaker cable
RTI T2c remote control

CABANA & TERRACE (EACH)

Boston SoundWare Cub outdoor speakers x 2
Audioquest 4-core speaker cable

BEDROOM 2

Sonance Visual Performance 6.5-inch square speakers x 2

MASTER BEDROOM

Sony Bravia XBR 40-inch LCDTV
Ultralift Phoenix lift 180-degree manual swivel
RTI T1 remote control
Sonance Visual Performance 6.5-inch square speakers
Audioquest 4 core speaker cable
Liberty 5-core mini RG59 video cable

EQUIPMENT RACK

All zones have access to these devices
Foxtel IQ
Foxtel IQ2
Xantech dual tuner
Integra DPS 6.9 DVD player
Vantage master controller
Vantage theatre point
Netgear DGVF 338 wireless router
Axiom 452AV multiroom A/V matrix switcher x 2
Rack Technologies 45RU rack on wheels
Rack Technologies dual whisper exhaust fans
RTI RP6 processor
Ness 16Ch DVR (12 cameras around property)

Lighting control system
Vantage Controls

BLINDS

Sompfi motorized

UNDERFLOOR HEATING:

Comfort heat

AUTOMATED LOUVRES

Sompfi motorised x 2

SECURITY SYSTEM:

Paradox
Bio Lock finger scanner
Ness 16ch DVR
Ness LED outdoor cameras

LIGHTS

supplied by Domus lighting

ARCHITECT

Altis Architecture

LANDSCAPE GARDENER

Land escapes

PHOTOGRAPHER

Tony Rabbitte

INSTALLER:

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