

# On Top of the WORLD

Old meets new in this lovingly restored historical Montecito, California home complete with a dedicated theater featuring JVC's G20 D-ILA projector and audio by Wilson and Tannoy

STORY BY KRISSY RUSHING

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Every home has a history. This home in the rolling hills of Montecito, California, aptly named Cima del Mundo, or "Top of the World," is not only historically significant for its architecture, but has a rich history attached to it that has lived on through various

owners. In 1924, Lora Moore Knight, whose husband and father had controlling interests in Nabisco, the Diamond Match Company, Continental Can, and who had money to spare, commissioned Myron Hunt—famous for the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, CA—to design a 22,000 square-foot home on 149 acres of land. The hacienda-style home was the largest Hunt had ever built. Because Mrs. Knight was the primary financial backer for Charles Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight from New York to France, you could often see Lindbergh using her property as a landing strip for his famed airplane, The Spirit of St. Louis.



After Knight's death, Cima del Mundo went unoccupied for eight years. In 1999, Jenean and Mark Cerami, the home's new owners, began an extensive renovation that would not only return the home to its former glory, but improve upon it by adding air-conditioning and a redesigned heating system and updating it with the latest technological advancements. Mark, who owns MSC Music and Entertainment, also wanted a state-of-the-art theater that would double as a haven for music listening. The challenges of updating the house while remaining true to the home's structure and preserving its historical impact unfolded, as various design teams went to work on a restoration that would last more than three years.

At the helm of the home's technology team was Michael Fuschi, of Michael Fuschi Design, Inc. Working in conjunction with Crestron programmer [redacted], general contractor Ken Cohen of Trillium Enterprises, Carl Bryant of Bryant Design Studio, the architect, and interior decorator Michael Savoia, of Savoia, Inc., Fuschi began tackling the home's wiring, which alone took a year to complete. Knight, who was worried about brushfires in the hills around her home, had Hunt build the house entirely out of brick and concrete. The walls and floors are constructed out of 12-inch-thick concrete or brick with no crawlspace, which wreaked havoc on Fuschi's wiring plans.

For every wire—from Cresnet to coax to telephone—that was laid, Fuschi had to have a team of concrete borers drill paths into the walls, creating space for the steel and PVC conduit that would hold the wire, a process that was both expensive and time-consuming. Because the home theater was to be constructed out of an old boiler room and bank vault in the home's basement, the distance the wire needed to travel to other zones in the home increased, making wiring complicated. "What was difficult about the wiring process was that every time anyone—whether it be the architect, interior designer, or owners—wanted to make a change



*Once an old boiler room and bank vault, the 25-foot x 15-foot home theater now holds audio/video treasures like the Wilson Watt Puppy 6 front channel speakers, a Tannoy center channel located behind the 10-foot perforated Stewart screen, and an 18-inch Aura subwoofer for serious bass. The theater's equipment, including lighting and the burgundy drapes, are easily controlled through the Crestron touchscreen.*



*Earth tones, like olive green, beige, and camel, blend naturally with the theater's mahogany woodwork. A JVC G20 D-ILA projector hides behind StarFire glass at the back of the room. Noticeably visible, however, are the Wilson Watch Rear channel loudspeakers.*



*Sitting in the home's fully stocked bar, visitors are transported back to the 1920s when Nabisco heiress Lora Moore Knight would entertain her famous friends. Different now, of course, is the 42-inch Fujitsu plasma and Sonance Virtuoso in-wall speakers.*

Fuschi accomplished this by making the dead end 80% fabric and introducing more wood and iron toward the back.

The Ceramis wanted a solid concrete floor for the theater's riser, but Fuschi convinced them otherwise. He created what was in effect a large wooden box filled with insulation for the riser, allowing the bass in the room to rattle the seats a bit to give audience members a visceral response from the theater.

Creating space problems for Fuschi was the room's small, perfectly square floorplan. "I didn't have the width I would have liked in a room," he says. "Michael and Janean wanted a 12-foot screen, but we needed area for the curtains on the sides of the screen, so we had to compromise with a 10-foot screen." In 1999, when the theater was initially planned, Fuschi had chosen to use a CRT projector, as DLP was still in its infancy. There was a solid concrete structural support in the room that couldn't be moved and was awkward to maneuver around, making a CRT projector, with its inflexible placement options, tricky. However, the theater was put on the back burner for a period while other projects in the house were completed and, during this time, improvements were made in digital projectors. Fuschi's plans for using a CRT were abandoned when he saw JVC's G20 D-ILA projector, which was smaller than a CRT and could be placed at the back of the room to clear the structural support.

"The JVC was one of the first non-CRT projectors that I was impressed with," says Fuschi. "It looks amazing. I put the projector behind StarFire glass so it's quiet, as well."

Fuschi used a woofer behind the perforated screen, making it imperative that 2/3 of the screen was higher than the woofer so that the screen wouldn't flap from the woofer's enormous energy. "The client is an audiophile," he commented. "And because he owns a record label, he needed to be able to come home, pop in a demo, and crank up the music to see what it would sound like reproduced accurately and loud." Fuschi therefore used two Wilson Watt Puppy 6s for stereo music in the front, a Tannoy center speaker behind the perforated screen (driven by a 500-watt Classé monoblock amp), Wilson Watch rears, and an Aura subwoofer with custom-designed enclosures.

anywhere in the home, all the teams had to get together to figure out how it was going to affect their own project," says Fuschi. "We really had to communicate with each other."

Wiring proved to be only one in a series of difficult problems posed by the home's fireproof structure. While the theater's concrete walls and floor made the room into a sort of sonic vault, letting no sound in or out of the room, reflections were nightmarish. To correct this, Fuschi used the LEDE-room concept (live-end/dead-end), in which the front end of the room is made acoustically dead to control first-order distortion (slap echo) and the rear is live to lend the room a little more excitement.

**THEATER**

JVC DiLA G20 Video Projector  
 Classe' SSP-75 Surround Processor  
 Classe' CAM-350 Front Channel Power Amplifiers (2)  
 Classe' CA-301 Rear Channel Power Amplifier  
 Classe' CAM-350 Center Channel Power Amplifier  
 Cello Duet 350 Woofer Power Amplifier  
 Pioneer Elite CLD-99 LD Player  
 Pioneer Elite DV-09 DVD Player  
 Sony SAT-B3 DSS Receiver  
 Toshiba W804 S-VCR  
 Panasonic SV-3700 Dat Player  
 Totevision LCD-501 LCD Monitor  
 Wilson Watt/Puppy 6 Front Channel Loudspeakers  
 Tannoy D-750 Center Channel Loudspeaker (behind screen)  
 Wilson Watch Rear Channel Loudspeakers  
 Aura 18" Subwoofer (custom cabinet)  
 Transparent Audio, Video & Digital Interconnect & Speaker Cable  
 Monster HTS500 AC Stabilization System (2)  
 Faroudja DVP-3000 Video Processor  
 Stewart GrayHawk Filmscreen 10x6 ft. Screen  
 Crestron CMNSX-AV Pro Control System  
 Crestron CT-1600 Touch Screen  
 SM Automatic Motorized Drapе Tracks  
 Middle Atlantic Slim 5 Equipment Racks (2)

**WHOLE HOUSE SYSTEM**

Crestron PAD-8 Audio Distribution Preamplifiers (3)  
 Crestron CN-AMPX 16X60 Multi-Channel Amplifiers (4)  
 Crestron CMNSX-AV Pro Control System  
 Crestron ST-Tune AM/FM/TV Tuner  
 Cello Duet 350 Power Amplifier (for Living Room speakers)  
 Cello Palette Preamp (for Living Room speakers)  
 Sony CDP-M555ES CD Library  
 Apogee DA-1000 D/A Converter  
 Sony B-55 DSS Receiver  
 Middle Atlantic Slim 5 Equipment Racks  
 Monster Cable HTS5000 Power Conditioner  
 Sonance LS-1/LR-1 Line Senders/Receivers  
 DLS MS-16 DSS Switcher  
 Terk FM Pro FM Antenna  
 Panasonic CT-13R22T TV Monitor  
 Liberty Cresnet, Coaxial & Speaker Cable  
 Transparent Audio Cable  
 APC LS Uninterrupted Power Supply

**Bar**

Fujitsu PDS-4214 Plasma TV  
 Premiere Mounts Plasma Swivel  
 Sony B-55 DSS Receiver  
 Crestron CT-1600 Touchscreen  
 Crestron ST-Tune FM/AM/TV Tuner  
 Sima SVS-4 A/V Switcher  
 Transparent Audio/Video/Speaker Cable  
 Sonance Virtuoso 833D Loudspeakers

**Billiard Room**

Sonance Symphony 621T Loudspeakers  
 Proton NT-333 TV  
 RCA DRD-203 DSS Receiver  
 Sony CDP-CE315 CD Changer  
 Sony DTC-59ES DAT Player  
 Transparent Audio/Video Cable  
 Crestron CN-WP12 Keypad  
 Xantech IR Repeater System

**Family Room**

Sonance Virtuoso 833D Loudspeakers  
 Sony KV-36XBR450 TV  
 Sony SAT-T60 DSS Receiver/TiVo Recorder  
 Marantz DV-7010 DVD Player  
 Sonance ASAP-1 Power Amplifier  
 Sonance AS-1 Auto Switch  
 Transparent Audio/Video Cable  
 Philips Pronto Control System  
 Crestron CN-WP12 Keypad  
 Xantech IR Repeater System

**Bowling Alley**

Sonance 833DR Loudspeakers (4pr.)  
 Crestron CN-WP12 Keypad



*If the theater isn't enough to entertain guests thoroughly, there's the bowling alley, complete with the original flooring. In the 1920s, a servant's son was employed as the alley's pinsetter. Today it is mercifully automated and includes Crestron keypads and four pairs of Sonance speakers.*

You'd never know how much careful calculation went into the A/V from the simplicity with which it is operated, though. "Basically, I wanted the system to be easy for someone to use without ever being trained on the Crestron," says Fuschi. "All you have to do is sit down, press 'Watch a Movie' on the touchscreen, and the rest is done for you."

Lighting, also controlled via the Crestron, is also a relatively straightforward affair. The Ceramis wanted to keep the original light switches and light plates on the walls, so Fuschi simply added recessed lighting, step lighting, curtain warmers, and a Lutron GrafikEye. "I like to keep lighting to a minimum," says Fuschi. "After all, you are in there to watch a movie, you don't need intricate lighting." While overseas, the Ceramis discovered a light sconce that would complement the theater's subdued art deco/eclectic vibe, which they purchased and had reproduced in the States, a project that took eight months to complete.

To get away from the regimented theater look, custom-made furniture—a couch and three chairs—and wall coverings in earth tones (olive green, beige, taupe, and camel) were used, coupled with burgundy velvet curtains and big pillows. Mahogany woodwork and turn-of-the-century antiques complete the theater's eclectic feel. Fuschi also retained the original bank-vault door that serves as the entryway into the theater equipment room. "Overall, the most important thing to Michael and Janean was that they wanted to live in the house and be comfortable there," says Fuschi. "Despite its price tag, this is not a pedestal home; it's based on comfort."

If the oft-enjoyed theater isn't enough to keep this family and their guests thoroughly entertained, which is highly unlikely, there's always the adjacent bowling alley, complete with the original flooring. Mrs. Knight, an eccentric woman often traveling with a 15-person entourage, used to



employ one of her servant's sons as the alley's pin-setter. "He would actually watch as guests bowled, and reset the bowling pins after they were knocked over," says Fuschi.

Audio and video fed by more than 4,000 watts of power through 36 pairs of speakers dance throughout the home's 24 audio zones, including an outdoor pool and patio area with heated flagstone flooring. Old air-returns in the entry gallery, complete with their original solid brass grilles, were used to house speakers so they are heard and not seen. A Crestron touchscreen in the bar area and a wireless touchscreen in the kitchen allow the Ceramis to control the home's A/V without descending into the theater.

Remaining true to the integrity of this historical home was a challenge. But it retains most of the original light fixtures, teak floors, and even the carved teak ceiling in the living area, while enjoying some of the latest technological advancements available and a truly spectacular home theater. "The house is an entire experience: the kitchen, the patio, the bowling alley, and the theater all give this home an unmistakable personality that is the perfect melding of old and new." ♦



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