

# A lighting designer creates a home theater that does more than show movies

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MODEL TRAIN STORE. A TV repair shop. A beauty salon. A home office. Like many other older homes in San Francisco, the front of Randy Whitehead's Potrero Hill flat has gone through many changes over the years. Now the space has new life as a multifunctional media room.

"I was very ready to have that theater experience in my home," Whitehead says. "As a lighting designer, I've been working with many homeowners who have them. But I've seen many media rooms used as only one space, and I wanted mine to be more functional."

Whitehead, who shares the two-bedroom, two-bath flat with his partner, wanted a media room that also would work as a second living room and a guest room.

"In San Francisco, we're dealing with such a small amount of space, we need rooms that have a second use."

With that idea in mind, Whitehead turned to San Francisco interior designer Katie Anderson for help.

"One of the main goals was to create a space that was going to serve their personal needs," Anderson recalls. "First, they do a lot of casual entertaining at home. They wanted a



Photos by DENNIS ANDERSON / Special to The Chronicle

## DOUBLES:

At left, a Chinese chest reveals home theater components; above, swing-arm, pendant and recessed lights do their work in the room. For types of lighting, see Page 4.

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RANDALL WHITEHEAD

private space for themselves but also a room that could help serve people in from out of town. So you're talking about watching movies, a place to hang out and a place to sleep. For that reason, it had to be a very dynamic room."

Whitehead and Anderson decided to change nothing about the structure of the 17-by-12-foot room, which last served as a home office, except some wiring for lighting and sound. To furnish the room, they choose an eclectic design including pieces from Whitehead's travels to China, India and Java.

"These kinds of pieces start conversation, so you're never at a loss for something to talk about in this room," Whitehead says. "Plus I love primitives. For me, some media rooms are ultraslick, but I wanted more texture. I think people feel a bit more comfortable when things look beat up, so I wanted things with history."

Since Whitehead was in a hurry to see his dream realized ("I need immediate gratification," he says) all the furniture in the room came straight off the floors of design showrooms around the Bay Area, except the sofa at the center of the sitting area. The tan sofa with a black zig-zag pattern conveniently folds into a queen bed for visiting guests. The neutral color makes the sofa a background piece, with pillows or throws adding just the right punch of color.

A black reclining leather chair picks up the black pattern in the sofa and provides a comfortable spot to read or watch movies.

A lightweight mahogany-colored coffee table was the perfect solution for this space, since it easily can be moved out of the way for guests wanting to use the sofa bed.

One of Whitehead and Anderson's best finds was a large, 150-year-old Chinese chest that solves many of the room's storage needs.

"I wanted something that would allow us to put the TV away when not in use and be harmonious with the rest of the room," Anderson explains. "When it's closed, you don't even know there's a TV in there."

The antique chest, with doors that fold back when open, holds the main electronics for the media room: a high-definition TV formatted for movies, a DVD player, a VCR and a stereo/CD system. Three Middle Eastern sitting stools stored underneath the chest pull out to the coffee table when Whitehead and his partner want to enjoy a casual meal in front of the TV. The chest also has drawers, so overnight guests have a place to store their personal items. A nearby antique bookcase provides even more storage.

Instead of hardwood, Whitehead and Anderson choose eco-friendly bamboo flooring. The material adds warmth to the room and compliments the Asian artwork. An area rug under the coffee table — the last item purchased for the room — has round medallions that match the pattern of the bamboo.

A large window gives the space lots of natural light, making the room the perfect spot to read the morning paper or enjoy a cup of coffee. Shade blinds add privacy or less sun for TV viewing, and some heavy Ultrasuede curtains fabricated by Anderson help absorb sound.

"I also chose that fabric for the illuminous of it," Anderson says. "At night, the reflective quality is wonderful." After trying a variety of neutral shades, the pair decided on a "cream of celery" paint color for the walls to help pull the look of the room together.

About two months and \$70,000 later, the room was complete. All the attention to detail contributed to the room's success, believes Whitehead, who says he now spends about 90 percent of his at-home time in his new space. "I love the fact that it doesn't scream 'media room'," Whitehead says. "People are always pleasantly surprised by how quickly the room changes."

*Jeannie Matteucci is a free-lance writer based in San Francisco.*



# INTERIOR DESIGN TIPS FOR HOME THEATERS

*San Francisco interior designer Katie Anderson offers these design tips for homeowners wanting to create an attractive but comfortable media room:*

■ **Design your media room with the idea that your taste will change down the road.**

Avoid expensive built-in cabinetry or a very trendy sofa that quickly looks dated. "Chances are in six years, you'll be very tired of it," she says.

■ **Consider scale and the size of your room when deciding which equipment to buy.**

"The largest TV isn't necessarily the best or most comfortable choice for a small room," Anderson says. Have room measurements in hand when you visit the TV/stereo store to pick out equipment.

■ **Pay strong attention to color.**

"I wouldn't put a lot of busy patterns in a media room," Anderson says. "You want an environment that is soothing."

■ **Spend your money on flexible furniture, like sectional sofas or reclining chairs.**

"You want a media room that works for both a large Super Bowl party and something more intimate when you have a friend over to watch a movie," Anderson says. "And remember, many people start watching TV sitting up, but by the end they're lying down."

■ **Make sure your media room reflects the look and style of your home.**

"You have to design appropriate to the architecture," she says. For example, if you have a very rustic home, avoid creating a theater with a cold, high-tech look.

— J.M.

