



The cosy entertainment room of Boost Juice founder Janine Allis's children, designed by Penny del Castillo, In Design International. Photography: Damien Kook



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

If all the world's a stage, your living room might just be the setting for the next big blockbuster premiere

WORDS DONNAY TORR

The success of SVoD (subscription-video-on-demand) services is indicative of a generation who'd rather stay in than go out. But the cheeky connotations of "Netflix and chill" doesn't mean homeowners aren't taking their entertainment needs seriously. From optimising existing living spaces for family-friendly fun to creating bespoke media rooms for movie connoisseurs, there's a perfect media room style for everyone.

First things first, what's the main function of the room? Who'll be using the space? Answering these crucial questions should help you set the tone and give you a running start.

"The perfect media room is a multipurpose family activity room," says Penny del Castillo, interior designer and director at In Design International. Penny was recently involved in the creation of a media room for the children of Boost Juice founder Janine Allis and cites it as a "perfect example" of how a versatile entertainment space can come together. "The

room is situated in the basement and connects to external stairs to get directly to the pool, pickleball tennis court and back garden. It also has a powder room and gym attached."

EXPERIENCE & CONNECTION

Leading international design practice Hassell Studios has vast experience in creating large-scale entertainment projects focused on bringing people together, such as the recently completed Geelong Arts Centre. Principal architect Scott Walker believes the design principles for larger-scale entertainment spaces can be effectively translated to private homes, and that the best design should ultimately connect with individuals.

"How people move through a space and experience the sounds and textures is fundamental to a positive connection with design," he says. "It's not just about a building or building fabric, it's about experience and connection to an environment. These themes are universal no matter what scale the project."

While Scott believes that starting your media room from scratch will most likely have the best technical outcome, he stresses that it's important these sorts of spaces are connected meaningfully to the rest of the home.

An entertainment room will be influenced by available space and your budget as well as your core needs. Remember to keep in mind who'll be using these spaces: if you have young children or teens and emphasise quality family bonding time, an elaborate, formal space might be more intimidating than practically enjoyable.

Penny suggests defining who in the household will be spending the most time in the media room, and to choose a concept theme design (such as sports memorabilia or Disney wonderland) aimed at those individuals. "Most families also use their media rooms as a playroom or sleep-out. We're currently working on a media room that has a pool table, cocktail cabinet, wine cellar and lockable mini office space incorporated."

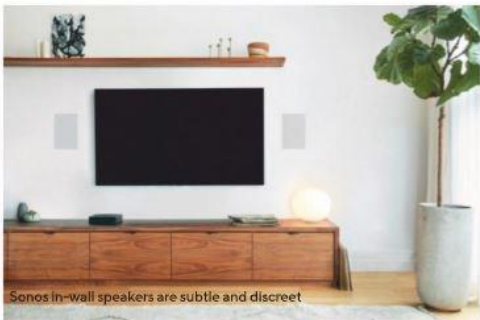


"MOST FAMILIES ALSO USE THEIR MEDIA ROOM AS A PLAYROOM OR SLEEP-OUT"
— PENNY DEL CASTILLO

UNIQ Building Group



Moda Interiors opted for simple lines and low lighting. Photography: Joel Barbitto, DMax Photography



Sonos in-wall speakers are subtle and discreet



Image courtesy of LG



ABOVE, LEFT & BELOW Audio and visual are the fundamental tech components, so don't skimp here. envalisaudio.com



"THE BEST MEDIA SPACES SHOULD BE CONNECTED TO THE HOUSE AND THE LIFE OF THE HOME" — SCOTT WALKER

Good sound quality is crucial, as is soundproofing. CSR Gyprock's Therese Tarlinton explains that modern sound systems have the potential to noise-pollute the entire house, defeating the purpose of an entertainment hub as the ultimate relaxation zone. "A basic understanding of building acoustics and careful consideration of room use and the layout of your home or extension is crucial to create quiet zones where needed, and keep noise contained," she says.

The uptick in the popularity of media rooms has led to the development of specific soundproofing products. Gyprock's Soundchek is Australia's first acoustic plasterboard, designed to reduce the transfer of unwanted noises through walls and ceilings, while reducing noise transfer in your home. "Consumers need to remember the importance of their home's foundations," Therese says. "Your walls and ceilings play such a crucial part in controlling environments, yet are often the most commonly overlooked."

GO SOFT ON FURNISHINGS

When repurposing an existing room, use soft wall-to-wall carpeting instead of timber or tiled flooring, or cover existing hard floors with large rugs. Avoid concrete entirely. "Hard, reflective surfaces bring moderate to high reverberation issues when the space is full of noise components," Therese explains. "The energy of sound radiates away from its source and interacts with every surface, so soft furnishings aren't just beneficial for comfort, they are also the most sound-absorbent. Consider things such as big, comfortable furniture that absorbs sound, positioned towards the central television screen."

Penny suggests using soft material on walls, ceilings and furniture. "We'd choose woven seagrass or fabric-faced velvet flocked wallpaper over a flat paper or plain painted wall finish, for example. And if there's a large window or door that needs covering, curtains are better than blinds."

Windows can be doubly problematic in a media room; they are hard surfaces that reflect sound-causing audio distortion and they admit light that can produce reflections on your viewing surface. While Penny mentions that most of her clients are opting for media rooms at basement level, where it's typically "already dark and partially underground, so has inherently great acoustic values", this isn't an option for all homeowners. If you don't have a basement but you're building from scratch, locate the room where it can be sealed off from the open-plan entertainment areas and avoid windows completely if at all possible.

When repurposing an existing room with windows, consider using blackout curtains or blinds or even external roll-down shutters to help keep out light when needed. Luxaflex's Vera Meharg emphasises that light control is "the number-one consideration for most homeowners when choosing a window covering, particularly for a home media

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ABOVE & TOP LEFT Luxaflex Duette LightLock shades' side channel design features rows of specially shaped micro-ridges to trap, absorb, block and deflect all incoming light

room, to ensure there's no glare from the sun". Choosing an effective light-blocking system that also restricts light leakage from light gaps, thus eliminating the "halo effect" that can be characteristic of some room-darkening shades, can make a world of difference.

Vera also references the growing role the use of smart technology (such as in the Luxaflex Powerview Motorisation system) plays in the control of light, privacy and overall ambience. Depending on what you pick, you can pre-program your blinds to rise and greet the dawn, and readjust to deflect afternoon sun, before scheduling them to close at night.

HELLO DARKNESS

When it comes to artificial light, less is more. Henley Design's Micaela Austin says that while lighting is really important to set the mood, not much is required. "You actually want this place to be a bit darker than the rest of the house, rather than lit up really brightly. It creates a calmer vibe." She recommends opting for warm lights with a yellow undertone as they're "not as harsh on the eyes", as opposed to natural lights, which give off a blue tone and are designed to wake you up. "Another worthwhile investment for this space is lights that are dimmable, giving you the option to turn it up to full brightness during the day."

Even better, suggests Penny, is "lighting coming from the floor or wall levels rather than the ceilings, so it's not stark on your face".

Bright colours and shiny paint types reflect light, which is especially distracting when there's a brightly lit scene on the screen. If the main purpose of your media room is viewing movies and TV series, paint your walls as dark as you can stand them. Think neutral brown, tan and olive tones, as well as navy blue and deep maroon red. Vera cautions against the

use of certain colours, though, if you're a true cinephile: "It's best to avoid bold colours such as red, blue or green, which can distort the picture on any screens."

If the room is multipurpose, the use of darker colours isn't as crucial, though it's still best to stay away from gloss or semi-gloss sheens. Reflection-fighting eggshell or flat paint is best. "Play with rich colours such as deep reds and royal blues," Micaela suggests. "Don't be afraid to paint your ceiling black — it creates the illusion of height as black recedes, whereas white comes forward."

If you're dedicating the room to cinema and gaming, avoid all reflective materials such as glass-fronted art, mirrors or shiny painted surfaces. Use poster art or canvas instead.

Of course, part of the pleasure of a home entertainment room is filling it with the

state-of-the-art technology you need to indulge in your favourite pastimes, be it movies, video-gaming or listening to your favourite music. Do your research and seek expert advice from AV equipment specialists before choosing what works best for your budget. In general, opt to invest in the highest-quality tech you can afford, but aim for durable rather than gimmicks or trends.

Scott stresses that it's important to focus on flexibility when designing your entertainment room, something that seems relatively simple but is often overlooked.

"Technology is changing rapidly and wireless systems and streaming services are making some technology obsolete. Of course, high-end systems will always have a place and in some ways this technology is evolving slower, but for systems in the more affordable price

bracket, you need flexibility as in five years the hardware will be obsolete. When designing a media space, design for the future and for change," he says.

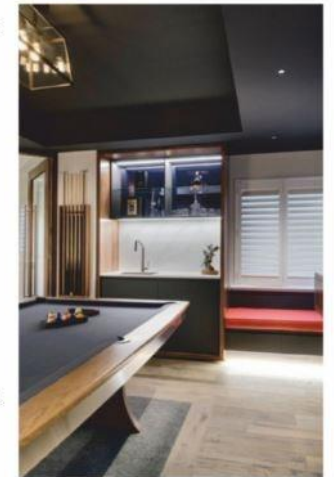
SELECT YOUR SCREEN

Before buying the biggest flat-screen TV you can find, consider the dimensions of the room. A huge screen is no use if the couches are so close to it that you have to move your head to take in the entire vista. And it's no fun squinting from the edge of your seat if the screen is way too small.

If you'd prefer a more authentic theatre feel and you have the space, consider a good-quality drop-down screen and projector installation with a premium Surround Sound system. These are usually 5.1, which means there are five full-range speakers and one low-range specialist, the "woofer". Three speakers and the woofer will be placed towards the front of the room, and the two remaining speakers on either side and slightly behind viewers.

Connectivity is crucial. If there's one area in the house where reliable internet access is critical, the media room is it! Penny suggests consulting an IT technician about the requisite capabilities for perfect streaming at all times.

Len Wallis Audio's Jason Sexton urges people to invest in a decent home network. "Many think they have fast internet and their supplied router from their provider will be fine for their new installation," he says, "so while they're happy to spend big on components, they won't invest on making their home network more capable." It's crucial, he explains, in order to avoid many of the technological issues affecting your enjoyment of a media room. "Buffering videos, wireless speakers dropping off the system ... chances are it's not the network that attracts the



ABOVE A renovation project for a home in Hillarys, Western Australia, includes a handy drinks station, with sink. Photography: Joel Barbita, D'Max Photography



The media and games room in series 8's Dee Why project looks over the indoor pool.
Photography Rhianan Slater



CSR Gyprock



Entertainment rooms can be a great place to store collections and miscellaneous memorabilia.
Photography Joel Barbitta, DMax Photography

blame," he says. Assuming that the video or audio system is at fault is a common error. Remember, too, tech's darkest side: cables. Micaela recommends wiring all cabling inside the walls, if possible, rather than leaving it exposed, which can be a hazard. Consider the positioning of recharging stations and the storage of devices and items such as DVDs, records, board games and remotes. It's likely to be cluttered, so storage is crucial. "Purchasing furniture pieces that have built-in drawers and storage components can help keep all smaller items away and out of reach," Micaela adds.

FUN WITH FURNITURE

Furnishing your media room should be fun, but always keep an eye on the practical. "Gold-class cinema seating is no longer in demand in our homes," Penny says. "Instead, it's either huge deep-seated sofas to snuggle into or more relaxed low-to-floor-style horizontal ergonomics." She also suggests including a couple of giant floor cushions or ottomans in the space — for squeezing in extra bodies and for getting close to the screen for gaming.

Keep the dimensions of the room in mind when choosing, and opt for items that can be reconfigured or moved easily. Remember, this is likely to be a high-traffic space where many people will drink, eat and slouch on the floor, so elaborate nooks and crannies and plush carpeting might fast become a headache. Choose easy-to-clean surfaces or removable, washable covers. Keep dainty and fussy bric-a-brac out of the space, opting for bolder, versatile pieces that can stand hard use.

Media rooms are ideal for having some fun while decorating — they are, after all, for entertainment! Penny suggests a mini bar or even a built-in kitchenette so you don't have to pop out to restock the snacks or drinks, while Micaela supports adding fun personal touches to the room. "Think framed memorabilia, vintage popcorn machines and record players."

Depending on its theme and purpose, your media room can also become the ideal home for the odds and ends that don't quite fit elsewhere, such as that *Evil Dead* poster signed by Bruce Campbell or the Fender Strat that Patti Smith once played.

Ultimately, a media room is meant to bring families and friends together. Keeping this in mind (or not) can make or break a room, as Scott illustrates: "I once sat in a media room (not designed by us) that was technically perfect. Tiered floor, total blackout, acoustic isolation and cinema-style seating. But unfortunately it was completely disconnected from the home to the point where it was disconcerting and frankly a little weird. The best media spaces should be connected to the house and the life of the home; at its best, it's a shared experience — not one of isolation." ♣

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