

Show-off Space

CALIFORNIA INTEGRATOR BENEFITS FROM DESIGNER SHOWCASE COMMITMENT

by *Don Kreski*

From Manhattan to Memphis, Kansas City to California, designer show houses, meant to impress potential clients with the skills of interior designers as well as raising money for charity, are more popular than ever. While it's always great to help out local charities, many contractors have wondered what it takes to participate in these projects and how much they can expect to benefit from the exercise.

If the experience of Wilshire Media Systems and independent programmer Casgan is typical, the answer is that it takes some real effort, but the return can be well worth the investment.

Building the System

The Pasadena Showcase House of Design is an annual fundraiser created in 1965 to support the Los Angeles Philharmonic and other local cultural and educational programs. According to Wilshire Media system designer David Bradford, "in most cases they redesign a private residence, although in this case it was a 1930 mansion now owned by the local branch of the American Red Cross."

As is the case in most show house fundraisers, the Pasadena committee asked a separate interior designer to donate their time and talents to redecorate each room of the house. The decorators, in turn, invited local contractors to donate time and materials needed to complete the project.

"We were approached by Karen Shoener from Designs of the Interior about a potential partnership in the production of a media room," Bradford explained. "We felt it was a perfect opportunity to showcase Wilshire Media Systems' ability to design a hidden, green, and fully automated entertainment system."

Wilshire engineers designed a system featuring a 52-inch Seura Vanishing TV, a 46-inch Sony



(Right) The Wilshire Media Systems' installation, operations, and design staff, back row (l-r): Adam Smith, Bennett Bowman, Dave Bradford, Brandon Jackson, Mike McMaster, Alan Thiele, Brian Nabonne; front row (l-r) Mark Kitchen, Tommy Eriksen, Sean Prater, Henry Villanueva, and David Stark.

(Below) The family room at the Craven Mansion in Pasadena showcased a Seura Mirror TV, a Sony TV on an Auton lift, Lutron shades, and the Crestron lighting installed by Wilshire Media.



PHOTOS BY CHRIS WOOLMAN, WILSHIRE MEDIA SYSTEMS, THOUSAND OAKS, CA.

LED TV that rises out of a cabinet using an Auton lift, Crestron infiNET lighting, Lutron-controlled shades, two Sony Blu-ray Disc players, a Sony surround receiver with ceiling speakers, and a Velodyne subwoofer, all managed by a Crestron processor and touchscreen. They asked Casgan, a Crestron Authorized Independent Programmer (CAIP), to handle programming.

David Martin, president of Casgan, said that the idea was to create a self-running demonstration that could be started with the press of a button and, in about three minutes, show off all the various features of the room.

The demonstration began by lowering the shades while the lights simultaneously dimmed. The motorized lift raised the Sony flat-panel in a sitting area at one end of the room, while a segment from *Planet Earth* appeared in the Seura mirror. Accompanying the video was the segment's stirring classical soundtrack played throughout the room. Then the lights brightened as the TVs faded away and tour guides talked about the energy-efficient features of the room. Those included earth-friendly building materials and Crestron Green Light technology that monitored the lighting and displayed the current energy use and costs on the touchscreen.

According to Bradford, it took two months for the system design and installation, and the room was open for one month. After the show closed, Wilshire technicians were able to remove most of the equipment and resell it at a reduced price. "The rules we operated under said that we had to leave anything permanently installed there in the room," he said. "That essentially meant the shades, a wall-mounted control unit for the shades, and the speakers and wiring we installed in the ceiling.



Casgan created an automated demo for a Crestron control system that revealed the room's hidden AV systems and demonstrated their impact in just three minutes.

Wilshire removed the TVs and the control system, as well as the infiNET gateway and dimming modules, returning the old switches so the lighting functioned as it had before the project started.

Bradford estimated that the total cost of the system, including labor, was about \$50,000, but the company recovered \$12,000 from the sale of the 52-inch Seura TV. In addition, there was the opportunity cost of staffing the media room to demonstrate the system for a month—a total of about 200 man-hours.

Reactions from the Public

"We had an overwhelming response," Martin said. "The public, showcase committee members, and employees of Designs of the Interior all expressed amazement with the technology. 'I want this in my home' was commonly heard, and we passed out over 100 business cards the first day alone!"

Bradford noted that his company gained valuable insight into the demographics of

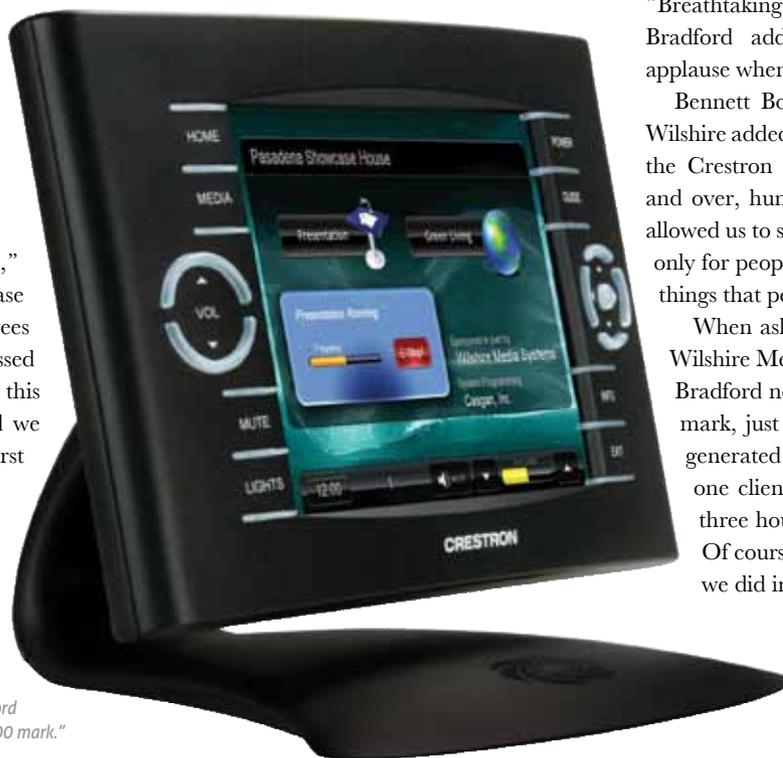
visitors to the showcase. "What we learned from this experience is that 80 percent of the people who viewed the showcase home were women, and probably 99 percent of them hated electronics," he said. "Yet they loved our demonstration because this was such a gorgeous room and because we had

made using the technology look easy to operate and incorporate into the home. We noticed people coming back two, three, even four times with their friends. It was a huge success."

Written comments, collected from visitors at the end of the showcase, included the succinct "Breathtaking," and "A WOW factor of 10!" Bradford added that, "We normally received applause when we ended each demonstration."

Bennett Bowman, a senior sales consultant at Wilshire added that he was impressed with how well the Crestron automation system performed over and over, hundreds of times a day for weeks. "It allowed us to show that automation isn't something only for people like Bill Gates, but can control the things that people use every day."

When asked if he could quantify the business Wilshire Media booked as a result of this project, Bradford noted, "The total broke the \$700,000 mark, just from the projects I am aware of. It generated several big projects. For instance, one client we met through the showcase has three houses, and we did work in all of them. Of course, I have no idea how much business we did in referrals from these direct clients."



When asked if he could quantify the business his integration company booked as a result of the showcase home project, Wilshire Media David Bradford said that the total "broke the \$700,000 mark."

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