Country Mouse, City Mouse

Homeowners outfit their Manhattan apartment and Westchester estate with state-of-the-art technology.
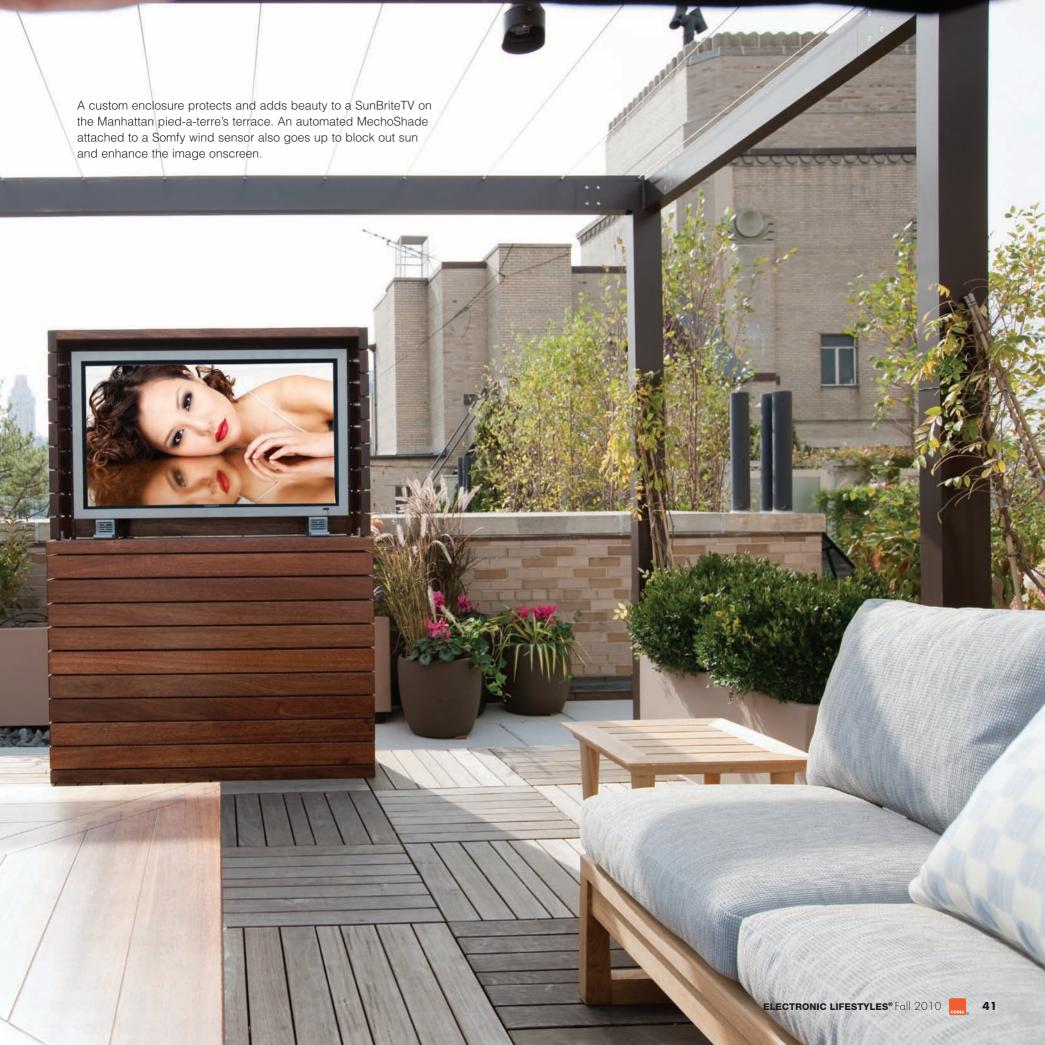
By Krissy Rushing

Two high-end spaces; one client, one architect, one designer and one integrator. That's how these two projects were executed, and while the systems in each are modified versions of each other, the challenges were different.

The Constraints of Space

The homeowners' primary residence in Westchester County, N.Y., spans 10,000 square feet and is meant to be a place where their children and future grandchildren can come to visit all at once, with room to spare. Space is abundant at this estate. Osbee Industries, Inc., had worked with the client for more than 10 years on previous homes, so it was a logical choice to do the systems integration. The company was excited to have such a large area to work with.

Because Westchester was a retrofit to be outfitted with large-scale whole-home automation with several media systems, Osbee's wire crew had to snake large quantities of cable through the walls, a process that took a month and

Both the Westchester estate (above left) and the Manhattan apartment (this page) benefit from the state-of-the-art technology. Due to the high ceilings in the Manhattan penthouse, Osbee had to come up with creative solutions to accommodate the desired technology. Here, an in-ceiling TV in front of one of the cabinets in the dressing room pops down from the ceiling using an Electro Genetics lift.

A custom enclosure protects and adds beauty to a SunBriteTV on the Manhattan pied-a-terre's terrace. An automated MechoShade attached to a Somfy wind sensor also goes up to block out sun and enhance the image onscreen.

Osbee worked hand-in-hand with the architect to create a truly hidden display in the formal living room. When not in use, an automated panel slides over the TV to reveal the homeowner's custom artwork.

The equipment rack in the back of the Manhattan living room shows how the entire apartment's electronics are centralized into one rack.

Dave Raines, president and CEO of Osbee

a half to complete. "While the wire crew was in there, we were in the office, building the equipment racks and writing the Crestron program," says Dave Raines, president and CEO of Osbee.

While it was a much smaller space at around 2,200 square feet, the Manhattan pied-a-terre's wiring was also an issue, though this time it was due to lack of space as opposed to an excess of it. Architectural features also played a role in compounding this challenge. "The architect insisted on the highest ceilings possible and many of the rooms feature extensive millwork," says Raines. "Finding routes for the wiring was very difficult. Between having to centralize all the line voltage for the lighting, video distribution wiring, and all of our audio cabling and data/telephone to one area, it was hard to get everything in the ceiling. Finding speakers and TVs that fit in the walls and ceiling was also problematic." Pre-war construction and old-plaster walls only contributed to the amount of creative thinking required.

The limited space of the Manhattan apartment presented other constraints, as well. "Unlike the Westchester estate, every single inch mattered down to keypad placement," says Raines. "To get a keypad in the wall meant chipping out a piece of concrete, so the type and size of the keypad were very important."

Osbee took the architect's lead, working very closely with him, armed with hundreds of pages of blueprints to make everything fit properly.

"When you pay big bucks for a 2,200-square-foot apartment, every inch of space is extremely valuable. People were arguing over where to put things," says Raines.

What's Good for the Goose...

While each residence presented challenges arising from space or lack thereof, Osbee echoed elements from the Westchester estate in the Manhattan apartment based on their success with the homeowners. In the Westchester estate, for example, the gentleman of the house wanted a TV in the living area, while his wife, the architect, and the interior designer preferred to maintain the appearance of a formal living room. To accomplish these seemingly disparate goals, Osbee worked closely with the architect and interior designer to engineer a motorized sliding panel that hides the Fujitsu 50" plasma TV when not in use and allows the customer to display artwork. "Our office and engineers coordinated all the dimensions of the panel and went back and forth with the architect to make sure every little detail would fit. This is not a manufactured sliding art panel, but a custom-made wall featuring a piece from the homeowner's collection," says Raines.

Likewise, a wall panel in the Manhattan apartment covers the Fujitsu 65" plasma TV when it's not being used, only here the panel is not motorized: The homeowners simply slide the faux wall manually to reveal the TV.

The clients can control either residence directly from their computers thanks to Crestron's e-Control X-Panel technology. Osbee tied the two Crestron systems at each residence together, so when the clients are traveling, they can log on and control both systems remotely from either

house, including audio, video, lighting, HVAC and even pool equipment.

Unfortunately, because the Westchester estate was a minimally invasive retrofit, Osbee did not have the ability to create a complete, centralized lighting system connected to the Crestron system. Raines and his team therefore only tied the outdoor lighting into the Crestron system. The clients like this feature so much that they decided they wanted their entire Manhattan penthouse to be fully tricked out with centralized lighting.

"Because the apartment was a gut job, we had a clean slate to do anything we wanted. Secondly, the client was now more familiar with what an automation system can do having done it in Westchester, so he was able to specify more things they wanted. Lighting was one of those things." Osbee also replicated the Kaleidescape system from the Westchester estate, which includes 120 family videos plus 200 movies, for the Manhattan apartment so that the homeowners can access their entire movie collection in both places.

The Same…But Different

While both the Westchester and Manhattan residences have many similarities, they each have some very unique engineering—both creatively and technically. The Manhattan penthouse has a beautiful terrace where the homeowner wanted to be able to watch sports. Osbee helped design and engineer a gorgeous mahogany enclosure to house the 46-inch weatherproof SunBriteTV console.

Perhaps more unique, however, is the custom, dual-tensioned automated 12-by-18-foot MechoShade shade system that rises up, sheltering the TV from harsh sunlight when in use and preventing glare on-screen. It's attached to a Somfy wind sensor, so if the wind picks up and the shade is

A manual sliding wall in Manhattan echoes the automated panel in the Westchester estate, revealing the display when it's time to watch a movie.

With Radoslav Opacic, principal of Opacic Architects in Irvington, N.Y. ▼

Electronic Lifestyles®: What has your experience been like working with electronic systems contractors (ESCs)?

RO: The clients are usually the ones to bring the ESCs on board. It is usually a good relationship that develops between our firm and the installer. We find it very helpful if the system's designer has good CAD drawings and good cuts for us to look through. The more information and specs they can give us, the better off we are going to be. The only sticking point that we've ever experienced with installers is that they love what they do. They love the look of the gear that they install, and they sometimes prefer to have the gear shown. We want to hide all of that stuff, so there is a kind of a push and pull there. We like to strategically place controls so that they work within the architecture but is still easy for the client to use. Also, it's always better when an installer is brought on early in the process.

Electronic Lifestyles®: If I am an ESC who has never worked directly with your trade, what advice do you have for me?

RO: While many of our clients are wealthy, some are not, but still want to incorporate some technology into their homes. Sometimes, the client can't afford a lot of it. We think it is important to really listen to what the goal of the project is, and not try to oversell. In other words, gauge the client's needs and really target them. Sometimes, once the client hires the integrator, they feel that because they were hired by the client, they don't need to compromise with the architects. While this is not true of many seasoned integration companies, it's important that the relationship between the client and the architect be respected and for the trades to work together to get the best end product.

Electronic Lifestyles®: As architects, what do you think the electronics industry can do better to make things smoother?

RO: It's about information. We need to be kept up with what is available in terms of new technologies, and that is difficult to do. The more we know, the easier it is to work together.

Electronic Lifestyles®: When you are faced with situations like those you encountered on the Manhattan apartment, where space is valuable, how do you compromise?

RO: It's always difficult, but if the integrator is onboard early, again, that helps. In the apartment, Osbee was given very little to work with—one closet in fact to store equipment—so it was limiting for them. But they were creative in the way they approached the wiring and the high ceilings. Sometimes, other trades, like plumbers for example, aren't as forthcoming in finding inventive solutions to challenging problems. We think the fun part is finding those creative solutions.

■ equipment Contact the CEDIA ESC for a complete equipment list.

Manhattan Apartment Equipment

Crestron PRO2, C2ENET-1, CNX-BIPAD8 (2), CNX-PVID8X4, C2N-IVDS24X24, CEN-TRACK-AMFMXD, C2N-SPWS300, C2N-HBLOCK (6), CAEN-4X1, ABAR-1 (2), TPS-2, CEN-IDOC (2), TPS-6L, CNX-B12, TPMC-8X, TPMC-8X-DS, ML-600 (6), CNRFGWA-418, (6), PAC2, C2ENET-1, CAEN-BLOCK (2), CAEN-7X2, CAEN-4X1, C2N-CBD (25), CLX-2DIM8 (5), CLT-2DIM8 (5), CLX-1DELV4 (6), CLT-1DELV4 (6), CLX-4HSW4 (2), CLT-4HSW4 (2), C2N-SSC-2, (7), CNPWS-75; **Monster** HTPS-7000, HTFS-IW HC, HTFS-IW HC; **Magnum Dynalab** ST-2; **AudioControl** Architect 1160; **Sonance** Sonamp 275 (2), Silhouette II (3), Z6S (2), Z6S (4), S625T (3), XSSTR (2), Mariner 82 (3); **Kaleidescape** KSERVER-1500, KDISK-750 (4), KPLAYER-5000 (2); **Niles** DBI; **Scientific Atlanta** Explorer 8300HD (2), Explorer 4250HD; **DirecTV** HR20, NPR6A (2); **Middle Atlantic** DWR-21-22, DWR-RR-21, PD-915R, U1, ICC ICCMSCMA42 (2), ICMPPO2460 (2), ERK-4420, CBS-ERK-20, ERK-RR44, PD-915R, RSH4A2R DIRECTV HR20, RSH4A3S (2), RSH4A2S; **Integra** DTR7.8 (3); **Fujitsu** P65FT00AUB; **Peerless** SF680P, SF640P; **Panamax** TL; **Sunfire** TSEQ10 True Subwoofer EQ; **Sharp** LC-32D43U; **Electrokinetics** CTL-002 Lift; **Hitachi** P42A202; **Nuvision** NVU26L, NVU32L (4), SF640P; **SunBriteTV** 4610HD, SB-TS46; **Panasonic** KX-TDA50, KX-TDA5193, KX-TDA5172, KX-A236, KX-A244, KX-T7636 (5), KX-T0155 (3), KX-TD7685 (4); **Linksys** RV042; **Dell** 24-Port Switch (2); **Cisco** Aironet 1131; **Channelvision** HS-16, CVT-15PIA; **ITULink** M8KSU; **Functional Fenestration** SP-200-24, RB24 (3)

Westchester County Equipment

AudioControl Architect 1160 (2), Architect 200 (2); **Cisco** Aironet 1131 (3), ABAR-1 (9), **Crestron** C2COM-3 (2), C2ENET-1 C2N-DB12W (5), C2N-HBLOCK (8), C2N-IVDS24X24 C2N-SPWS300 CAEN-4X1 CEN-IDOC (2), CEN-TRACK-AMFMXD CHV-RSS CHV-RTHS (12), CHV-THSTAT (3), CHV-TSTAT (11), CNANT (2), CNRFGWA-418 (5), CNX-BIPAD8 (3), CNXHUB CNX-PVID8X3 CNX-PVID8X4 ML-600 (14), PRO2 QM-RMC (2), TPS-12LW TPS-6LW (4); **Da-Lite** 92" Tensioned Advantage Deluxe Electrol; **Dell** 24-Port Switch; **DirecTV** HR20, DirecTV HR20-100S, RSH4A2SW; **Fujitsu** P50XTA51UB, P50XTA51US, P65FT00AUB, P42XTA51US, ICC ICCMSCMA42, ICMPPO4860; **Integra** DTR-7.8, Integra DTR7.8 U1; **JVC** DLA-RS1X; **Kaleidescape** KDISK-750 (4), KPLAYER-5000 (2), KSERVER-1500; **Lexicon** RV-5; **Linksys** RV042; **Magnum Dynalab** ST-2, **Middle Atlantic** CBS-ERK-20 (2), ERK-3520 (2), ERK-4QFT-FC (2), ERK-RR35 (2), PD-915R (2), PD-915R, PPM-8-18, RSH4A2MW; **Scientific Atlanta** Explorer 4250HD (3), Explorer 4250HD (3), Explorer 8300HD (2), RSH4A3SW, Explorer8300HD (2), RSH4A5X; **Monster** HTFS-IW HC (6), HTFS-IW, HC HTFS-IW, HC HTFS-IW, HC HTFS-IW, HC HTPS-1100, HTS-5100 MKII (2), HTS-5100, MKII Muxlab 500001 (15), 500050 (20); **Niles** HD8

in use, the shade will automatically retract to prevent damage. The entire thing is controlled by a Crestron handheld waterproof remote.

This innovative thinking, along with Raines' background in visual arts and design, also came into play when it was time to install the Fujitsu 65-inch TV in the Westchester estate's family room. "There was no way anyone was going to tolerate looking at a center channel speaker above the fireplace. It just wasn't going to happen," says Raines. Osbee's team therefore designed a custom frame around the TV above the fireplace to hide the center speaker. A custom snap-in cloth bezel is built around the frame that conceals the center channel. "This was our way of putting a TV above the fireplace without cutting into the woodwork and bookshelves that existed." Osbee also allowed for easy future upgrades. They simply need to remove the snap frames, replace the TV, and make a new inexpensive frame to fit the new display.

Because there are a whopping 14 TVs at this estate and a wide variety of people watching them, Osbee equipped each person with their own cable box that records their selected shows. "In addition to other global sources such as Kaleidescape, DirecTV, DVD, and AppleTV, users can pull up their cable box from any TV in the house thanks to a high-definition video switcher that is centralized in the basement," says Raines.

While it's interesting to see the different challenges and unique aspects of each residence, one thing is clear. A combination of creative thinking and technological expertise, along with a client who wanted nothing but the best, contributed to two highly successful, high-tech residences that any tech enthusiast—or designer—would be proud to call home.■

A Crestron touchscreen controls the entire house. Even the interface was custom designed by the homeowner, with Osbee's help.