

MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS FOR CUSTOM
ELECTRONICS DESIGN & INSTALLATION

residential systems

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CEDIA's Big Winners

A silver remote control device is positioned in the foreground, angled towards the viewer. The background features a stylized cityscape at night with illuminated buildings and a row of theater seats, suggesting a home entertainment system.

This Year's Top Products, People & Projects in Review

ARCHITECTRONICS

by karen
mitchell

*A Retreat
with A View
and a Secret
Earners
CEDIA
Honor For
Best Hidden
Installation*

EDG president Bob Gullo (right) and vice president Ed Condiracci at the CEDIA Award Ceremony, where they took home top honors for Best Media Room and Best Hidden Technology. With the help of interior designer Cynthia Harriman, of Eastern Design

Group, EDG was able to hide the JBL speakers and Stewart Model "A" Electrascreen and to retain their client's beautiful lake view. The rooms' orientation is focused on the three-bay window and small window above it, facing the lake.

Hidden Assets

CEDIA
WINNER

Bob Gullo has nothing to hide, but some of his custom designs and installations are a different story. Gullo is president of Electronics Design Group Inc. (EDG), in Piscataway, New Jersey, a 36-employee, non-retail, professional contractor designing and installing integrated custom systems for



homes and corporate boardrooms. In addition to the New Jersey/New York metro area, the company serves clients from southern Connecticut to eastern Pennsylvania.

EDG has garnered four CEDIA Electronics Lifestyles Awards since 1996, three in

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The room features a JBL Synthesis 3 system, loudspeakers plus processor, amps and a special digital equalization system which Gullo and staff calibrated (using nearly a full day) with a JBL proprietary program. The system is controlled by an AMX touch panel as is family room, media system and the whole-house music system which extends outside to patio and lake areas.



the Best Media Room category. This past September, the company hit the daily double, capturing Best Media Room and Best Hidden Technology awards.

The winning media room is a five-screen multimedia showpiece with HDTV sources on four of five monitors and AMX touch screen controls.

The Best Hidden Technology project is a high-performance media room that also serves as a spot for reading and relaxing without the visual temptations of high-tech. The room features a JBL Synthesis 3 system, loudspeakers plus processor, amps and a special digital equalization system which Gullo and staff calibrated (using nearly a full day) with a JBL proprietary program. The system is controlled by an AMX touch panel as is family room, media system and the whole-house music system which extends outside to patio and lake areas.

"I was speechless at the CEDIA presentation," Gullo, 36, said. "We entered three projects and won two out of three."

The Best Hidden Technology clients, a couple with young children, live in an older 1938, center hall ("Bellhall") colonial home, situated on a private lake in western New Jersey. The renovated home has three stories and a finished basement.

"I had known the clients previously, but we had lost touch," Gullo said. "They called us in 1999 when they were closing on the house and expressed a desire for a high-end media room (including home theater) as well as a

music system, telephone system and computer networking capabilities. They were on the fence about lighting control, which we eventually did."

With a project budget of approximately \$250,000, the main dilemma was media room location. "We considered using the basement but the feel was uncomfortable," Gullo said. "The family room has an open floor plan, adjacent to the kitchen. I felt it wasn't conducive for a media room because of interaction with the kitchen and potential difficulties with lighting and windows."

Gullo was immediately taken by the potential of the room over the garage, about 650 square feet, with a pristine view of the lake. "I saw that there was an attic above it for the projector, which is in a motorized lift that drops from the ceiling, and a small staircase leading to an attic closet, ideal for the equipment rack."

Because the room is isolated from the main areas of the house by a staircase extending from the family room, the clients had planned to transform it into a quiet retreat/reading room.

"We compromised, and it became both," Gullo said. "With the help of interior designer Cynthia Harriman, of Eastern Design Group, in Morristown, New Jersey, we were able to hide the speakers and screen, and to retain the beautiful lake view. The room's orientation is focused on the three-bay window and small window above it, facing the lake."

Gullo built the screen into a soffit above the window, and hid subwoofers and L/R channels on each side of the screen with the center channel below. Motorized black-out shades (one behind the screen, three covering windows) bring daytime darkness when desired. Furnishings, in soft colors, are on casters for easy configuration.

"Cynthia came up with a beautiful custom cabinet design in light wood," he said. "She used an acoustical fabric, 'faux painted,' as the front fascia of the cabinets. When you can coordinate a design with contractors and interior designers, it makes for a much better project. Cynthia was very helpful in achieving the goal for me and the clients, so the media room does not reek of technology."

That he would design such projects—or anything called a "media room"—would have come as a surprise to Gullo as a Sayreville, New Jersey, high school student working at local hi-fi shops.

"I did some rudimentary installations, and snaked wires through the occasional attic," he said. "My grandfather was an electronics buff, not an audiophile, just a gadget guy who had a pair of original Bose 901 speakers, circa 1968, and a Revox reel-to-reel deck."

While studying business at Kean University in the mid-1980s, Gullo worked for a commercial A/V company dabbling in home installations. "They had the trucks on the road and the techs, and I got a taste of the business," he said. "What I found most interesting was going out and calling on construction sites or meeting with architects and builders."

After graduation, Gullo interviewed at banks and insurance companies, but his heart wasn't in it, so he stayed on with the A/V company.

"My parents weren't too happy, but shortly thereafter I got a job with NEC

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as a sales trainer," he said. "Because of all my contacts, I was able to continue doing weekend installation jobs, and I recruited some college friends to help."

By early 1989, Gullo wanted to launch his own business but had no capital. Then the phone rang. "I got a call from a commercial electrical contractor with a half-million dollar contract from a New Jersey residential client. I almost fell off my chair."

Lacking the specific expertise, Gullo offered to split the job with a Connecticut contact. "I became project manager and he was the techie," he said. "It was a humongous house, and we did 30 zones of audio with keypad controls. This was one of the original ADA System 56 installations—one of the first multi-zone, multi-room audio systems, and it still works today. The owner remains a client."

Using capital from the installation to purchase a fax machine and a van, Gullo quit his NEC job and opened Audio Video Consultants. He had a multi-level office; his parents' basement and garage.

"I hired a high school student to come over and type," he said. "I had to hit the pavement and work the home remodeling shows, doing eight to 10 shows a year. I had a crude trade show booth with in-wall speakers."

Because manufacturers were not selling to non-storefronts, Gullo could only buy product from Sonance, Niles and Xantech. In 1992, Gullo incorporated the company, changing its name to Electronics Design Group Inc. to reflect his vision to offer integrated systems with lighting and telecommunications. He enlisted elementary school friend, Ed Condiracci, to help out part-time. Condiracci, now EDG vice-president and partner, is one of several EDG staffers Gullo has known for years. Scott Jordan and Joe McNeill were also recruited, and have since become senior project manager and senior salesman, respectively. Gullo's hometown friend Tony Skarzynski is operations manager.

Electronics Design Group Inc. has expanded "explosively" since 1995, Gullo said. "New Jersey has tremendous pockets of wealth, and we have become entrenched in such places Bergen, Somerset, Essex and Monmouth counties.

"Our business is steady and strong," Gullo said, "and we're confident about the future. I think my grandfather would get a thrill over what I do now, and the fact that I make a living at it."

Karen Mitchell is a writer living in Boulder, Colorado.