



Model Behavior >> by KIRSTEN NELSON

Hippo's makes an entertaining addition to the luxury residences in the new Elms of Saratoga development.

IMAGINE THE CONVENIENCE OF LIVING MERE BLOCKS AWAY FROM YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANTS, THEATERS AND ART GALLERIES. That is precisely the ideal held by homeowners who are investing in residential development in urban centers across of the country. Instead of commuting to and from work via crowded highways each day, these downtown dwellers are enjoying city life of the highest caliber.

This trend can be spotted on the west side of Saratoga Springs, where the new Elms of Saratoga development has produced a welcoming array of luxury custom residences featuring quality construction from BCI Construction of Albany, N.Y., built in a style reminiscent of the golden age of the city.

Located in the Beekman Street Arts District, the Elms of Saratoga will have plenty of personalized in-home entertainment options available to its residents. In a special arrangement initiated by Elms builder BCI Construction, Hippo's Home Entertainment of Albany will outfit each new home with audio/video equipment.

The partnership between the two entities began when BCI renovated its offices and employed Hippo's services to provide an

integrated audio/video system. Deeming that project a success, Jim Amsler, vice president of BCI Construction, recalls, "At that point we knew that Hippo's would be our choice to provide these services for our forthcoming Elms at Saratoga project and that Hippo's would be able to work with each individual homeowner as they coordinated their project design needs with our staff."

When the first of the 28 custom homes destined to populate the Elms of Saratoga neighborhood was built, Hippo's was there from the start. After pre-wiring the residence for audio and video entertainment, Hippo's was able to wrap up its audio and video installation tasks throughout the house in three short days. With the amount of equipment that makes the house a dazzling place to entertain or spend time with the family, that is a remarkably brief process.

"The aim was to make the technology a very simple and discreet component to the home," explains Erik Pravel, who took charge of integrating the entertainment system for Hippo's Audio/Video. "The objective was to present a sleek, easy-to-use system in the first model home."





Laying the foundation for the various audio/video customization possibilities that would be possible at the Elms, Hippo's presented a diverse array of flat-panel displays and a complete whole-house audio system.

Upon walking through the front door, the technology is at once apparent and blended into the lifestyle setting presented therein. The living room features a home theater setup based around a 46-inch Sony LCD video display recessed above the main fireplace. The screen's position is easy to adjust, as it is mounted on a full-motion swing-arm that makes it possible to catch up on the news from the adjacent kitchen or settle in on the sofa and watch a movie.

The living room area has something in common with the rest of the house—in-ceiling speakers were installed throughout to provide a subtle addition of sound to every room without cluttering up the space. "The speakers in the theater are aimable, so we positioned them to fire down at an angle for better sound quality," Pravel says.

The home theater system is rounded out by a subwoofer hidden in one of two custom cabinets on either side of the fireplace. The other cabinet holds a plethora of Sony home theater equipment, the whole-house audio master controller and an iPod dock.

A Sony touch-screen remote provides control of the whole system, and it also features information about video or audio content playing on the system.

All the other rooms featuring in-ceiling speakers have in-wall control keypads with blue-lit LCD screens that provide sound system information.

Moving on through the house, also on the main floor is the master suite, which features a 42-inch Sharp LCD display, recessed into a wall and mounted above DVR and DVD components tucked into spaces in the wall.

Upstairs, a lofted common area connects two bedrooms and provides another station for video entertainment. There, a 42-inch Hitachi plasma sits on a stand in a custom cabinet, mounted on a remote-controlled motorized swivel base.

"The whole system is very easy to use, and it sounds great," Pravel concludes. ■