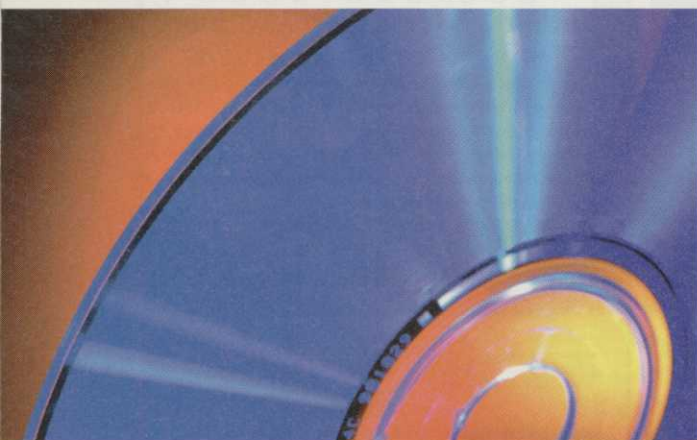


# digital video discs

**C**ritics claimed that most people would not spend their hard-earned money on expensive digital-video discs to transform their living rooms into home theaters. They were wrong.

While DVDs aren't likely to overtake the enormous VHS rental market any time soon, they are here to stay. And if you haven't had the overwhelming experience of the absolute clarity of sound and picture that you get with a DVD, here's a primer that will help.



A DVD looks like any other CD, except that the DVD can hold two hours of high-performance video and audio. The discs can hold up to eight tracks of digital audio, can support up to nine different camera angles (if the filmmaker chooses), allows wide-screen (or letter-boxed) movies on regular televisions, and lets you instantly jump to any part of the movie. Often a DVD will contain some fun features, such as a look behind the scenes of a movie or its original theatrical trailer.

Unlike a VCR, though, you can't record onto a DVD ... yet. But all in all, DVDs hold some serious power.

IT PAYS TO SHOP WHEN HUNTING FOR JUST THE RIGHT DVD SETUP  
TO TURN YOUR LIVING ROOM INTO A COMFORTABLE HOME THEATER

BY MARK LUCE

The price of DVD players continues to drop, and it's possible to find reliable units for as low as \$350 (sometimes even cheaper if you shop around or patiently wait for sales). If you want to buy specific titles, they normally cost between \$20 and \$30. However, many video stores now rent DVD movies, usually for \$3 to \$5 a movie. Like most electronics, sticking with name-proven brands like Sony and Panasonic is best for first-time buyers.

Basically, there are a couple of ways to go when choosing a DVD setup. You can buy just the player and hook it up the same way you hook up a VCR, or you can integrate a DVD player with a home-theater receiver and speakers.

Many of the entry-level DVD players, like the popular Panasonic A-120, cost about \$350. However, many of these lower-end players will lack a built-in Dolby Digital Decoder, an audio necessity if you plan to create a fully functioning home theater. For about \$200 more, the JVC XV-D701 or the Pioneer DV414 will provide the necessary decoder.

If you want to boggle your senses with a home-theater setup, it will cost more money. A solid receiver with a Dolby Digital Decoder, such as the Sony STR-DE825, will cost around \$500. Also crucial for cinema-quality sound are home-theater speakers. Sony's SA-VE150 set, including a powerful subwoofer (a loudspeaker de-

signed to reproduce sub-base frequencies), runs around \$400.

As always, shop around. Decide what system will best suit your needs, which has the most flexibility, and, of course, which has the best value. But whatever DVD route you decide upon, please heed this warning: once your friends (and your children's friends) learn that you have a DVD player, it will be difficult to get them out of your house.

### Strong Showings

Movies are better on DVD. Here are some titles that will give you a breathtaking home-theater experience.

**Terminator 2** — Dazzling sound and visual effects make this one of the best-renting DVD titles.

**Le Femme Nikita** — This noirish French thriller is a must-see with surround sound.

**Priscilla, Queen of the Desert** — Lavish colors, an excellent soundtrack and outrageous costumes make this Australian movie a campy DVD classic.

**The Three Tenors** — Carreras, Domingo and Pavarotti in concert in Terme di Caracalla. Enough said.

**The Usual Suspects** — This phenomenal DVD contains an audio track of the director and screenwriter talking about what is going on in the movie.

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*Mark Luce, a freelance writer based in Lawrence, Kan., has turned into a DVD-watching couch potato.*