



# Esquire

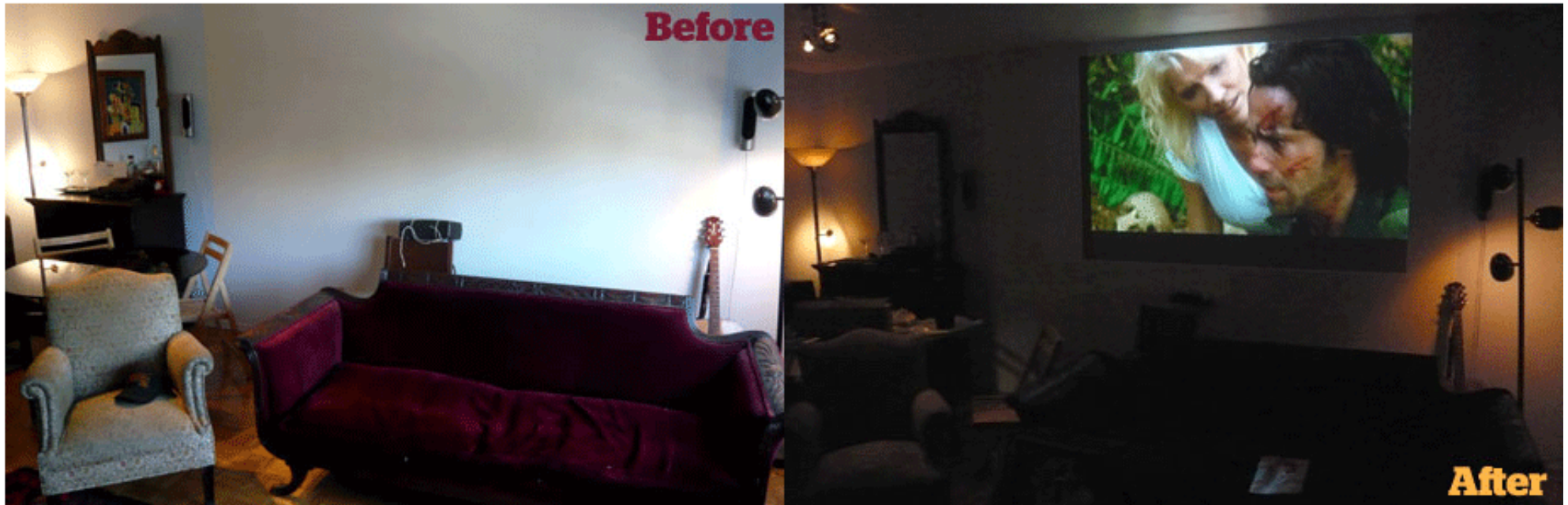
**Subscribe**

## The Studio Apartment Home Theater, Part Two

The best projectors for tight spaces, tips on getting your focus right, and a magical can of paint that changes everything.

By Jason Rowan (more from this author)

10/5/2007, 8:05 AM



A **moving image** projected on wall is powerful magic, something now ingrained in our collective consciousness to induce reverie -- and even the less costly and dynamic projectors still manage to achieve this affect. There are numerous advantages to having a front projector in your small pad. Taking a date to a film in your own apartment is impressive (and, shall we say, efficient), even if it's a tiny place. Programming your own film series for friends (or just yourself) is genius, and movie night really becomes an event. Not having to look at an ugly black television screen that fills the room is great -- when the projector is off you've just got a blank wall.

All great reasons to have a projector at home, but it's that transformative experience of gazing up at a big screen is really key. Re-visiting films you've only seen on a TV or once in the theater is a completely different experience. I watched some episodes of *Battlestar Galactica* projected and was completely overwhelmed by a sense of grandeur and an abiding sadness I hadn't experienced watching it on my 20-inch TV. Altman's *The Long Goodbye* became a completely different movie -- more potent and alive. Somehow the act of gazing up at a projected image, be it six-feet across or sixty, puts us in state of near-narcotic bliss -- we're hypnotized by the silver screen.

As the two-part nature of this column would suggest home theaters are a gear-intensive operation. So, let's start with the projectors, then move on to some pointers to get the most bang for your buck.



In the budget/all-in-one category, the \$899 Optoma DV11 (shown above) is a solid option for people who hate setting up equipment. It's absurdly easy to use -- plug it in, turn it on, pop in a DVD to the built-in player and boom: instant large movie. It's especially good for small places because it's a coffee table projector, shooting an image up higher, instead of straight across the room. As a result, you can get an 80-inch diagonal image from about seven-to-eight feet back. The DV11's major drawback is its tinny built-in speakers -- an issue easily remedied by running the audio through your home stereo -- making this the perfect projector to keep in your closet and haul out for the big game.

Got a smaller place? Toshiba makes an even better all-in one player/speaker/projector combo. The \$999 TDP-ET20U Multimedia DVD Projector is small and sleek and even comes with Dolby 5.1 output. But the unit's "extreme short projection" is what you're paying all that money for. The ET20U can deliver an image up to 100-feet wide from as close as four feet away -- a great choice for very snug pads. (Toshiba made an even better projector, the \$1295 TDP-T95U, which delivered a particularly bright picture with amazing contrast ratios, but sadly, it's no longer in production. Still, it's worth checking Amazon.com or eBay.com for a used model.)

And lastly, as always, if you're made of money, there are some brilliant options for you as well. The \$2,699 Optoma DLP HD Home Theater Projector has 1080p

resolution and extremely dark blacks, which makes the colors pop. If you've got \$6,499 and 15 feet of throw space to work with (and who doesn't, really?) the Marantz VP8600 is the Cadillac of mid-tier projectors, delivering a rich, saturated image in total silence, using extra fans on half speed to dampen the noise. Because it runs cooler, the \$529 bulb lasts twice as long as other models, making this the perfect investment for cinephiles out there. The image quality output from the Marantz is stunning -- you can easily forget you're not in a movie theater with an expansive silver Cinemascope screen. This is the rare product they're going to have to pry out of my cold, dead hands to get back. (Ed. Note: But you are giving it back, right? *Right?*)



And while we're on the topic of silver screens: a plain blank wall as a surface to project on is fine for amateurs, but you're a pro -- or you will be after this -- and you're going to need a product called ScreenGoo. The Goo is a two-coat process, with a base of "video white" paint and a top-coat of a mixture of pigments, reflective elements and texture.

Before painting, try out your projector making sure to test several films in multiple projection ratios and formats on your wall to get a clear idea of how much space you'll need to paint. If your wall's already painted a color, paint the area you'll use as a screen from the floor to the ceiling (it'll look like a design element when you're not projecting) and when the lights are down and the Goo's illuminated -- *Shazam!* A silver screen in your tiny pad. There are several ScreenGoo kits for different needs, but the best all-around choice is the Goo Kit that comes complete with rollers, black border paint, tape and all that good Goo.

Many projectors have brighter and regular light settings to compensate for ambient light that may creep into your space and fog the image. Controlling lighting conditions is essential to get a high-quality image. While a totally sealed-up converted garage without windows is ideal, you can replicate that by getting blackout blinds -- it's worth the hassle. The lower light setting will actually give you richer, more authentic, less blown-out color.

Once your wall is painted and the lighting controlled, it's time to adjust your focus. Try focusing on words -- the title sequence ideally (try pausing and focusing), but a DVD menu works well, too. Getting something halfway between the center and the edges perfectly in focus will give you the best spread.

Now the only hard decision you'll have to make is which DVD to watch first.

*Got a question for the Tech Therapist? Please e-mail him at [thetechtherapist@gmail.com](mailto:thetechtherapist@gmail.com).*