

This is how much it really costs to build a luxury home cinema

From wall-to-wall beds to Darth Vader props, these entertainment spaces have Hollywood quality.

By Alexandra Goss



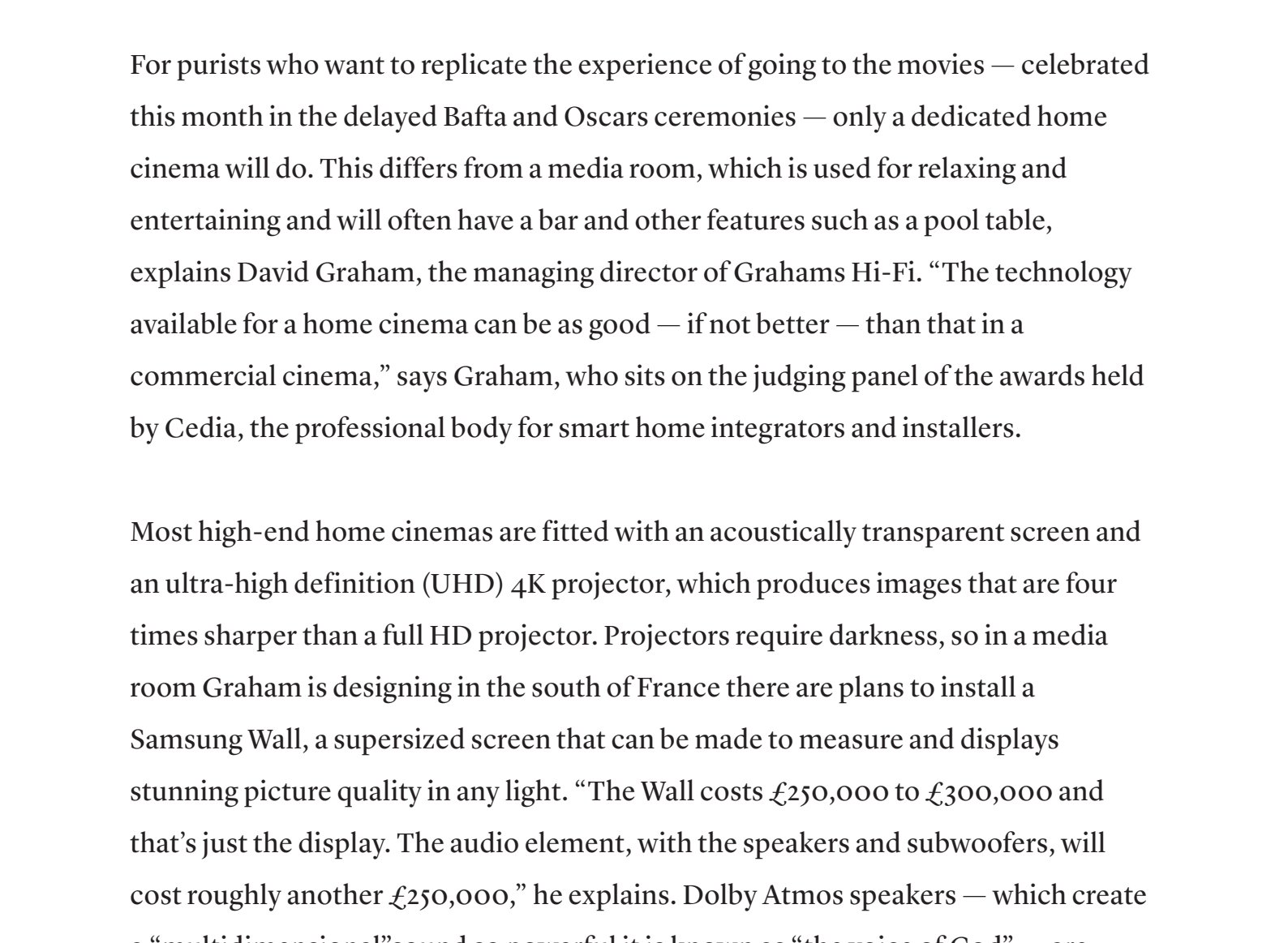
A cinema room by SHH
MANDY TOH

Alexandra Goss | Sunday April 25th 2021, The Sunday Times

The television remote has been our constant companion through Covid. Films and TV shows have become entertainment, our social lives and the only way to travel the world, from Liverpool to Laos, Glasgow to the Galapagos. With cinemas shuttered and nothing to do but watch Netflix (the streaming service gained a record 37 million new paying members last year), creating the perfect viewing experience has become a priority. And for the super wealthy, it has become a seven-figure priority.

According to Will Watson, the head of London at The Buying Solution, more than 80 per cent of the people looking for a family home in the capital through the buying agency at the moment have specified that they want a cinema room or a cinema/entertainment space. “We all need a bit of fun and escapism at home right now,” he says, adding: “Home cinemas have traditionally been considered an added luxury, but are fast gaining the same must-have status as home offices.”

Leading installers of audiovisual equipment say that demand for their services has rocketed since the first lockdown began in March 2020. At New Land Solutions inquiries for home cinemas have increased by at least 50 per cent, while the number of residential cinema projects the Pyramid Group is working on has risen by 200 per cent.



A Georgian-style cinema room

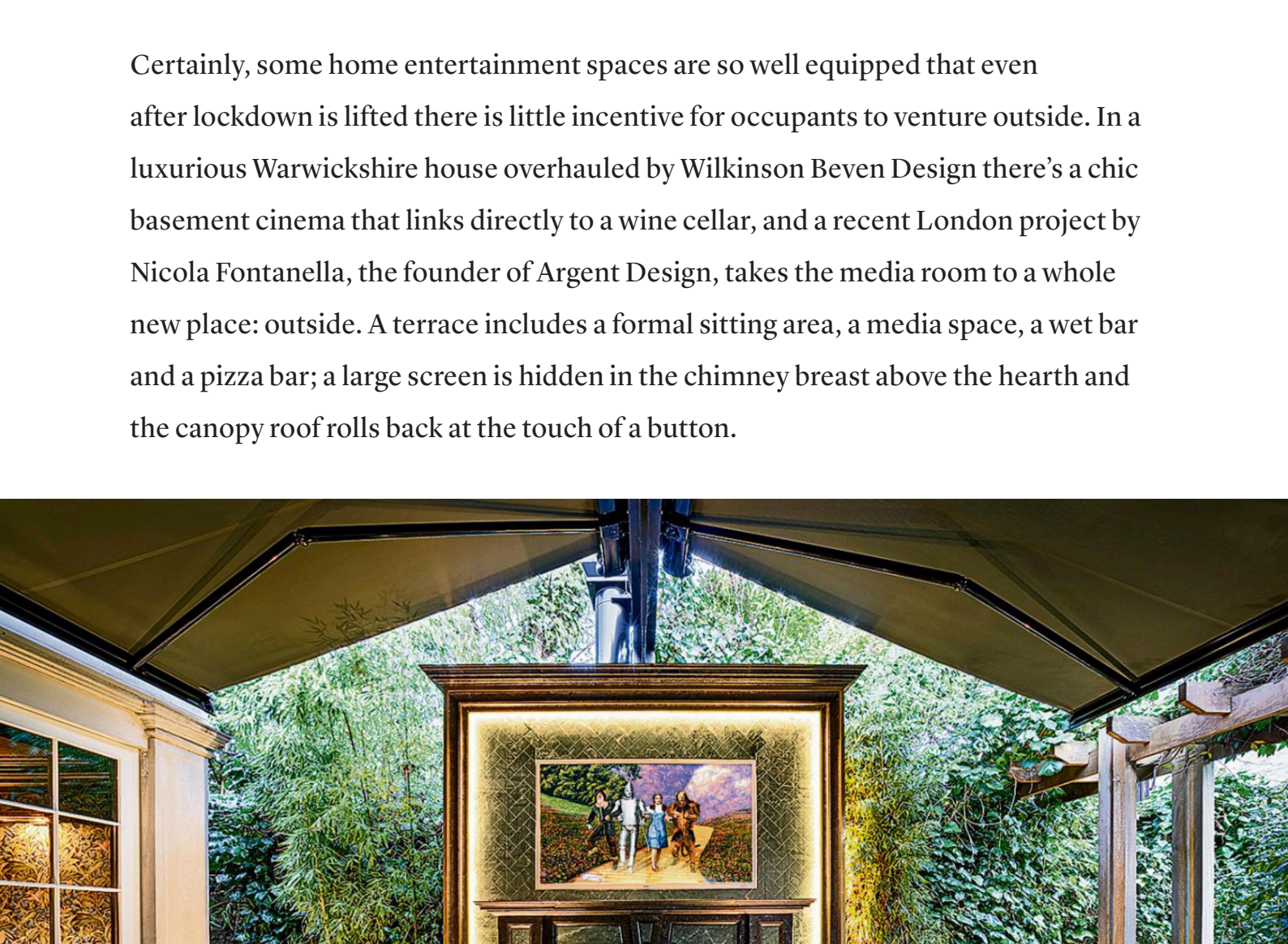
For purists who want to replicate the experience of going to the movies — celebrated this month in the delayed Bafta and Oscars ceremonies — only a dedicated home cinema will do. This differs from a media room, which is used for relaxing and entertaining and will often have a bar and other features such as a pool table, explains David Graham, the managing director of Grahams Hi-Fi. “The technology available for a home cinema can be as good — if not better — than that in a commercial cinema,” says Graham, who sits on the judging panel of the awards held by Cedia, the professional body for smart home integrators and installers.

Most high-end home cinemas are fitted with an acoustically transparent screen and an ultra-high definition (UHD) 4K projector, which produces images that are four times sharper than a full HD projector. Projectors require darkness, so in a media room Graham is designing in the south of France there are plans to install a Samsung Wall, a supersized screen that can be made to measure and displays stunning picture quality in any light. “The Wall costs £250,000 to £300,000 and that’s just the display. The audio element, with the speakers and subwoofers, will cost roughly another £250,000,” he explains. Dolby Atmos speakers — which create a “multidimensional” sound so powerful it is known as “the voice of God” — are routinely used in the best projects; these cost about £800 each and a high-end home cinema could require between 16 and 32 of them.

Graham’s client is not the only one spending £500,000 — the cost of an average London house — on a turbocharged television. Rupert Martineau, the project head of residential interiors at the architecture and design company SHH, says his customers’ media budgets range from £15,000 for a simple set-up to £500,000 for the highest technical specification. “Add to this the fit-out, furniture, specialist lighting control, personalised accessories such as motorised minibar fridges and you could be talking up to £2.5 million.” The most expensive cinema project that SHH has worked on cost about £3.5 million. “This didn’t include the art collection — including some very rare Hollywood and Bollywood posters — hung in the acoustically lined WC linked to the cinema room,” Martineau adds.

While plenty of cinema rooms resemble the Batcave, the best new examples prioritise aesthetics as much as the audiovisual equipment. In one created for a high-profile music manager in his London home, the design studio Frank & Faber embraced the dark side by painting the walls in Farrow & Ball Off-Black and upholstering the bespoke seating in charcoal velvet. An opulent cinema in the basement of a Regency townhouse in Brighton, completed last year by the interior architects Pfeiffer Design, has the feel of an exclusive private members’ club. There are art deco flourishes, velvet curtains and a media wall with panelled cabinetry inlaid with natural cork wallpaper — fabrics such as this hide equipment and provide acoustic installation, while upholstery is also crucial for comfort.

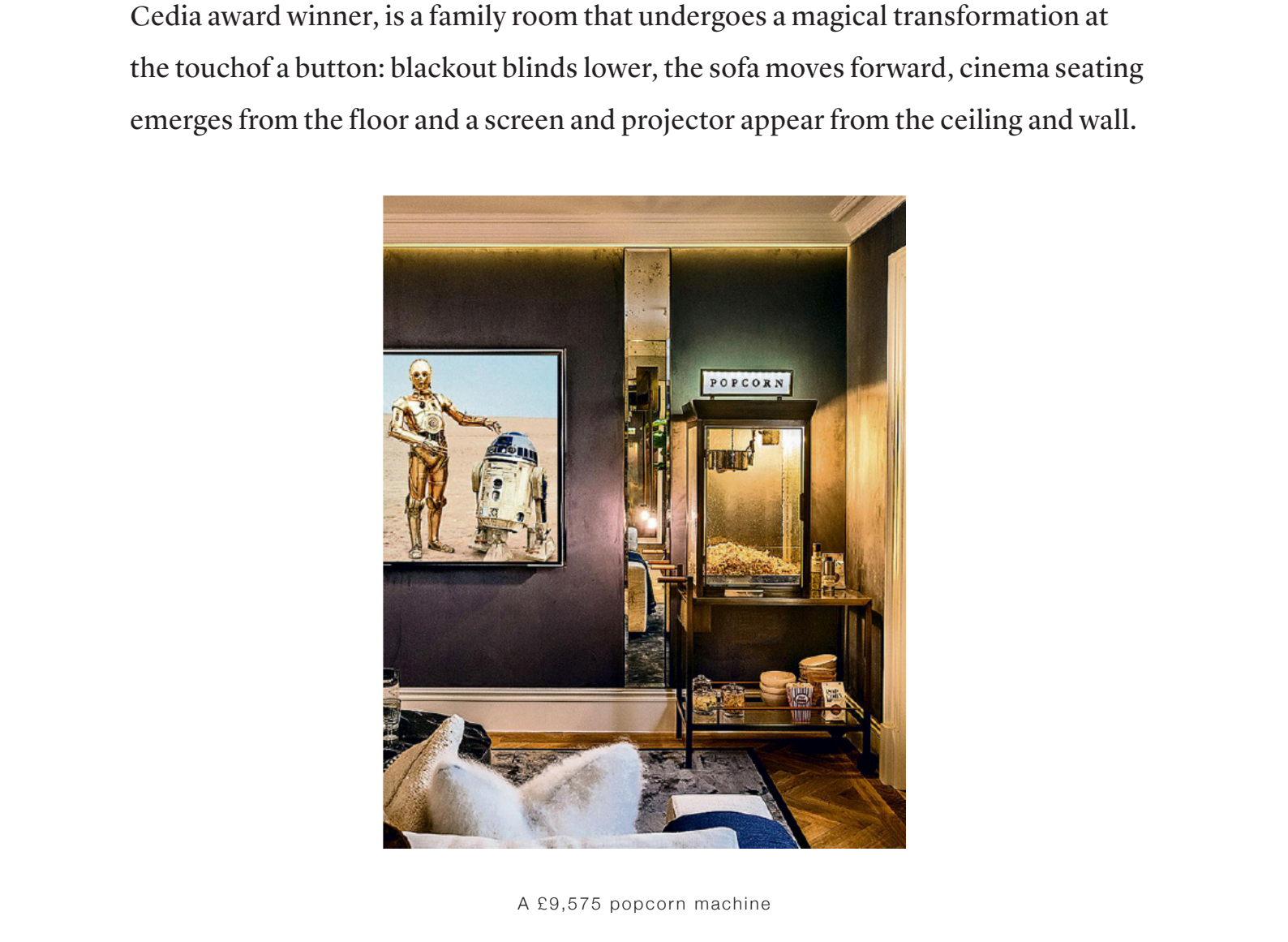
Sophie Rogerson, the managing director of the advisory firm RFR Property, is seeing more cinema rooms with daybeds. “In one Notting Hill house there was just one wall-to-wall, ultra-oversized daybed of amorphous soft cashmere,” she says.



The Primrose Hill entertainment area by Woulfe

Some media rooms eschew the stereotypes. The entertainment area created by Designed by Woulfe in a house in Primrose Hill, north London, has walls lined in bubblegum-pink suede fabric, drapes in a deep plum, and a sunshine yellow Natuzzi swivel chair. Laura Hammett, the founder of the interiors firm of the same name, recently designed a screening room for an A-list celebrity with a 150in cinema screen above a 4m-wide contemporary fireplace, two tiers of bespoke Christian Liaigre sofas and a bronze mirrored bar. “In some cases, the experience for the rich and famous at home is even better than going to the local movie house,” Hammett says.

Certainly, some home entertainment spaces are so well equipped that even after lockdown is lifted there is little incentive for occupants to venture outside. In a luxurious Warwickshire house overhauled by Wilkinson Beven Design there’s a chic basement cinema that links directly to a wine cellar, and a recent London project by Nicola Fontanella, the founder of Argent Design, takes the media room to a whole new place: outside. A terrace includes a formal sitting area, a media space, a wet bar and a pizza bar; a large screen is hidden in the chimney breast above the hearth and the canopy roof rolls back at the touch of a button.



Argent’s outside cinema project

Just as the best film plots are all about the dramatic reveal, so it is in the funkiest home cinemas. Last year the furniture designer Lewis Alderson & Co created a cinema in Farnham, Surrey, with the appearance of a Georgian library, at a total cost of £54,000. Handpainted false book spines and laser-cut fretwork conceal the cinema equipment, while the 200in screen and projector are tucked away in the ceiling, ready to drop down when required. Nic Black, managing director of the Pyramid Group, a Cedia Member of Excellence, has just created a cinema hidden behind a bookcase. “The client pulls a book on one of the shelves, the bookcase splits in half and reveals the room,” Black says. “The book? *The Hidden Cinema* by James C Robertson.”

The global winner of the best home cinema accolade in last year’s Cedia awards, the KA Theater in southern California, has a motorised door that slides back to reveal a bank vault, while the £1 million Hidden Cinema by New Land Solutions, a past Cedia award winner, is a family room that undergoes a magical transformation at the touch of a button: blackout blinds lower, the sofa moves forward, cinema seating emerges from the floor and a screen and projector appear from the ceiling and wall.



A £9,575 popcorn machine

If your budget is big enough, the attention to detail can be astounding. In the cinema of a house recently completed by Studio Suss in Hampstead, north London, the four tiers of bespoke seating were engineered to accommodate the owner’s bad back, while a newly completed £7.8 million, three-bedroom townhouse at 13-19 Leinster Square — the Notting Hill development by Banda, the property firm founded by Princess Beatrice’s husband, Edoardo Mapelli Mozzi — features a show-stopping bespoke popcorn machine with brass metalwork, seeded inset glass and a fluted light-up sign. It costs £9,575.

Home cinemas are the perfect places to let imagination run riot. The smart technology company Cornflake has created an entire room in Ferrari red for a car collector, while the designer Naomi Astley Clarke says movie props add drama and fun. “Think Darth Vader costumes and Nasa space suits. A client recently asked us to install a lifesize giraffe model in their cinema — made from fibreglass with a flocked coating, you’re looking at £7,000 to £10,000 for a really good one.” Argent Design’s Nicola Fontanella has even been asked to boldly go where few cinema designers have gone before. “We are currently exploring a Star Trek-themed cinema for a client. No teleport available yet, though.”