

# Best

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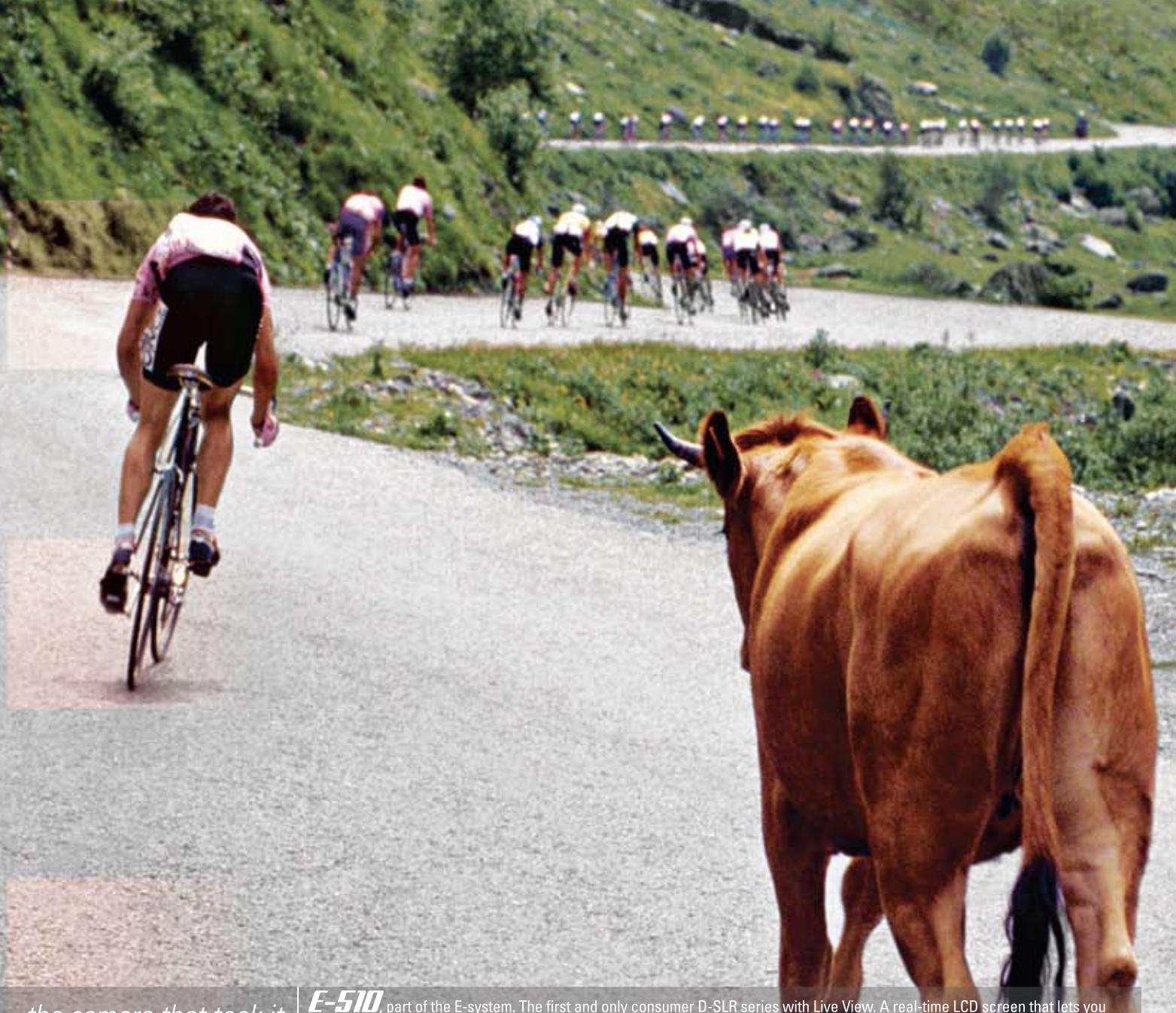


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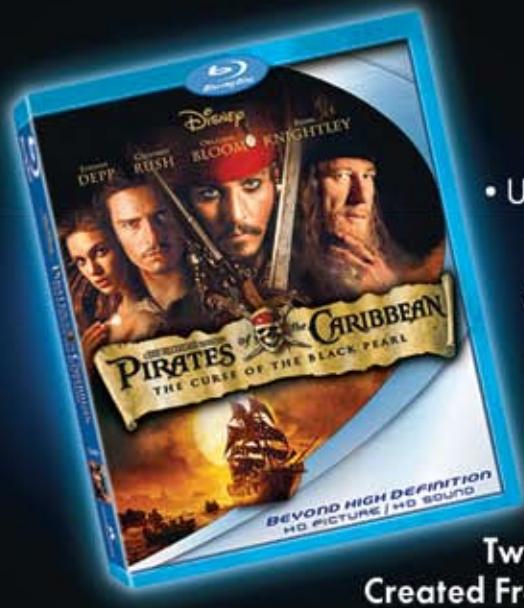


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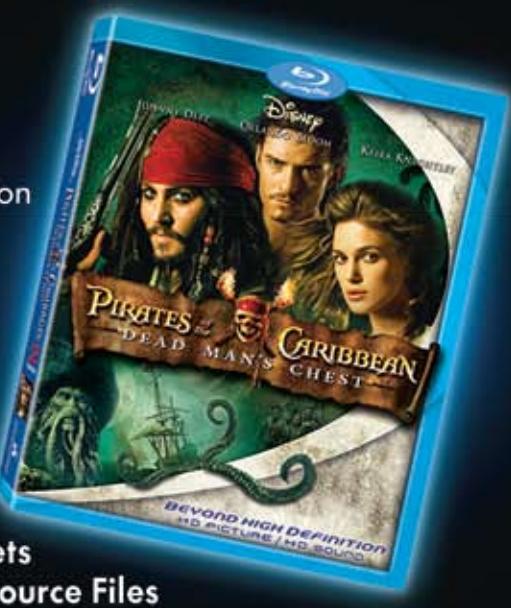
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### PRIMETIME ON YOUR TIME

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## EDITORS' NOTE

### Turning Best into Bests

**M**any consider buying new technology similar to throwing dice or playing high-stakes poker at a casino—you can win big, or go bust dropping a lot of money on a technological gamble. That said, wouldn't you like the opportunity to see your opponents' hole cards? If you could, it would dramatically increase your odds of walking away from the hi-tech table a winner with the coveted jackpot. That's where Best magazine comes in.

Best writers and editors were charged this issue with teaching you how to place winning bets on electronics and lifestyle products. Concerned about the high-stakes world of next-generation HDTV? See this issue's "The King of Hi-Def," where we tell you how to get a hi-def image worth bragging about—and give you the best bets for the top televisions available today. And we don't stop there.

What camera should you bring along for your summer vacation? We choose 10 of the top digital cameras to ensure that you're getting the right camera for your needs at the right price. Then we'll take the mystery out of Windows Vista—and even detail those new laptops and desktops that are sure things. And, since it's almost summer, read our article on multimedia cell phones, "Wireless Wonders," to get tunes and movies on the go. You'll also find the skills to wager on the best online video-gaming experiences, home audio systems that fit your lifestyle, and the top iPod accessories. In short, by reading Best, you're destined to become an electronics ace.

We also know there's a big world outside of high technology. That's why we suggest you take our advice and consider a trip to the Entertainment Capital of the Word—Las Vegas! We'll tell you where to stay and play (Caesars), where to dine (Restaurant Guy Savoy), what to see (*Love*), and other sure things to make your desert holiday unforgettable. Not only that, we give suggestions for arriving in style and on time—in Las Vegas or anywhere else. We profile the ultimate hard-top convertibles—the ones that redefine the category and our experts provide an exclusive suite of wristwatches that transform keeping time into luxury.

So for the greatest that life and technology have to offer, read on. With Best magazine, there's simply no limit.

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*David J. Elrich Krissy Rushing*

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# BEST BITS & BYTES

THE LATEST NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE DIGITAL FRONTIER



## NEW HI-DEF DVD PLAYERS, LOWER PRICES

To squeeze the most entertainment value out of a new 1080p HDTV, you need a next-generation hi-def DVD player (HD DVD or Blu-ray Disc). The price of entry has dropped since these formats' introductions, when stickers soared to over \$1,000. Toshiba's new HD-A20 HD DVD player, for example, is available for \$499. The HD-A20 joins Toshiba's current HD DVD lineup, which includes the entry-level 1080i HD-A2 (\$399) and the top-of-the-line 1080p HD-XA2 (\$799).

Toshiba isn't the only company lowering prices. In July, Sony plans to introduce a new \$599 1080p Blu-ray player, the BDP-S300, to join the BDP-S1 (\$999). The BDP-S300 is compatible with most standard DVDs and can upscale

standard-def material to 1080p through its HDMI output, thus improving the picture quality of your existing DVD library. It also plays AVC-HD discs encoded with xvYCC technology, which is a fancy way of saying it can easily handle videos made with Sony's latest HD camcorders.

Don't worry about availability of new hi-def videos to exercise your new 1080p television and hi-def DVD player. Hollywood continues to release movies in both HD formats at breakneck speed. If you don't feel like choosing between them—the quality of both is exceptional—there are options such as the LG Super Multi Player (BH100, \$1,299), which plays both Blu-ray and HD DVD discs. Samsung has also announced that they will introduce a dual-format player later this year.

## CUSTOMERS SATISFIED WITH GPS

Overall satisfaction among owners of Global Positioning System (GPS) devices, which are used primarily in vehicles for navigation assistance, is high and consumer interest in the technology is exploding, according to research from the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA). The study revealed an 80 percent owner-satisfaction rate strongly influenced by the devices' ease of use and display quality.

Nearly a quarter of online consumers are planning to purchase a GPS device within the next year, when they will spend an average of \$410. The study shows that 33 percent of future GPS buyers are interested in owning a cell phone that has GPS/navigation capabilities, making on-the-go navigation even easier.



## QUICK FACTS

- Total consumer electronics sales in the US will hit \$155 billion in 2007
- Apple sold 21.7 million iPods in the first quarter of 2007
- 158 billion text messages were sent in 2006
- 1.7 million digital photo frames were purchased in the US last year
- 106 million digital cameras were sold worldwide in 2006
- 62.7 million computers were bought worldwide in the first quarter of this year

## MORE HDTV CONTENT TO LOOK FORWARD TO

The FCC has mandated that beginning this year every new television sold must have a digital (ATSC) tuner. Along with the plethora of sets to choose from, viewers have more HD programming to watch—especially sports. Satellite TV provider DirecTV, which is calling 2007 the “Year of HD,” plans to launch 100 additional national hi-def channels. After the launch of the DirecTV 10 and DirecTV 11 satellites this year, the company states it will have the ability to deliver more than 1,500 local HD and digital channels and 150 national HD channels, in addition to advanced programming services. With this substantial HD offering, DirecTV claims it will offer three times more HD programming than any other satellite or cable multichannel distributor. The majority of these channels are scheduled to be launched between July and September.

Among the more than 70 major networks that are planning HD versions are A&E, Bravo, NFL Network, MTV, SciFi Channel, The History Channel, USA Network, and many others. DirecTV will also offer hundreds of games and other HD programming available from Regional Sports Networks (RSNs) around the country, including YES Network, Comcast Sports Net, New England Sports Network, and Fox Sports. DirecTV will also offer an expanded lineup of hi-def programming available from all of the premium movie channels.

Not to be outdone, Dish Network recently launched seven Regional Sports Networks in high definition, all from Fox Sports. Dish states that it will continue to explore additional HD RSNs throughout the year to enhance local HD programming lineups. Dish will begin offering Sun Sports and SportSouth this spring, and Altitude this fall.

Dish Network also offers HD sports programming, such as NFL Network HD, ESPN HD, ESPN2 HD, Rush HD, WorldSport HD, as well as local HD networks in 29 markets. These RSNs will feature game-only content in HD.

*CBS's hi-def coverage of March Madness*



## I WANT MY HDTV!

You may have purchased that new HDTV, but do you know if you are getting what you paid for? Nearly half of the 24 million Americans who own HDTVs aren't, a recent study by Leichtman Research Group showed. More surprisingly, one-fourth of those believed that they were watching in hi-def, but were not. That's because while they have taken the first step in purchasing an HDTV, they haven't obtained the hardware they need to receive the hi-def signals, such as an HDTV receiver from their provider. Other consumers may have the equipment, but don't know that some shows are not broadcast in HD.

As hi-def displays come down drastically in price, consumers need to take the necessary steps to get the picture they are paying for. See our story “The King of Hi-Def” for tips on getting a great hi-def picture.





## THE ANALOG TV CUTOFF

Think of it as the Big Bang—or the Big Blackout. On February 17, 2009—less than two years from now—analog broadcasting will end in the US. Consumers who subscribe to a “pay” television service such as cable or satellite aren’t likely to be affected by the switch. If you currently receive analog television over the air or via an antenna, however, you’ll need to take action to continue watching your favorite stations. On this date, all stations will switch to new digital frequencies mandated by Congress. Surprised?

Over the past few years, the FCC ordered TV manufacturers to include built-in digital (ATSC) tuners so viewers would be ready for the big day. As of 2007, every new television has a digital tuner, so new sets are good to go. For those people who use an antenna for that spare TV in the third bedroom, manufacturers are working on an affordable, simple fix called the digital set-top box. You simply hook it up and the older TV will display new digital programs. Congress has authorized that every home can request two \$40 coupons to help pay for these boxes, which will be readily available at local retailers beginning in 2008. It’s estimated that they’ll cost \$50–\$70. For more details visit [www.dtvtransition.org](http://www.dtvtransition.org).

## AHOY, MATEYS!

We have to confess enjoying that first ride through *Pirates of the Caribbean* during a visit to Disney World at a tender age. Who would have thought the ride would turn into one of the most popular movie franchises ever? At last count, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest* was one of the highest box-office-grossing movies of all time. This summer Capt. Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp) and his not-so-merry band are sailing into new waters with *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End*.

One of the highlights is the expected introduction of Captain Jack’s dad, Teague Sparrow, played by Rolling Stones legend Keith Richards.

It’s no secret Depp modeled his original portrayal of Sparrow on the famed guitarist. If fighting the lines at the theater is not your style, there’s always the new Blu-ray version of *Dead Man’s Chest* (Buena Vista). The two-disc was set created from the original digital source files, meaning the picture will most likely be outstanding on the next-generation discs. No self-respecting DVD set isn’t filled with extras. Here you’ll get *Liar’s Dice*, a high-definition game that lets you interact with real pirates from the movie, “Captain Jack: From Head to Toe—Secrets and Legends” a featurette in which Depp and others reveal the secrets behind the famed pirate, and “Bloopers of the Caribbean.”



## SECURE HOME NETWORKS

The WiFi Alliance unveiled the results of a nationwide survey measuring consumer awareness of WiFi security. Overall findings indicate that consumers see WiFi network protection as an important home-security issue, and are activating their networks’ security accordingly. Among the key points of the survey:

- **Keep it under lock and key.** Keeping families and homes safe is a high priority for many Americans, and WiFi networks are no exception. Respondents ranked security for their WiFi network as being one of the “top three” essential elements of home security, right behind locking windows and doors and installing a home alarm system. More than 40 percent of respondents felt that a protected WiFi network is an important part of creating a safe home.
- **Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s WiFi.** Eighty-three percent of Americans agree that using someone else’s WiFi without their knowledge is stealing. Respondents did not approve of neighbors borrowing their signal and want to protect themselves from the 17 percent of Americans who see nothing wrong with using someone else’s network.
- **Security is the best policy.** Americans are keeping themselves safe by activating their network security. Seven out of 10 respondents have enabled security on their wireless networks, allowing them to enjoy the freedom of WiFi with security protections in place.



**"To someone who lives and breathes film,  
the Toshiba HD DVD player is the ultimate movie machine."**

Michael Imperioli — actor/writer/director



Film. It's what makes me tick. From B-movies to giant musicals and everything in between – why, I'll even watch an occasional gangster movie.

That's why if you love movies, I must tell you about something I believe is one of the greatest things to happen to film in a long while: Toshiba's HD DVD player. To me, it offers a superior video and sound experience with more vivid images and colors. It allows me to experience the full potential of my High Definition TV.

As far as I'm concerned, it's the ultimate movie experience!

With the Toshiba HD DVD player, I can watch my new HD DVD movies in hi-def. It even makes the DVDs I already own look better.

Toshiba's HD DVD player, DVD now in High Definition. It's what everyone's been waiting for.

*Michael Imperioli*



**HDDVD**  
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THE ULTIMATE MOVIE MACHINE—FROM **TOSHIBA**

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HD DVD with high-definition content required for HD output. Viewing high-definition content and up-converting DVD content may require an HDCP capable DVI or HDMI input on your display device. Some current DVDs and CDs may not be compatible. Because HD DVD is a new format that makes use of new technologies, certain disc, digital connection and other compatibility and/or performance issues are possible. This may, in rare cases, include disc freezing while accessing certain disc features or functions, or certain parts of the disc not playing back or operating as fully intended. If you experience such issues, please refer to the FAQ sections of [www.toshibahddvd.com](http://www.toshibahddvd.com) or [www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com) for information on possible work-around solutions or the availability of firmware updates that may resolve your problem, or contact Toshiba Customer Solutions. Dolby Digital Plus, Dolby TrueHD and DTS support for up to 5.1 channels (DTS HD support for DTS core only). Some features subject to delayed availability. ©2007 Toshiba America Consumer Products, LLC. All rights reserved.

# Best

## WHAT'S NEW

A sneak peek at some of the most sophisticated gear around.



**BEYOND THE IPOD >** Although the iPod hogs all the headlines for digital audio players, there's plenty of life beyond Apple's iconic offering. One of the more interesting and affordable is the Insignia NS-DVB4G 4GB MP3 player. This one stands out for its Bluetooth stereo capability—you can cut the headphone cord by using a pair of optional Bluetooth-enabled stereo headphones. Although only 0.6 inch thick and weighing only 2.4 ounces, the attractive player holds up to 1,000 songs, 4,000 photos, 50 audio books, or 14 movies. It has a good-sized (2.2 inches) screen, an FM tuner, and a microSD card slot so you can enjoy even more content. The player is compatible with Best Buy's Digital Music Store and other PlaysForSure sites. \$159



**A/V FURNITURE UPDATE >** Although hanging a flat-panel TV on a wall is the dream, many people find it more convenient to simply place it on an attractive piece of A/V furniture that can hold the rest of their components. An attractive option is the Platinum Furniture line from Sanus Systems, which features sophisticated black finishes and can handle virtually every size of television. The Platinum line is made of high-quality materials that provide the strength and durability needed to hold even the largest televisions, including extra-thick, black, tempered glass that's durable enough to support heavy A/V gear. The Platinum line also offers large, easy-to-access wire-management channels that keep cables organized and hidden. \$299-\$429

**HIGH-DEFINITION MEMORIES >** Sony's new HDR-UX7 AVCHD DVD high-definition camcorder features a 3MP ClearVid CMOS sensor for sparkling 1080i HD video as well as 6MP digital still photos—the best of any home video maker available. It has Super SteadyShot optical image stabilization to take the shakes out of handheld videos and stills. Not sure if you want to take a video or a photo? The Dual record mode lets you shoot video while simultaneously capturing a 4.6MP still.

The video of this and other Sony HD Handycams is even better than before. Sony's new x.v.Color technology complements the company's newest Bravia TVs. Based on the new international xvYCC color standard, x.v.Color supports a much wider range of colors than the conventional sRGB standard, making your memories practically jump off the screen. Using the bundled software, you can play back your recorded HD videos on select Blu-ray devices, including Sony Blu-ray player, the Playstation 3 video entertainment console, and standard DVD drive of compatible PCs. There's also an HDMI terminal for simple, one-cord connection to compatible HDTVs. \$1,300





**PIZZA WITH THE BIG GAME >** You may have the biggest TV screen this side of a sports bar, but what good is it if you can't enjoy a slice of pizza or some *hors d'oeuvres* while watching the game? If you like entertaining the crowd, consider G.E.'s new Profile Double Oven Free-Standing Range. With the largest total capacity of any free-standing oven in the industry, it can simultaneously cook two different dishes at two different temperatures. The 2.1-cubic-foot upper oven is ideal for baking pizzas, fresh or frozen, thanks to G.E.'s exclusive pizza mode. Fitting in the same space as a traditional range, the Profile eliminates the need for expensive remodeling to add a second oven. Designed with sleek new aesthetics, the Profile features a full stainless-steel door, glass handle and trim, plus heavy-duty control knobs to complement any décor. Available in a choice of stainless steel, white, bisque, or black. \$1,499-\$1,999, depending on finish



**THE TREKKER'S FRIEND >** Taking a long hike?

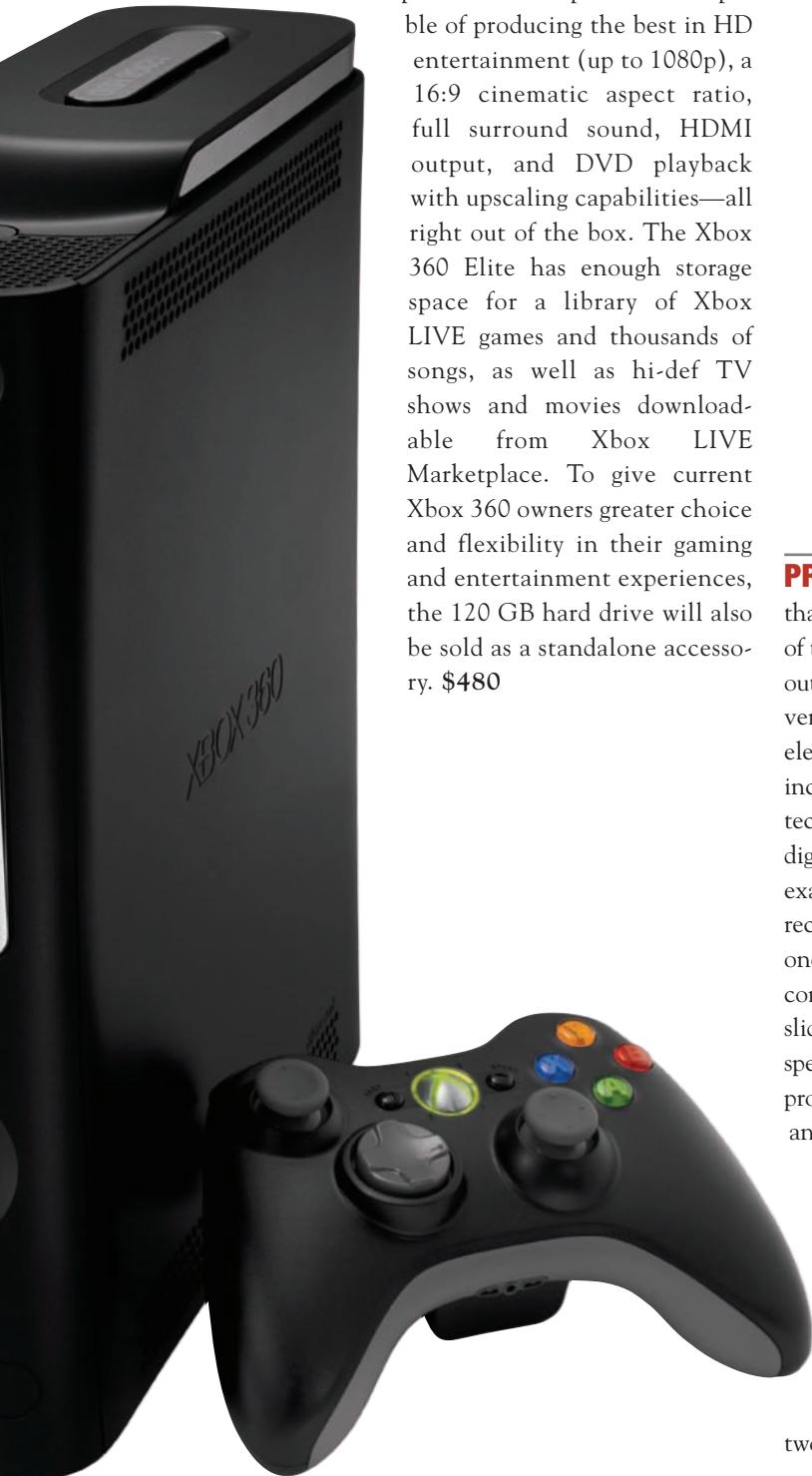
Bushnell's new ONIX 400 Weather Tracker is the perfect companion. The ONIX 400 is not only a portable XM Satellite Radio, it's a GPS navigation system, and it's not just for fire trails. The unit offers personalized, real-time XM weather information, no matter where you are in the US. You don't have to be a psychic to sense a shift in the weather, either. The ONIX 400 will let you know when there is a severe weather condition on your route, as well as at your final destination. The weather is continuously updated and displayed on the GPS map. All these features are available, while simultaneously listening to commercial-free radio, news, sports, or whatever XM programming suites your fancy. We can see why this handy device won a 2007 Consumer Electronics Show Innovations Award for engineering and design. \$499



**POWERFUL AND THIN >** Casio's new 7.2-megapixel Exilim Hi-Zoom EX-V7 is the world's slimmest digicam with a 7x optical zoom lens. The camera is less than an inch thick and doesn't get any fatter—that powerful zoom lens doesn't extend from the body. The EX-V7 reduces photo blur by using Casio's mechanical CCD shift technology. It also uses Casio's Anti Shake DSP, which reduces blur due to shaky hands or a moving subject by using higher ISO sensitivity and faster shutter speeds. The camera not only takes 7.2MP stills; using next-generation H.264 video encoding, it captures high-quality movies at high compression ratios that save storage space. The EX-V7 records about 1.5 times longer than conventional MPEG-4 videos but with the same picture quality. \$399

**GAMER ALERT >** Microsoft's new Xbox 360 Elite features a 120GB hard drive, a high-definition multimedia interface (HDMI) port, an HDMI cable, a premium black finish, a wireless controller, and an Xbox LIVE headset.

The console is equipped with three powerful core processors capable of producing the best in HD entertainment (up to 1080p), a 16:9 cinematic aspect ratio, full surround sound, HDMI output, and DVD playback with upscaling capabilities—all right out of the box. The Xbox 360 Elite has enough storage space for a library of Xbox LIVE games and thousands of songs, as well as hi-def TV shows and movies downloadable from Xbox LIVE Marketplace. To give current Xbox 360 owners greater choice and flexibility in their gaming and entertainment experiences, the 120 GB hard drive will also be sold as a standalone accessory. **\$480**



**PRETTY PICTURES >** You took some beautiful shots on that last vacation and have some truly memorable snapshots of the family. How do you show them off to your friends without gathering everyone around your computer monitor? It's very easy with a Digital Photo Frame, one of the hottest new electronics gadgets. Typically ranging in size from 7 to 14 inches diagonal, Westinghouse Frames with MosaicView technology are good for people who want to tell a complete digital story by simultaneously displaying multiple images. For example, one frame can highlight several images from a recent vacation—one arriving at a resort, one on the beach, one of a night on the town, and so on. You can also run a complete MosaicView slideshow. The Photo Frames also offer slideshows, a variety of transitions for slideshows, variable speeds for slideshows, or simple picture viewing. The Frames provide support for JPEG, AVI Motion JPEG, and MPEG-1 and -4 files, and have extensive memory-card compatibility.

The DPF-0702 (\$119) is for those who want to showcase images at a very affordable price. With its 128MB of built-in memory, you can save files from a memory card directly to the Frame. The DPF-1411 has a 14.1-inch, 16:9-aspect-ratio screen, 128MB of built-in memory, and playback modes that include MosaicView and Individual View Slide Show. It also has two USB ports for file transfers. **\$399**



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**SAY CHEESE! >** Face Detection is one of the hottest new digicam features for 2007. Face Detection is a specific technology that searches for human faces, looking for eyes, noses, and mouths. Once it registers a face, it will adjust accordingly (focus, exposure, color). The 8MP Fujifilm FinePix F40fd can detect up to 10 different human faces in a scene. Face Detection sets the correct focus and exposure automatically, regardless of where subjects are located within the frame. It also has enhanced playback functions, including the ability to zoom in automatically on each detected face. Now you can check to make sure that everyone's eyes were open and that they were smiling, crop images for the perfect portrait, and perform a variety of other functions to make sharing photos more fun.

The F40fd has a 3x optical zoom and a 2.5-inch LCD screen. Thanks to the sixth-generation FinePix Super CCD-HR chip and the RP processor, the FinePix F40fd can reach ISO 2000, so you can capture quality images even in low light while preserving the shot's natural color and clarity. In a first for Fujifilm, the F40fd features an xD/SD Compatible slot, which accepts not only Fujifilm's traditional xD-Picture Cards but also Secure Digital (SD) cards. **\$299**

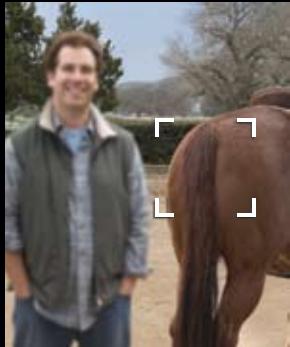
**VIDEO TO GO >** Watching DVDs and iPod videos on the go just became a lot simpler. Philips' DCP line-up of portable DVD players handle DVDs and are docking stations that unleash videos from your iPod. The DCP750 has a 7-inch widescreen display and the DCP850 has a 8.5-inch screen. Both feature a memory card reader that can display digital photos or play DivX movies. Additionally, each DCP can play a broad range of video-based media, including DVD±R and DVD±RW discs, (S)VCD, and MPEG-4. These lightweight entertainment stations are compact with car adapters to ensure the player stays juiced for miles. The DCPs' own built-in, rechargeable battery delivers up to 2.5 hours of playtime. A remote control adds simple navigation. Perfect for traveling by car or plane. **DCP750, \$149; DCP850, \$199**



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**A COOL HYBRID >** Hybrids are all the rage—for both cars and electronic gadgets. Some of the most interesting new electronics hybrids are Hitachi camcorders that let you record on either a built-in hard-disc drive or a blank mini DVD. The pluses of HDD recording are huge—they let you record for hours at the highest quality, compared to around 20 minutes for 3-inch DVDs. Since the Hitachi camcorders—such as the DZ-HS500A—have hard-disc and DVD drives, you can also easily transfer the HDD footage to the disc without using a computer. Then you just pop it into your DVD player and enjoy your newest memories. The DZ-HS500A has a 30GB HDD that holds almost seven hours of best-quality standard-definition DVD video and a potent 30x optical zoom. \$799



**IT'S A SMALL WORLD >** Sony plans to introduce the HDR-CX7, the world's smallest high-definition camcorder in June; it's 15 ounces with the battery. The camcorder is the first to use Memory Stick Pro Duo flash cards as recording media instead of tape, DVDs, or hard drives. Sony states an 8GB card holds three hours of high-definition video, more than enough for graduations and weddings. Panasonic was first

on the scene with a hi-def solid-state camcorder earlier this year that tips the scales at 17.4 ounces. Both camcorders use the AVCHD format for truly superb results. By comparison the Panasonic HDC-SD1 records to Secure Digital (SD) cards instead of Memory Stick media. The Sony HD Handycam HDR-CX7 has an advanced imaging device that also lets you take 6-megapixel still photos. \$1,200

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\*Enter as many times as you like. Odds of winning determined by the number of eligible entries received.

# THE TIME MACHINES





The well-appointed man—and woman—doesn't let style dictate his or her choice of special accessories. Like any piece of jewelry, a good watch is meant to be worn and cherished for years, not months. The blinged-out timepieces now gilding the streets of New York and London are literal flashes in the pan compared to some of horology's masterpieces of yesterday and today.

This year marks the rise in the watch world of the complication—*compliqué*, as the Swiss like to say. Complications—anything that deviates from a watch's standard time-telling features—include chronometers, moon phase, or displays of day and date. In the new digital era, high-end watchmakers are turning to computer-aided

design and traditional methods to create timepieces that would have been impossible just 10 years ago—let alone in the 1800s, watchmaking's golden age.

From ocean depths to the arid lunar plains, these watches will survive the toughest terrain and still go great with formalwear or a little black dress. Each has that little something extra that makes it stand out in a crowd.



**Bathys 100 Fathoms Automatic**

John Patterson, creator of the Bathys 100 Fathoms Automatic, is an accidental watchmaker. This Hawaii-based doctor and surfer wanted a watch that would survive the rough water off the Kauai coast and still look great with khakis and a blazer. The result is the 100 Fathoms

Automatic, a Hawaii-designed, Swiss-made, limited-edition timepiece that was worn and tested by surf dudes up and down Hawaii's shorelines. It looks good at the 19th hole as well. \$795

**Frederique-Constant Heart beat Day Date**

The husband and wife who run Frederique-Constant wear their hearts under their sleeves. Their watches are famous for their "heart beat" design, which shows the watch's ticking escape wheel in a little window on the face. This classically styled watch has an exposed movement at 12 o'clock and a day-date register at 6 o'clock. Add a handsome steel case with a leather band and you have a classic timepiece that won't break the bank. \$2,000

**Panerai Luminor 1950 Chrono Flyback 44mm**

Panerai has made monster watches with striking good looks since 1860, when they began designing them for the Italian Navy. Since then, their models have been adopted by yachtsmen worldwide. This contemporary timepiece has a chronograph movement for measuring elapsed time, as

well as a lock-down crown for waterfastness. Panerai is well known for making watches the size of dinner plates, but this 44mm timepiece will fit almost any wrist to make a bold, unembellished statement. \$9,000

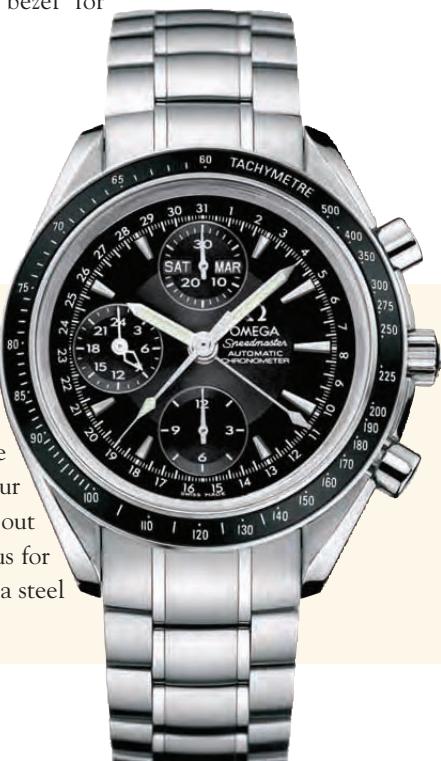
**D. Freemont Sapphire Diver**

David McCready, D. Freemont's lead designer, has watchmaking in his blood. Having built and repaired watches since he was 13, McCready now runs a small shop in Arizona where he designs, tests, and sells imported Swiss watches made to his own exacting specifications.

The Sapphire Diver is an excellent example of McCready's dedication to classic aesthetics and complex complications. In addition to a date window, the Diver has a second dial to show 24-hour time in a different time zone. This elegant piece is also water-resistant to 330 feet, and includes a timing bezel for professional divers. \$895

**Omega Speedmaster Day Date**

Omega's classic Speedmaster has been worn by astronauts on the moon, yet their Speedmaster Day Date is stationed quite firmly on Earth. This complex watch registers the month and the day of week in a small window at 12 o'clock; a separate hand shows the date. The dial at 9 o'clock registers both 24-hour time and seconds, while the chronometer movement metes out seconds and hours elapsed. Omega's Speedmaster line is famous for its clean lines and bright white hands; the Day Date comes on a steel bracelet and is water-resistant to 330 feet. \$2,650



## Oceanaut Perla



Oceanaut, a small company based in Redondo Beach, California, is run by a brother and sister who lead a team of designers and watchmakers to create a unique line of waterproof watches with loads of style. Celebrities seen with Oceanaut watches include Teri Hatcher, Samuel L.

Jackson, and Baywatch's David Charvet (naturally). This Swiss-made watch has a quartz movement, and a chronometer that shows elapsed minutes and hours. The dial, of white mother-of-pearl, is water-resistant to 165 feet. **\$695**

## Tissot T-Touch Danica



Danica Patrick is Tissot's ambassador from the racing pits to the fashion runways. Patrick, 2005 Rookie of the Year in the Indy Racing League, helped design this high-tech timepiece, giving Tissot's T-Touch line a bit of femininity and a whole lot of street-racing credibility.

The Danica includes an altimeter, barometer, and compass, all triggered by a mere touch of the watch's sapphire crystal. While it might seem a bit geeky, the T-Touch Danica is all business and works great with jeans or heels. The latest version, studded with diamonds, makes a dazzling accessory. **\$1,095**

## Omega DeVille Prestige Automatic



A classic silver face offsets the steel case and sapphire crystal. **\$2,500**

The Omega DeVille collection harks back to a simpler age, before ultra-fashion watches hit the scene. This spare automatic runs off of the movement of your wrist, and has a small date window and sweep second hand. Only 27mm across, it comes with an attractive band of dark

## TAG Heuer Monaco Automatic

Steve McQueen made the TAG Heuer Monaco an iconic watch, but that doesn't mean the ladies can't have some of Steve's cool. The Monaco Automatic is square-faced, with a small second dial at 6 o'clock and a date window at 3 o'clock. The watch comes in cream or black and includes a band of python or alligator. The 26 diamonds lining the top and bottom add a bit of shine to this racing-inspired timepiece. **\$3,000**



## Timex TX World Time



The new TX series from Timex offers enough features to make any globe-trotter happy. The watches feature a German quartz movement design and they're water resistant down to 10 atmospheres. The retro-styled two-tone rose gold and steel case has a quality brown leather strap. The watch displays a second time zone at the click of a button, has controls for daylight savings time and resets itself for every new city you visit. Timex's new TX line-up is a classy—and inexpensive—way to keep time on your travels. **\$425** •



# Viva Las Vegas

The best places to eat, drink, stay and play.

By BOBBIE KATZ

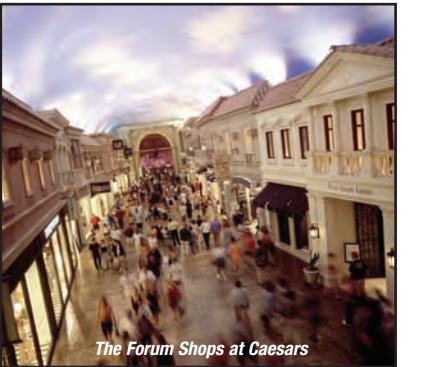
It's not your daddy's Las Vegas. The Stardust Hotel is gone, Elvis has left the building, and the 99¢ buffet has given way to Michelin chefs with three stars to their credit. While "America's Playground" still offers fun in every price range, feel free to bring plenty of money with you. Las Vegas now caters to a larger clientele, a more sophisticated, well-traveled visitor, and the hotels, casinos, and venues have

pulled out all the stops in an effort to entice. Luxurious accommodations, the hottest nightclub scene in the country, A-list entertainment, incredible art exhibits, incomparable shopping, premier sporting events broadcast around the world, and an unequaled gathering of world-class restaurants are just a few of the attractions to lure you to this fast-growing city. Las Vegas 2007 is a city of superlatives.



## The Best of the Best

There are many great Las Vegas resorts, but if you really want to feel like a high roller you can't go wrong at the Bellagio, Wynn, Mandalay Bay, Venetian, or Caesars Palace. These resorts have notable attractions, dining experiences, and shows—they are virtual cities unto themselves. The Wynn Las Vegas, one of the city's newer resorts, is something to see. It is the only casino in the world to receive a Mobil 5 Star and AAA 5 Diamond rating, and for good reason. The



*The Forum Shops at Caesars*

amenities are luxurious and the entertainment first-class. Caesars, however, is my favorite Las Vegas haunt. If, like me, you don't want to wait in cab lines or walk the strip, you can happily pass three or four days within the walls of these resorts. For example, Caesars Palace's 85-acre property has the 4.5-acre Garden of the Gods pools and spas, where sun-worshippers work on their tans and Grape Goddesses tour the area offering frozen grapes. It's a refreshing reminder that Caesars is a place of pampering and indulgence.



*Opened August 5, 1966, with then-recording and television superstar Andy Williams headlining, Caesars Palace has grown from 600 to 3,300 guest rooms, and continues to spotlight world-class talent, such as Celine Dion, Elton John, and Jerry Seinfeld.*

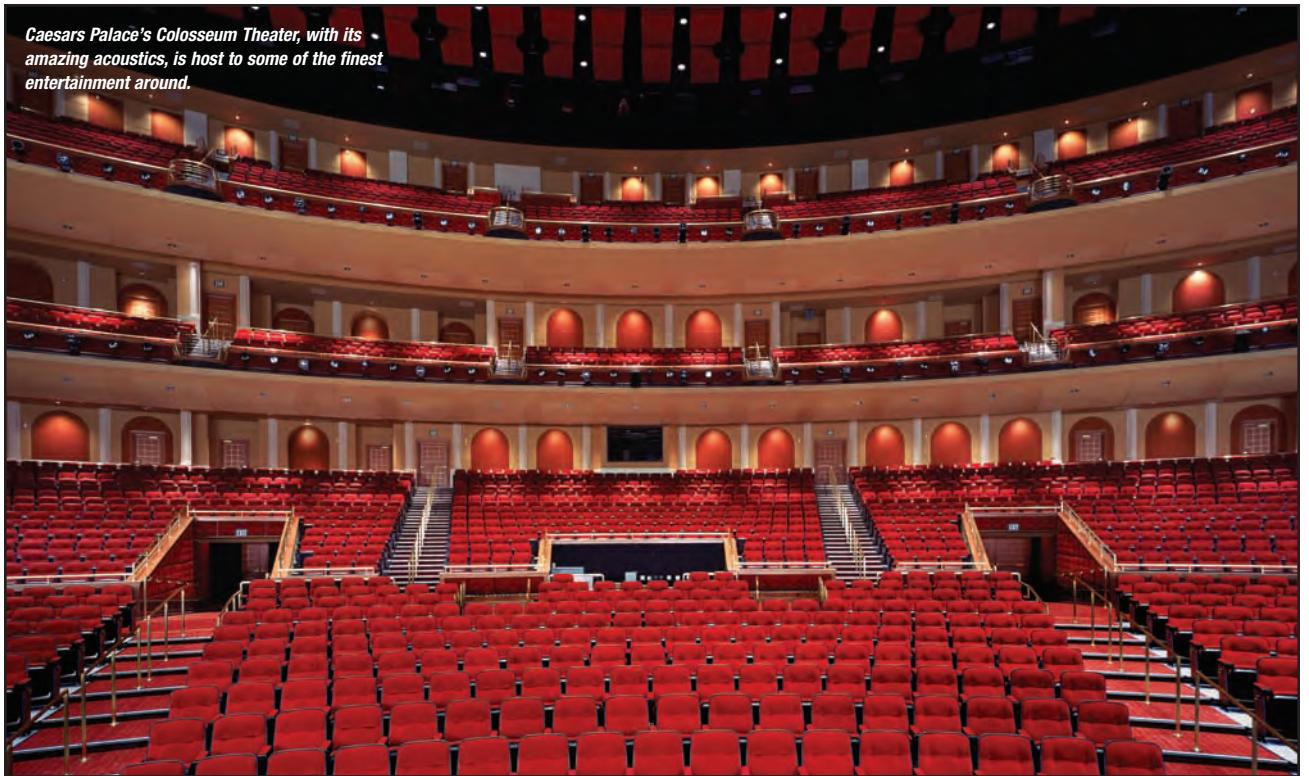


*Like dining and nightclubs, spa facilities and services in Las Vegas rival some of the best spa destinations in the country. The BathHouse at THEhotel at Mandalay Bay and Canyon Ranch at Venetian are good, and the new Red Rock Station at the city's far west border is excellent. (It's a good 45-minute drive from the Strip, near Red Rock Canyon—great for a post-hike treatment.) Qua Baths & Spa at Caesars Palace, shown above, features lavish Roman Baths. Hot, cold, and tepid pools and a circular rain shower that falls from the ceiling offer the ultimate in relaxation.*



*The Bellagio's gorgeous glass ceiling in the lobby.*

*Caesars Palace's Colosseum Theater, with its amazing acoustics, is host to some of the finest entertainment around.*



Savoy's famed Paris establishment, it was named "the best restaurant in Las Vegas and one of the finest anywhere" by *Newsweek International*, and, at press time, was nominated to win a James Beard Award for Best New Restaurant of 2007. Also don't miss the 2004 James Beard award-winner, Bradley Ogden, with its eclectic menu featuring the finest wild and organic ingredients. Caesars is home to the vibrant Southwestern-inspired cuisine at Chef Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill, as well.

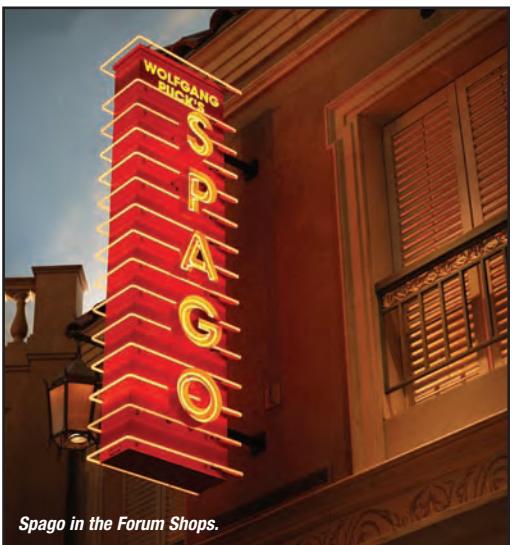
Las Vegas has a long history of providing the finest entertainment in the world, and all of the mega-resorts go to great lengths to top one another. However, if you decide not to venture out, Caesars \$95 million Colosseum Theater has acoustics

on par with the finest concert halls in the world, and you can always count on a great show from Celine Dion, Jerry Seinfeld, or Elton John, who all appear there regularly. In fact, Elton's *The Red Piano*, was perhaps the best show I've seen.

It's hard to call it a night in Las Vegas. Even with plush rooms and to-die-for views, it's difficult to forget that there's a casino bursting with excitement just a few floors below. New lavish poker rooms are the hot spots, along with themed entertainment gaming pits—such as the Pussycat Dolls pit at Caesars—where dancers perform in cages surrounded by blackjack and roulette tables. This kind of "action" is perhaps what Las Vegas is best known for.



*A moonlit night at the romantic Venetian resort.*



*Spago in the Forum Shops.*



Westinghouse



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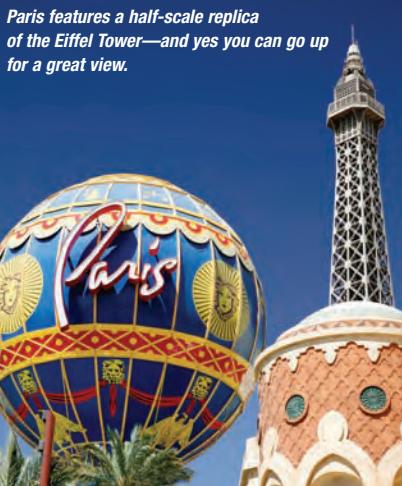
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Paris features a half-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower—and yes you can go up for a great view.



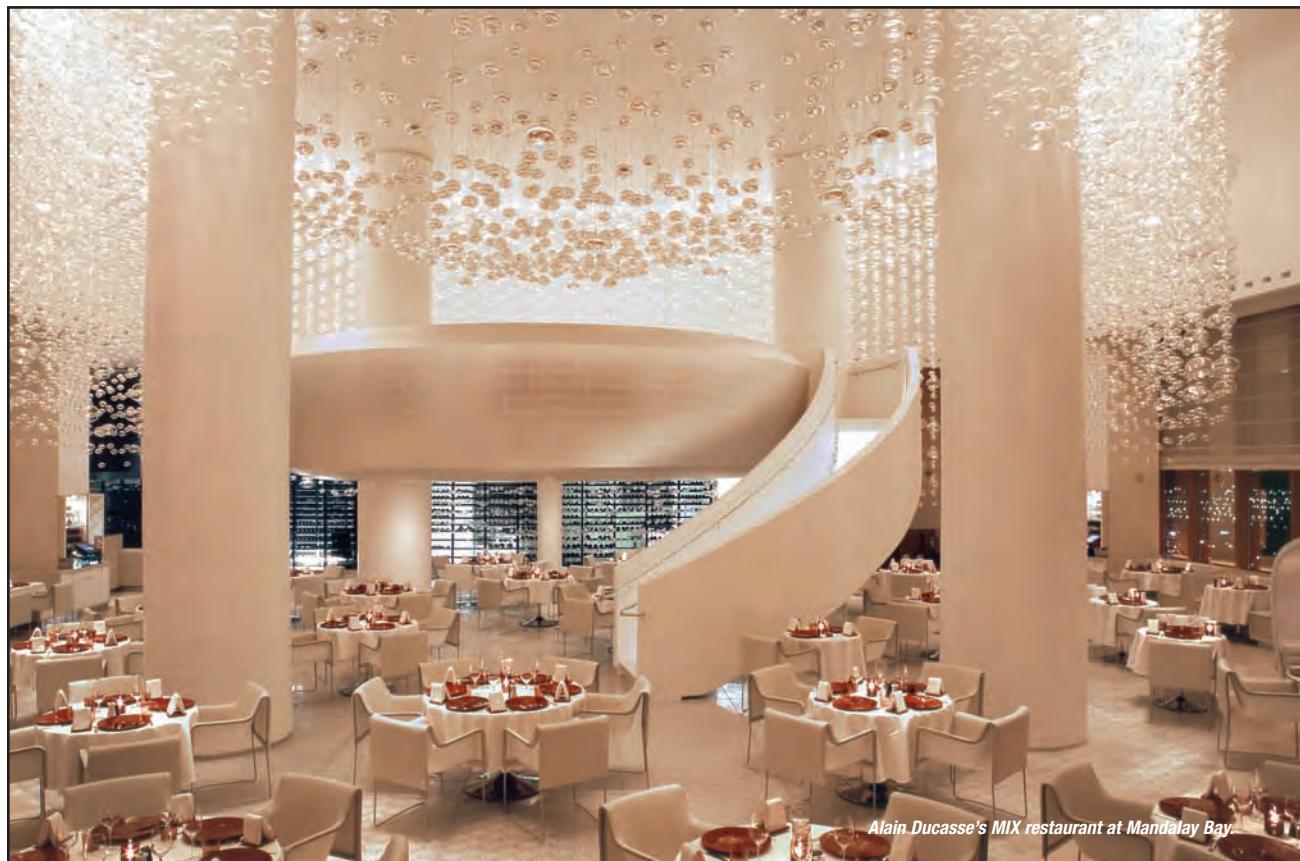
The Bellagio's famous water show at dusk.

## Great Chefs

Of course, Caesars isn't the only home to fine dining on the strip. Great chefs are around every corner. Hubert Keller oversees the culinary magic at his Fleur de Lys at Mandalay Bay, the same hotel that is home to Michael Mina's StripSteak. Mina has two other Las Vegas restaurants: Michael Mina at the Bellagio (seafood) and Nobhill at MGM Grand (eclectic). MGM scored another gastronomic coup when they lured "Chef of the Century" Joel Robuchon out of retirement to open his first U.S. restaurant, L'atelier Joel Robuchon.

Like everything at the Wynn Las Vegas, the food at the Wynn is second to none. Steve Wynn, known for doing nothing halfway, jumped headlong into the food fray by recruiting culinary heavyweight Daniel Boulud. Wynn Hotel and Country Club's Daniel Boulud Brasserie specializes in the comfort foods of Boulud's native France.

Want to know who is moving up the culinary ladder? Check out the food, and the view, at Chef Joseph Elevado's Pan-Asian cuisine at Social House in Treasure Island, Bruno Davaillon's classic French and American signature dishes at Alain Ducasse's MIX at Mandalay



Alain Ducasse's MIX restaurant at Mandalay Bay.



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Bay, Brian Massie's grilled American delights at FIX, or Martin Heierling's four open kitchens (Italian, Asian, Seafood, and Grilled) at Sensi in the Spa Tower at Bellagio. Moreover, while you're there, don't miss the incredible European-style pastries at Jean-Phillippe Patisserie. If the view is as important as the food, be sure to visit Paris Las Vegas's romantic Eiffel Tower restaurant, or their Mon Ami Gabi.

Many gastronomes feel that Las Vegas rivals New York as the country's culinary hot spot. In truth, you won't find so wide a choice concentrated in so compact an area anywhere else in the world. But be forewarned, world-class food does not come cheap. Bring your appetite, your taste for the finest food around, and your wallet!



Caesars Palace has no shortage of superstar shows. The success of Celine Dion's *A New Day...* (above) in the Colosseum marked the return of true superstars to the city's showrooms. Catch *A New Day...* before December 15 this year, when she ends her sold out four-year run. And Elton John's *The Red Piano* (left), also at Caesars, is one of the best shows on the strip!

## *Las Vegas Spectaculars!*

Before or after dinner, take in a show. Las Vegas has always been about spectacular shows—and that is still the case. Be sure to see the last true Las Vegas spectacular—*Jubilee!*—at Bally's. Updated many times since it opened in 1981, the sets are elaborate, the costumes fantastic, and the cast of 86 long-legged dancers superb.

If high-tech shows intrigue you more, you will love the various Cirque Shows: O at the Bellagio, *Mystère* at Treasure Island, *Zumanity* at New York-New York, KA at MGM Grand, and *Le Reve* at the Wynn. These Cirque shows are not traditional productions by any definition. The performers are amazing, and the new state-of-the-art theaters support pyrotechnics, cranes, hydraulic platforms, puppetry, and

*Revolution at Mirage features Beatles' music and memorabilia.*



*MIX lounge at Mandalay Bay.*

movable stages and decks. Each Cirque show has a different theme. The latest must-see Cirque production is *Love*. It is based on the soundtrack of a re-mix of the Fab Four's music by Beatles' producer Sir George Martin and his son Giles. It took something special to fill the giant void left by Siegfried and Roy at the Mirage, and *Love* was just the show to do it. After the show, you can stop next-door at Revolution, a new club beside the Love Theater that is devoted to Beatles' music and memorabilia.

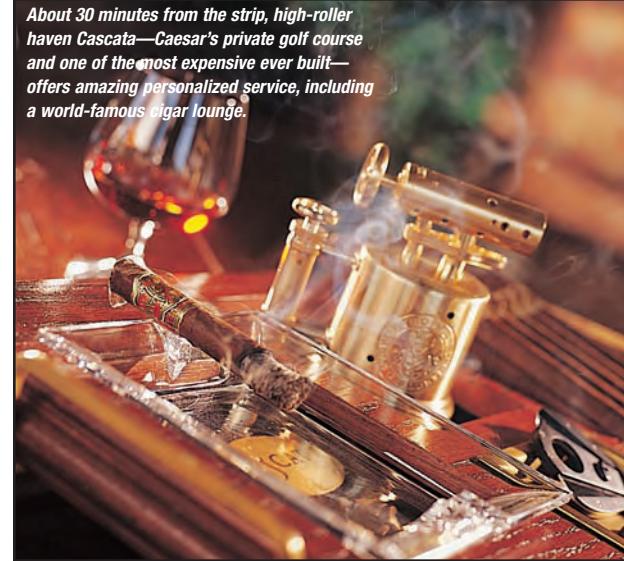
Broadway has hit it big in Las Vegas, with the Mandalay Bay's *Mamma Mia!* drawing crowds for more than four years. Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera* opened to rave reviews last year. In fact, the Venetian built

*Phantom* a \$40 million theater that resembles Paris' Opera Garnier. And don't forget to check out Mel Brooks' hit *The Producers* at Paris Las Vegas.

### *I Love the Nightlife*

If you are not in the mood for a show, there are several great clubs worth checking out. The MGM Grand launched things with their ultra-lounge, Tabu, and the club scene quickly spread. The Venetian pulls its weight with TAO, and the Mirage steps in with Jet. The VooDoo Lounge at the Rio, and the hip Ghostbar at the Palms offer views of the city that are as impressive as the action inside.

*About 30 minutes from the strip, high-roller haven Cascata—Caesar's private golf course and one of the most expensive ever built—offers amazing personalized service, including a world-famous cigar lounge.*



Celebrity hot spot Pure is the latest addition to Caesars' scene. The 40,000-square-foot nightclub with an awesome view of the Strip offers four venues, each with its own DJ. Dress to impress.

The Palms recently revived the Playboy Club, a combination nightclub and casino featuring Playboy bunnies. And, if 1960's Vegas is the name of your game, visit Ivan Kane's Forty Deuce at the new Mandalay Place in Mandalay Bay. Kane redefined the art of striptease with a back-alley club and trained professional dancers performing to the sultry sounds of a jazz band.

Whether you came to Vegas to eat, drink, stay, or play, one thing is certain: there's no lack of top-notch entertainment . . . and it just keeps getting better every day. •





**Best**

HOME  
ENTERTAIN-  
MENT

# THE KING of Hi-Def



New 1080p HDTVs set the bar high  
for hi-def picture quality

By PETE PUTMAN

In the market for an HDTV set? Perhaps you have been sitting on the sidelines, waiting for screens to get larger and prices to drop—or maybe you've been waiting for more high-definition channels to arrive on your cable or satellite system.

Whatever the reason, you are ready to buy now, particularly after the big price reductions this past December and January. You've checked out the different technologies, such as plasma, LCD, and rear projection. You've even started thinking about peripherals, such as an upscaling or next-gen hi-def DVD player.

**B**ut there's a new sheriff in town known as 1080p, the highest-definition format currently available. 1080p offers potentially gorgeous images—clearer, sharper, more vibrant, and more lifelike than anything you've seen so far. The 1080p standard is now making its way into more and more TVs, making it an option for you, the HDTV shopper. Let's take a moment to review the facts you need to know before you buy.

## What 1080p Programs Are Available?

There are only two standard resolutions for the HDTV programs carried by broadcast stations, cable systems, and direct-broadcast satellite companies. The first sends out frames of video with 1280 horizontal pixels and 720 vertical pixels, using progressive picture scanning. This format, known as 720p, is the only one used by the Fox, ABC, ESPN, and MyHD networks.

The other HD format transmits 1920x1080 pixels in each frame of video, which is about twice the resolution of the 720p standard. The difference is that these video images are presented in an interlaced (alternating) scanning format. This format, known as 1080i, is the standard at CBS, Discovery, NBC, HBO, Showtime, Starz, NBA TV, NFL Network, PBS, INHD, and many other HD networks.

But HDTV programs and HDTV sets don't always have the same resolution. So where does 1080p come into the picture? First, the interlaced video in a 1080i broadcast must be converted to a progressive-scan image so it can be seen on your flat-panel or rear-projection HDTV. The 1080i-to-1080p conversion process varies from manufacturer to manufacturer. Some use an inexpensive processor that doesn't really give you the best results, while others do the conversion correctly, to provide amazingly detailed HD images.

1080p content can also come from the new blue-laser hi-def DVD formats, Blu-ray and HD DVD. Movies mastered for these formats can be played at the 1080i or 1080p resolutions. Already have a big library of movies on standard DVDs? There are many inexpensive DVD players available that do a very good job of upconverting DVD resolution (also called upscaling) to 720p, 1080i, and 1080p. And don't forget the millions of PlayStation 3 video game consoles, which also output a 1080p signal from Blu-ray discs and some new games.

## 1080p—Is It for Me?

When shopping the world of technology, it's usually better to

invest more, even if you don't necessarily need the additional features offered on a more expensive product. That way, down the road you'll have everything you need. A TV with extra connections, for example, will allow you to hook up future purchases, such as a gaming console. Because 1080p is currently "the highest of the hi-def," if you purchase a 1080p set now, even if you don't have a true 1080p source, you're future-proofing your television—giving yourself that option when you do upgrade your DVD player, or broadcast 1080p comes around.

For larger sets, such as a 46-inch LCD or 50-inch plasma, 1080p is a great choice. The higher pixel density of a 1080p HDTV means you're less likely to spot the screen's actual pixel structure—it resembles a screen door—than you would with, say, a 720p set.

If really big screens are your thing (55 inches or more) and watch a steady diet of HD programming, then 1080p is definitely the way to go, particularly with rear-projection HDTVs. Your HD programs will really jump off the screen, and you'll have more flexibility with seating distances. With 1080p's higher resolution, you can sit closer to the screen without seeing the pixel structure.

Pair a 1080p set with a good upscaling DVD player or a Blu-ray or HD DVD player, and you'll have an exciting viewing experience that's more like a movie theater than "just television."

Feeling more ambitious? You can get 1080p in a front projector, too, and the prices of these have dropped considerably in recent months. Add in a big front screen and surround-sound system, and you may start wondering why you spent all that money going to movie theaters when you can get such a great picture at home.

Keep in mind that once you get above a certain screen size with a given HDTV technology, 1080p will be your only choice. While LCD HDTVs with 1080p resolution are available in screen sizes as small as 37 inches, all LCD sets larger than 46 inches are 1080p. Plasma HDTVs larger than 65 inches are all 1080p, with some manufacturers providing 1080p resolution down to 42 inches.

If you've decided to spring for a new next-generation hi-def DVD player, then 1080p is a must so that you can see every pixel on the screen.

Many television networks put a lot of time and effort into delivering the best HD signals they can to your home, and you'll really see the fruits of their hard work on a big-screen 1080p set. Check out ESPN HD, Comcast SportsNet HD, Discovery HD, and CBS for high-quality HD programs that will have you believing you're sitting front-row center! •

1080p  
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## Editors' Picks: The Best 1080p HDTVs

After scouring the shelves for the latest and greatest 1080p sets, the editors of *Best* have come up with some truly great picks that do the 1080p format justice. While there are many models available, *Best* recommends the following handpicked displays for people who want the best image quality, most comprehensive features, and the best value.

We print the full model name and number as many lesser sets have similar names. Always try to go by the model number when using this handy reference to make purchases. Without further ado, here are our favorites in order of screen size—you will not be disappointed with any of them.



### Westinghouse Digital 42-inch TX-42F430S LCD

Westinghouse Digital has come out of nowhere to become one of the HDTV leaders because it delivers superior picture quality at excellent prices. When you see a 42-inch 1080p HDTV for much less than \$2,000, send your regards to the manufacturer. Although the 42-inch TX-42F430S has a bargain price, it doesn't have cut-rate performance. It's a full 1080p HDTV with a fast 8 millisecond response time so there's no blur when you're watching sports or a fast-moving action. It offers a wealth of inputs, including four separate HDMI jacks and a PC input. Contrast ratio is a solid 5,000:1. The built-in stereo speakers fire through the bottom of the slim cabinet for a thinner profile and the subwoofer adds extra depth to round out the overall experience. \$1,499



### Toshiba 42-inch REGZA 42HL167 LCD

This 42-inch LCD HDTV features a new CineSpeed Panel to improve response time (8 milliseconds or less) and adds 14-bit video processing to deliver a wider range of colors—from bright white to deep blacks. ColorBurst Wide Color Gamut technology produces colors that are even more accurate than last year's models. This enhanced color palette makes movies look as good as the Cineplex, sometimes even better. Adding to the home theater experience is a 20-watt speaker system—much more than offered on many TV speakers—with SRS WOW sound to give you better sound than most flat-screen TVs. \$1,799

### Sony 46-inch KDL-46XBR2 Bravia LCD

Without a doubt, Sony Bravia LCD HDTVs are among the best we've seen. Movies—especially Blu-ray Discs like *X-Men: The Last Stand*—seem to pop off the screen. Sony packs its TVs with an alphabet soup's worth of technology so long that we won't even try to itemize everything here. The Bravia Engine Pro Full Digital Video Processor features advanced Digital Reality Creation (DRC) circuitry as well as an improved wide-color-gamut backlight for brighter reds and greens. This HDTV has TruSurroundXT sound for a surround sound feel from the set itself. This is one of the most attractive flat-panel sets around with its floating glass design. You can also choose from five different optional interchangeable color bezels to match your room's décor. \$3,299



### **Sharp Aquos LC-46D92U LCD**

Early in the flat-panel revolution Sharp was the undisputed king of the category. Now it has dozens of competitors, but it still releases superb HDTVs, such as this new Aquos 46-inch LC-46D92U LCD HDTV. Made in the company's advanced Kameyama II factory, this eighth-generation Advanced Super View/Black TFT panel delivers full HD 1080p resolution. It has 120Hz fast-motion image processing—twice as fast as many competitors—for very smooth motion video and a super-fast 4 millisecond response time. This attractive HDTV has a good variety of tuners and a wealth of inputs to handle many components and HD set-top boxes. The LC-46D92U features a sleek piano black cabinet with detachable, recessed bottom-mounted speakers. \$3,699



## **7 Steps for Taming Your New HDTV**

- 1)** Make sure you have a source of HD signals before your new HDTV arrives. If you subscribe to cable or satellite TV, upgrade to a new HD set-top box first, preferably one that includes a digital video recorder for recording and watching your favorite HD programs at your convenience. Nothing beats a DVR for catching up on shows that air while you're at work, asleep, or traveling.
- 2)** Make sure the set-top box is up and running when your HDTV arrives so you can check out the TV's different A/V inputs to make sure everything works correctly. Set-top boxes usually have multiple output-resolution settings, such as 720p or 1080i. For a 1080p HDTV set, select the 1080i output—1080p output is not yet available on any set-top box. If you're having your HDTV calibrated, the technician will want to compare actual HD signals before and after the calibration is completed. If you don't plan on having a professional calibration, the following easy steps will help you get the best picture quality.
- 3)** Open the HDTV's Picture menu and see what choices you have for picture modes. Chances are one of them is labeled Dynamic, Vivid, or something similar. Dynamic modes on HDTVs are designed to make them look really bright in showrooms, but they can degrade the picture quality by washing out highlights and emphasizing the edges of people and objects in the picture. Look for and select a setting labeled Standard, Cinema, Movie, or Natural. The image won't be as bright, but it will look more pleasing because the colors and contrast will be more accurately lifelike. You may also find you don't need the picture to be as bright for normal viewing. Look for the Contrast or Picture control, and set it about midway (50 to 60).
- 4)** You may also want to turn down the set's Sharpness control to 10 or 20 percent. This will get rid of white outlines around people and objects. Sharpness enhancement is not needed when viewing HD programs—they're already sharp enough!
- 5)** Check to see if the Picture menu includes a Color Temperature or White Balance setting. If so, stay away from Cool settings, and instead use the Medium, Mid, or Warm setting to get better flesh tones and more natural colors.
- 6)** If you've bought a plasma, make sure it's positioned so you don't see glare on the screen. Plasma HDTVs come with anti-glare glass, but some reflection is unavoidable. LCD and rear-projection HDTVs usually won't show glare as distinctly, but unwanted light can cause a hot spot on the screen.
- 7)** Wherever possible, use the digital A/V connections to hook up DVD players and set-top boxes. This will ensure that you get the highest picture quality with the lowest signal loss. HDMI cables (shown on the right in the image below) carry as much video information as five component video cables (shown on the left in the image below)! Most new HDTVs now include two to three HDMI connectors, which should take care of almost anything you'd want to connect.

Because HDMI connectors also carry the audio signals, you'll have a smaller nest of wires behind your set when you finish setting up. If you've also purchased a surround-sound system with your new HDTV, you can use an HDMI connector to hook up your A/V receiver with minimal fuss.



### **LG Electronics 47-inch 47LB4DF LCD**

LG recently introduced nine new 1080p LCD models. One that stands apart is this 47-inch HDTV with an impressive 10,000:1 contrast ratio. This simply means you'll see whatever is in the source material—and for Blu-ray Discs and HD DVDs that's plenty. The 47LB4DF has a glossy black finish and a wide 178-degree viewing angle. The new TruMotion Drive ups the refresh rate to 120Hz to eliminate blur on fast-moving objects. **\$3,199**



### **Pioneer Elite 50-inch PRO-FHD1 Plasma Monitor**

A l t h o u g h expensive, this top-notch 50-inch plasma 1080p HD monitor has won unanimous praise. In fact, the PRO-FHD1 was the first 1080p plasma monitor ever introduced. Pioneer plasmas have always been known for their rich, deep blacks and eye-pleasing contrast. The PRO-FHD1 is one of the very best, with an almost three-dimensional picture. It's finished in a sophisticated piano gloss black. **\$7,999**



### **Samsung 52-inch LN-T5265F LCD**

This brand new 52-inch 1080p LCD HDTV has a stunning picture wrapped in a beautiful black gloss-finish cabinet with chrome details. We might say it looks as good off as it does on, but not when you see this HDTV handle Blu-ray or HD DVD discs. Video is spectacular. The LN-T5265F has a 15,000:1 contrast ratio, a wider color gamut for richer, more lifelike colors, and a wide 178-degree viewing angle. It also has the latest HDMI connections. There's even a USB connection to play back your favorite MP3 tunes or JPEG photos. **\$4,299**



### **Panasonic 58-inch TH-58PZ700U Plasma**

Pioneer may have been the first to introduce 1080p plasma HDTVs, but Panasonic isn't letting any flat panels grow under its feet. Panasonic's new TH-58PZ700U delivers huge impact that has to be seen to be appreciated. Viewing animation favorites like *Happy Feet* on this plasma is truly a joy. It has EZ Sync HDAVI Control, which lets you operate compatible components by pressing a single button on your TV's remote control. GalleryPlayer, a built-in service that turns your display into a virtual museum, lets you display fine works of art and photos onscreen. The TV has a built-in SD card slot so you can check out your own digital photos onscreen. Two HDMI connections for your hi-def sources and a new antireflective coating complete the package. Panasonic has become the largest seller of plasma TVs by offering a combination of great picture quality and reasonable prices. You are getting champagne on a beer budget. **\$4,799**

### **Sony Grand Wega 60-inch KDS-60A2020 SXRD Rear Projection**



There's no question flat-panel TVs have seized the imagination of HDTV buyers. However, once wall-hanging TVs go above 65 inches, they are very expensive. Fortunately, there are some excellent 1080p rear-projection TV alternatives such as the Sony Grand Wega KDS-60A2020. Approximately 20 inches deep, this set uses a trio of superb SXRD imaging devices to create the 1080p image. The system delivers highly accurate and natural colors. The WEGA imaging engine and Cinema Black Pro processing provide sharp detail even in dimly lit scenes. **\$2,899**

### **Mitsubishi 65-inch WD-65831 DLP Rear Projection**



Mitsubishi Digital Electronics America has been known for years for its quality rear-projection HDTVs—and the 65-inch WD-65831 features Digital Light Processing (DLP) technology with a twist. By using a six-color light engine instead of the usual three, it pumps out a wider range of colors, a brighter picture, cleaner whites and very deep blacks. The 20-inch thick WD-65831 also has PerfecTint to fine tune all six colors for more accurate adjustments. The bottom line is beautiful video for next-generation DVDs as well as your favorite TV shows. And it's half the price of comparable flat-panel HDTVs. **\$4,599** •

# Take a few bytes from the latest Apple

The slick new 40GB Apple TV liberates your music, photos, and videos from your PC

By BILL HOWARD



**F**irst things first: The Apple TV is no more a TV than your DVD player is. Both components connect to your television to deliver content. The Apple TV delivers all the music, photos, and digital videos on your home PC to your HDTV, and does so with the style and idiot-proof simplicity you expect from Apple technology. After using it—and even with a few caveats—I was quite impressed. But before you sign on for this \$299 device, just be sure you understand the fine print.

The Apple TV is the latest and best of the devices called digital media receivers (or hubs), or digital music (or media) systems. Intended to be placed next to your TV and home stereo, these components seek out music, photos, and digital videos stored on

your PC or Mac, convert the signals into a format your TV or home stereo system understands, and transmit (stream) them over a wired or wireless home network. Voilà! The Green Day MP3s stored on your PC are now playing on your stereo, or the vacation photos on your hard drive are playing on the big-screen TV, with your iTunes as musical accompaniment. You can also stream movies or video clips from your PC to your home entertainment system.

The first media receivers were hard to use and typically required a wired Ethernet connection. Even if they did display music track and tune information on your TV set, after a few minutes the typical receiver switched to a screen-saver of the vendor's logo. Not surprisingly, various iPod docks found greater favor among consumers.

The new Apple TV, however, could swing the momentum back to media receivers. It takes only a few minutes to set up the white-plastic-and-aluminum box, which measures 1 x 8 x 8 inches (HWD). It has a tiny remote control, and the interface is the easiest to use of any media receiver I've tried. Given that its parents are the Mac and the iPod, this should be no surprise.

But not even Apple is perfect. If you've got two or three PCs or Macs at home, the Apple TV can work with only one of them. However, you can copy your music, photos, and videos to the Apple TV's built-in 40-gigabyte hard disk—which is problem number two. While 40GB is a lot of space for music and photos (9,000 songs or 25,000 photos, or a combination thereof), it's not much if you want to store videos. And because video streamed across a network takes up so much bandwidth, you will want to store it on the hard drive. Watching video streamed from your computer may cause the image to stutter—not a good thing. Apple calls the video "high-definition," but what they mean is that it's hi-def if you can find any hi-def content. Most downloadable movies are not hi-def, and aren't even up to the quality of standard

DVD. Still, Apple claims that the Apple TV can output 720p video, and if you've taken some great hi-def home video, you could watch home movies from your computer on your main system in 720p.

Apple TV doesn't let you go directly to the Internet, so you can't run YouTube videos or—and this seems a major oversight—download directly from the iTunes store. You need your Internet-connected computer for those functions. The iTunes store has only about 500 videos and TV series available for download; by comparison, NetFlix's movie catalog lists 75,000 titles. Also, the Apple TV is designed to be used only with widescreen TVs with HDMI or component-video connections. Because almost all new HDTVs have such connections, this isn't a big issue, but those of you with older TV sets will want to double-check your rear panels.

These minor issues don't change the fact that an easy-to-use media server compatible with both Macs and PCs is here, and hopefully to stay. The Apple TV liberates the digital photos, music, and videos currently "trapped" on your computer, and it's as easy to use as the iPod. •

The new Apple TV could swing the momentum back to media servers



# HOUSE PARTY

The Sonos system is an incredibly simple plug-and-play whole-house digital music solution that will make your home *the* place for parties

By KRISSY RUSHING

**W**hen I first heard about Sonos I was skeptical at best. The company was then in its infancy, with all the energy of an Internet startup circa 1999, and the Sonos folks who came out to meet the press were young, creative, and energetic. This journalist wondered if the Sonos whole-house wireless music system was just another “gee-whiz” product we’d see come and go in less than a year.

Five years later, Sonos products are all the rage in many technology magazines, not to mention in the pages of mainstream fashion, news, and even health magazines. When a product crosses the barrier from enthusiast to mainstream, you know you have something special on your hands. In the case of the Sonos whole-house music system, I attribute that specialness primarily to the product’s effortless ease-of-use, with functionality coming in a close second. The real beauty of Sonos lies in the fact that die-hard music fans like me get to listen to more of the music we love in more places—like the bedroom, the backyard, the bathroom, or all of the above.

The Sonos system is comprised of a series of small receivers that act as wireless music players called ZonePlayers. They get their music from your computer; be it your own collection stored on the hard drive, from Internet radio, Rhapsody, or one of the many other online sources. The wireless, hand-held Sonos Controller, which is used to operate the ZonePlayer, has an interface reminiscent of that little gadget we all know and love—the Apple iPod. Its scroll wheel lets you rapidly find song titles and tracks, and its large, bright, color LCD display shows album art and track info. The unit is very solid. It feels high-end in the hand—very heavy, stylish, and slick. When guests enter my living room and see it sitting in its cradle, they want to know what it is. Since it’s wireless, you can take it from room to room; as long as it’s within range of a ZonePlayer—this distance can vary from 50 to 100 feet, depending on the construction materials used in your home or apartment.

There are two ZonePlayer models to choose from: the ZP80 and the ZP100. The ZP100 has two built-in amplifiers—so you can make a complete stereo system out of it by simply plugging speakers directly into the unit’s rear panel. That rear panel also has inputs for other audio devices you



*The Sonos ZP100, shown here, is an amplified device that can power speakers.*

**Best**

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might wish to use, like a CD or DVD player. The ZP80, on the other hand, has no amplifiers and simply connects to an existing stereo setup you may already have, letting you use that system as another ZonePlayer. It’s an easy selection: The ZP100 is great if you lack a sound system of any kind; the ZP80 is perfect if you already have audio setups in various rooms.

### Setup's a Cinch

For this review, I received one ZP100, two ZP80s, two Sonos speakers, and the Sonos Controller, which controls the various ZonePlayers scattered around a house—and of course all your music. I was excited to get my Sonos Bundle—I planned to host a party at my house the following weekend and wanted to be able to play the same tunes, synchronized, throughout the house and patio.

I started where it made sense: the living room, which is the closest place to my wireless Ethernet router, as I needed high-speed Internet service for Sonos to work, and one ZonePlayer must be connected to an open port on your router. To get started, all I had to do was connect the ZP80 to my router, then connect it to an empty auxiliary input on my stereo receiver, using the provided RCA cables. Then I plugged the ZP80 into the wall.

If you want instant gratification, at this point all you have to do is turn on your Sonos hand-held Controller, and follow its simple on-screen video prompts to start listening to the free Rhapsody music trial that’s included with all new Sonos systems. This way you can listen to tunes while you’re



installing the Sonos software on your computer. Installing the software is incredibly easy; you'll be up and running in no time, with your entire digital music collection available at your fingertips.

Having installed the first zone, which played in stereo through the Polk Audio speakers in my living room and sounded great, I was ready to tackle Zone Two. I have a computer speaker system in my garage home office, so I used another ZP80 out there to make a whole-house zone out of that room, which also provides music for the patio area when the doors are open. Note that only one ZonePlayer must be connected to a hardwired Ethernet connection. All other ZonePlayers then work wirelessly via Sonos' built-in wireless network (though each still needs to be plugged into an AC outlet).

I didn't have a music system in my bedroom, so I installed the ZP100 there, along with the Sonos speakers. These speakers are small but work just fine in a smaller room, such as a kitchen, office, or bedroom. (If you want better sound, you might demo a few non-Sonos speakers to pair with the ZP100.) In no time, I was listening to tunes while getting ready for the party.

The entire setup, including the time it took me to un-box everything and figure out what was what, took all of 20 minutes. I had almost instant music in several rooms of my house.

## Whole-house Music Made Easy

Most people, when they think of a whole-house audio system, envision something complicated and intimidating: snaking wires from room to room to connect to a main multi-zone receiver and in-wall speakers, which themselves require intrusive drywall surgery. While such systems are a wonderful way to enhance your home, many people just don't want to deal with all the fuss of a complicated installation with wires running all over the place.

That's where Sonos comes in. What I like most about the Sonos Digital Music System, and what has undoubtedly made it so popular is that it makes whole-house audio incredibly simple—and wireless!

For my party, I had all three zones running at once playing the same music. All I needed to do was click the Controller's Link Zones option, and the three zones were in sync. Rather than play DJ all night, I took advantage of the Rhapsody free trial, using samplers from the Rock genre as my playlist. You can also connect to any Internet radio station; this alone gives you an almost unlimited choice of music. I chose Indie Rock, and was surprised to hear great music from some of my favorite bands, including Pavement, Elliot Smith, and Mew. The Controller lets you control the volume in each zone individually or ganged. The latter came in handy when a friend wanted to propose a toast—I just turned down all three zones at once. As my house is small, the three zones worked perfectly; if you have a large house, you may want to add a few more ZonePlayers (and Controllers) to your system. You can add up to 32, all playing different songs.

The only thing I found myself wishing the Sonos system had was the ability to search by keypad. The Power-Scroll function lets you scroll through the letters of the alphabet to find a song or artist, but if you have as much music as I do, this can take a while. This was no big deal; the scroll wheel moves fast, again much like our old friend the iPod.

What will appeal to many is the surprisingly low price of



*"What I like most about the Sonos Digital Music System, and what has undoubtedly made it so popular is that it makes whole-house audio incredibly simple—and wireless."*



the Sonos Bundle. The Sonos Bundle 130 is just \$999 and includes a ZP80, ZP100, and Controller. There's also a bundle with a pair of speakers for \$1,149. You can hire a professional to install the whole shebang for you, but believe me—if I can do it, so can you.

Whatever attracts you to a Sonos system, one thing is clear:

It's becoming an iconic device that is rapidly bringing whole-house music to the mainstream. Great for just enjoying a night in at home, for parties, or relaxing by the pool this summer; the Sonos system will make your home the life of the party. And you will find yourself enjoying your music a lot more often. •



# FINE TUNING

**Amazing sound adds a multidimensional aspect to your home-theater experience, and with all the new speakers, it's easy to find models that fit your lifestyle and design sensibilities**

By GARY ALTUNIAN

**N**ow that you have that big flat-panel hi-def TV, you will want to get audio that is on the same level as the video. And for home theater, that means surround sound. While a bigger-than-life picture is part of the appeal of the silver screen, it tells only half the tale. It's the soundtrack that envelops and draws the audience into the story. Dialogue, music, and effects combine to add drama, emotion, and a keen sense of reality to what unfolds onscreen. And we're not talking about audio from the built-in speakers that come with your TV.

Indeed, with all the recent hype about flat-panel and hi-def displays, audio has been given short shrift. And with the number of choices out there, choosing a system that suits your room and lifestyle can be difficult. But more choices mean that it's likely you'll be able to find a sound system that will give you a great home-theater experience without detracting from the design aesthetic in your room. This guide will help you determine what speakers fit your lifestyle and design sensibilities, and get you excited about adding surround sound—whether it's simulated or the real deal—to your room. While nothing can beat the surround audio experience from a full 5.1, 6.1, or 7.1 system, you do have other options. And once you hear really good audio, you won't be able to go back to those tiny speakers built into most flat-panel televisions.



## NO WIRES: Sound Bars

Imagine a surround-sound speaker system that produces exciting multichannel effects from a single component. It's called a sound bar. You get simulated surround sound without the clutter of multiple speakers and wires. Remember, six or seven speakers in your room means six or seven sets of wires to be hidden (or tripped over).

In a single enclosure, a sound bar combines multiple small speakers with signal-processing circuits that project sound throughout the room so that the listener perceives it as coming from both front and rear. Though nothing beats a full surround



array of speakers for visceral audio impact, a great sound bar can provide a very good audio experience. These all-in-one speakers can be installed on the wall under a flat-panel TV or placed atop a big-screen TV. Sound bars are quickly gaining momentum, with companies like Yamaha, Polk, and Philips all offering models. Tip: These speakers sound best when they are placed in a highly reflective room.



### SOUND BAR AND VIRTUAL SURROUND FEATURES

- Great for the space- and design-conscious
- Install sound bars on the wall under a flat panel or place atop a TV
- Less clutter in the room
- No wires on the floor, no wires to hide
- No-hassle installation
- High woman-acceptance factor (WAF)
- All are highly room dependent

## Editor's Picks: Sound Bars



### Yamaha Digital Sound Projector

Yamaha's Digital Sound Projectors use as many as 43 1-inch-wide speakers in a single cabinet, each speaker with its own amplifier to beam and reflect sound off the walls to produce a simulated multichannel surround soundfield. Just add a DVD player or other source and a subwoofer, and you have a home-theater audio system. Yamaha's IntelliBeam auto calibration feature, available on some models, makes it easy to set up in any room. **\$799–\$1,499**

### Philips Ambisound HTS8100

Philips' new Ambisound system with Smart Surround also creates a simulated multichannel listening experience from a single component, this one housing six 2.5-inch full-range speakers and two 1-inch tweeters powered by a built-in multichannel amplifier. The Ambisound system also includes a docking station through which you can use your Apple iPod or Philips GoGear. **\$799** (*pictured left*)

### Polk Audio SurroundBar

The Polk Audio SurroundBar comprises seven 3½-inch speakers and three ¼-inch tweeters in a single enclosure and is designed to connect to any A/V receiver. Used with a subwoofer, the SurroundBar delivers a 5.1-channel listening experience from a single enclosure and includes a color-coded cable for simple connection to the receiver. **\$949** (*pictured below*)



## EASY CHEAT: Virtual Surround Sound

For surround sound without having to buy five or six speakers, you might consider a virtual surround-sound system. Virtual surround arrays, also known as 2.1-channel systems, combine two stereo speakers, a subwoofer, and sophisticated signal processing to create the illusion of sound all around you. While virtual surround sound (like sound bars) can't compete with a true 5.1 to 7.1 loudspeaker surround system, much of this technology has become very advanced, creating a surround effect good enough to be worth looking into.



## Editor's Picks: Virtual Surround Systems

### Sharp SD-SP10 System

The Sharp SD-SP10 delivers home-theater surround sound from only two cabinets, each with a slender profile and a small footprint: a main speaker unit simulates surround sound via Dolby's Virtual Speaker Technology and Audistry surround processing, and a subwoofer. The system is simple to set up and use, and there's no need for rear-channel speakers or wires. A great space-saving design for a small room. \$400



### Bose 3•2•1 GS Series II 2.1-Channel DVD Home-Theater System



This space-saving 2.1-channel system combines two small stereo speakers, a subwoofer, and an AM/FM receiver with a built-in DVD player. Bose's TrueSpace surround processing provides surround sound from the two Gemstone satellite speakers and subwoofer. Typical of Bose, the system includes an easy-to-use remote control. \$1,000

### Klipsch CS-700 DVD Entertainment System

This new system uses sophisticated digital processing to simulate the sound of a full 5.1-channel home-theater speaker array using two satellites, a subwoofer, and an A/V receiver. Each satellite has a 3-inch driver and  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch tweeter with Klipsch Tractrix Horn for a big sound from a small enclosure. The subwoofer delivers good bass response, and the receiver also features Dolby's Virtual Speaker Technology for realistic surround sound from two speakers. \$1,300 (*pictured left*)

## INCONSPICUOUS HT: Home-Theater-in-a-Box

### Speaker Systems

Speakers don't have to be huge to sound good. One of the most popular home-theater speaker systems is the home-theater-in-a-box combination. Small satellite speakers reproduce the midrange and high frequencies, while a single sub takes care of the bass. But in addition to speakers, you'll also get a receiver and DVD player that hook directly to your speakers, meaning you don't have to buy a lot of separate components. Properly set up, an HTIB's sound quality can be quite good, and such systems have the added advantage of not dominating a room. The satellites can be placed on shelves, on stands, or on walls, and the small sub can be concealed under a chair or table. While you won't get the same sound quality as from a larger full-range speaker, you'll get good audio that is truly surround sound.

#### HTIB FEATURES

- Surround sound without the clutter of large speakers
- All-in-one solution
- Speakers don't dominate the room
- No-brainer installation, often with color-coded wiring
- Come with other components, such as a DVD player
- Great for the budget-conscious

### Editor's Picks: Home-Theater-in-a-Box

#### Panasonic SC-PT650 Home Theater System

This compact home theater system is also XM-ready, meaning if you want XM Satellite Radio, all you have to do is subscribe, and the SC-PT650 will receive the signal automatically, offering excellent satellite radio content. It also has a 5-disc DVD/CD player, and offers 5.1 channels of Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, and DTS audio, including a subwoofer. Plus an iPod dock that lets you listen to your iPod through your home theater system. This is a lot of system for the money. \$300



#### KEF fivetwo Series

KEF's new fivetwo Series speakers provide a virtual surround experience from two speakers for those who don't want the clutter of five or more speakers (hence the name). The Model 7 bookshelf speaker system (seven drivers) and the Model 11 floor standing speaker system (eleven drivers) both feature a "racetrack" shaped enclosure and are available in either a matte silver or high-gloss black. The speakers use KEF's Uni-Q drivers to get a realistic surround sound effect. Although any KEF Subwoofer can be used with the fivetwo Series speakers, KEF's new generation HTB2 Sub, available in the same matte silver and high-gloss black finishes, makes a good match. (Note: You'll need to plug the fivetwo Series speakers into a receiver—only the optional subwoofer is powered.) Model 7, \$1,200; Model 11(shown here), \$2,000

#### Bose Acoustimass 16 Series 6.1-Channel Home-Theater Speaker System

Bose, one of the most popular audio brands, offers this 6.1-channel speaker system with six cubical satellite speakers and a powered Acoustimass subwoofer. A 6.1-channel system adds an additional third surround speaker, this one at the back of the room, for more seamless surround effects. The six small cubes can be rotated to fill the room with sound and are ideal for mounting on the wall or ceiling. The system comes with a remote control, all speaker cables, and is easy to hook up and use.  
\$1,299





## BEST AUDIO: Traditional Speaker Systems

From column or tower floorstanders to bookshelf models, an abundance of conventional loudspeakers are available in virtually every size, shape, design, and finish. Conventional speakers offer excellent sound quality, and are preferred by critical listeners. They provide the best sound, and offer the advantage of flexible placement in the room. Of course, they also consume more space than any other type of speaker system. To do surround sound right, you need at least five speakers and a subwoofer (see sidebar, "Surround-Sound Essentials"). The proof of this

pudding is in the listening, however: full 5.1-, 6.1-, and 7.1-channel surround speaker systems sound better than any other.

### TRADITIONAL SPEAKER FEATURES

- **Best sound quality**
- **Floorstanding or bookshelf models allow flexible placement in room**
- **Offered in many styles with beautiful finishes**
- **True surround sound from 5.1-, 6.1-, or 7.1-speaker systems**

### Athena WS-60

The Athena WS-60 is suitable for mounting on a wall, or use its included stand. Each speaker features six 3½-inch drivers and a 1-inch dome tweeter. Connect the WS-60s to your A/V receiver for a true movie-theater sound experience. The sound is great and the price is right. \$200/each



### MartinLogan Mosaic

MartinLogan made its mark in audio with electrostatic loudspeakers, which use a microthin, ultralight diaphragm instead of the usual tweeter—MartinLogan calls its version Advanced Thin Film (ATF)—to radiate midrange and high-frequency sounds, combined with a traditional woofer cone for the bass. The benefits of ATF—outstanding clarity and detail—make it a great choice for critical listeners to enjoy music as much as movies. Combine two Mosiacs with three of MartinLogan's Fresco center-channel/surround speakers for high-definition multichannel sound to go with your hi-def TV. Mosaic, \$900/each; Fresco, \$1,000/each



### Definitive Technology BP7004BLA

The Definitive Technology BP7004BLA floorstanding tower speaker, designed by speaker guru Sandy Gross, is a three-way design with a built-in, 10-inch powered subwoofer, two 5½-inch midrange drivers, and two 1-inch aluminum-dome tweeters. The BP7004BLA incorporates Definitive's Bipolar technology: two sets of drivers, one facing forward, the other to the rear, create a larger sound image ideal for movies and music. \$800/each



## HIGH STYLE: In-Wall Speakers and Flat-Panel On-Wall Speakers

If room design is the most important thing to you, consider on-wall and in-wall speakers. In-wall speakers have been around for a long time. These models fit inside your wall, meaning you'll have to cut holes in your drywall to accommodate them, which in turn means you may want to enlist the help of a custom installer. Many in-walls can be painted to match your walls, and the sound quality has greatly improved over the years.

If in-walls don't appeal to you, a new category of on-wall speakers has arisen to complement the rapid growth in sales of sleek flat-panel and big-screen TVs. Like their video counterparts, on-wall speakers are impressively slim. They are also easy to attach to the wall, and are available in many styles and finishes to match almost any flat-panel TV. You'll need a 5.1-channel speaker system for a true surround-sound effect, but you can also purchase on-wall speakers in LCR (left, center, right) arrays. Of course, with on-walls, you have to deal with the wires that connect the speakers to the amplifier or receiver, but these can be installed behind the walls for a truly finished look, if you want to go the extra mile.

### ON-WALL AND IN-WALL FEATURES

- **On-walls available in a variety of styles and finishes to match any flat-panel TV**
- **In-walls mount flush to the walls, blending in with walls**
- **Take up no floor space**
- **Speaker wires must be installed behind walls for a neat appearance**
- **Aesthetically pleasing**
- **You will need a subwoofer for full bass response**

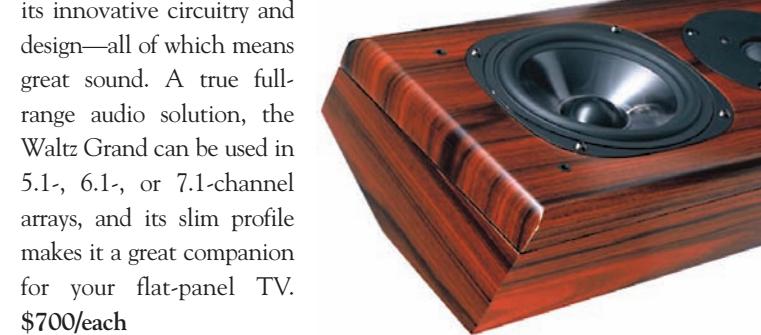
## Editor's Picks: In-Wall Speakers and Flat-Panel On-Wall Speakers

### SpeakerCraft Aim8One In-Ceiling

This round in-ceiling model from in-wall speaker expert SpeakerCraft delivers a full range of sound from an 8-inch woofer and 1-inch silk dome tweeter. The speaker discretely blends into your ceiling, and the pivoting design allows you to aim the sound where you want—toward the audience for example. You may need a custom installer to help you install these speakers, but you can say goodbye to bulky speaker cabinets with this unobtrusive design. \$213

### Vienna Acoustics Waltz Grand

This gorgeous on-wall speaker handles up to 180 watts of power, has a silk-dome tweeter and two 6-inch cones, and creates powerful bass through its innovative circuitry and design—all of which means great sound. A true full-range audio solution, the Waltz Grand can be used in 5.1-, 6.1-, or 7.1-channel arrays, and its slim profile makes it a great companion for your flat-panel TV. \$700/each



### Klipsch Synergy SLX

The Klipsch Synergy SLX is a two-way on-wall speaker that comes with a bracket for wall mounting that can be rotated as much as 30 degrees to aim the sound directly at the listener. You can also mount the speaker on the included stand. Use two for stereo, or five plus a subwoofer for true surround sound. \$350/each (pictured left) •



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# Surround-Sound Essentials

Most movies released on DVD (and lots of multichannel music) are produced in 5.1-channel surround sound. This means they sound best when played back through a system with the left-, center-, and right-channel speakers in the front of the room, two surround speakers behind or to the sides of the listener, and a subwoofer for bass effects. With music coming from the left and right speakers, dialogue from the center-channel speaker, and sound effects from the two surround speakers, the outputs of the five main channels of a 5.1 system combine to produce a soundfield that envelops the audience and puts them in the middle of the action. The ".1" channel of a 5.1 system is the LFE or low-frequency effects channel. The low frequencies are sent to the subwoofer, which is not a full-range speaker, reproduces only these bass sounds.

There are also systems with 6.1 or 7.1 sound channels. The additional channels have been added for even greater ambience and more enveloping surround sound, and are particularly useful in larger rooms. There are DVD releases with 6.1- and 7.1-channel soundtracks, which give you the most realistic surround from more speakers.

## Tips for Getting the Best Sound From Your System

- When shopping for a home-theater audio system, always select the speakers based on listening to them with your own ears—everyone's tastes are different.
- Always include a subwoofer if you can, an essential component for movies and music.
- When selecting a 5.1-channel speaker system, select speakers from the same manufacturer to ensure balanced sound quality.
- If buying a prepackaged system, consider purchasing better speaker wire for the best performance.
- For the best sound quality with traditional speaker systems, place the system in a fairly acoustically "dead" room. A dead room means that sound doesn't bounce off the walls or other hard surfaces, causing it to be too "reflective." Adding carpeting (or area rugs) and drapes can help make your room less reflective and audio more lifelike.
- For sound bars and virtual surround speakers the opposite is true. Try not to deaden your room. These speakers work best in a reflective space. In fact, they depend on room reflections to work optimally.
- Try to place all speakers in a surround-sound system equidistant from the listening position.



- For a 5.1-channel system, place the left, center, and right front speakers at your ear height when seated, and the surround speakers slightly higher and behind your listening position.
- The center-channel speaker should be placed as close as possible to the screen (above, below, or behind). Never put a center speaker to the side of the display.
- For the best sound, use speaker stands for bookshelf speakers rather than placing them in a cabinet, on a shelf, or against the wall.
- Use the A/V receiver's built-in test-tone generator when setting speaker levels, or buy a self-calibrating receiver.
- Many newer A/V receivers incorporate features that make setup and sound adjustment simple. These self-calibrating models have a special microphone connected to the receiver that measures the acoustic properties of the room, then makes adjustments to set the correct volume level for each speaker in the system and thus achieve the best balance of sound.



**LG - THE WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF FLAT PANELS.**

**LG - THE WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF FLAT PANELS.**



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Ziggy Marley on Sirius Satellite Radio

# BATTLE OF THE AIRWAVES

With XM and Sirius merging and HD radio gaining momentum, this guide will help you sort out what is what on the new frontier of audio entertainment

By KRISSY RUSHING

You've heard the rumblings about the \$13 billion merger between XM and Sirius satellite radio providers, and you may want to know what it means for you as a subscriber or potential subscriber. Rest assured, the merger, expected to be completed by the end of 2007, looks like a good thing for both.

The two companies say that together, they will offer enhanced content with users having the added benefit of choosing radio stations à la carte. Both also say that together, they will offer greater content choices, including more commercial-free music channels, real-time traffic, and rear-seat video programming, as well as new features like advanced data services including enhanced traffic, weather, and infotainment. The XM/Sirius merger is also poised to offer accelerated technological innovation, with the merged company planning to develop and introduce a wider range of lower-cost multi-functional radios.

We are looking forward to these innovations and new features, but in the meantime consumers still want their satellite radio. The two companies are operating as independent entities until the merger is approved. In other words, it's business as usual until sometime in 2008. Some folks, however, are hesitant to purchase satellite radio services and products from

either company, worried about what effect the merger will have on compatibility and subscription rates.

First thing's first: If you have existing XM or Sirius radios, they will continue to work in perpetuity with your existing satellite service. In other words, if you're paying for XM, you will continue to get the XM content you've been getting, and the same goes for Sirius. However, in order to take advantage of the benefits of the merged company's new combined programming menu you will have to buy a new radio unit when the time comes, which could be awhile.

The jury is still out on what channels will be eliminated on the new combined service due to overlapping content between the two satellite providers. For example, is there room on the airwaves for both XM's Oprah & Friends and Sirius' Martha Stewart programs? Only time will tell, and odds are that unique content will be retained on both channels. XM states

that the new service will combine shows, however, where there is obvious redundancy. For example, both services offer an 80s channel, so the 80s channels will be combined—whether you are a new subscriber to the combined service or a previous XM or Sirius subscriber. Both camps say that existing pricing structures will stay in place, with some lower tiers of pricing being introduced, as well as premium packages as



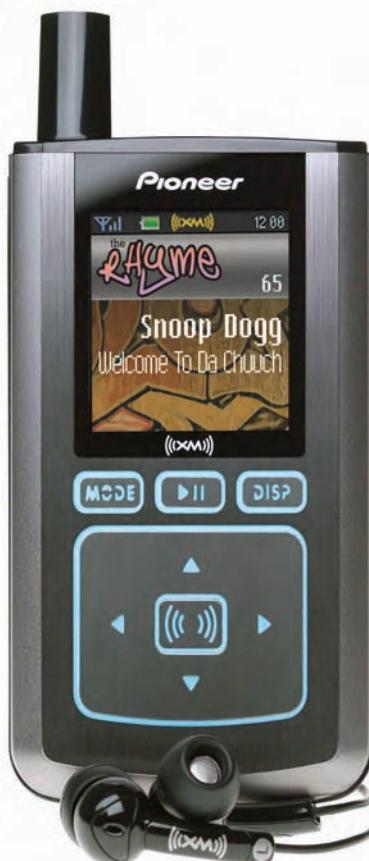
Polk's format-agnostic I-Sonic entertainment system



*XM service comes standard on Hyundai's 2007 Santa Fe.*

programming is expanded upon.

It's business as usual on the store shelves, as well. While you could wait until the merger to buy new XM/Sirius products, there are some great pricing deals on current products, whether they are portable devices, home-entertainment models, or car devices, and because you will continue to get the programming you are paying for, why wait? Many newer devices allow you to time-shift content; it's like TiVo for radio. You can fast forward through time-shifted content, skipping, for example, over songs you don't like. Many new portables, such as XM's SkyFi3, even let you download MP3s, making them combo radio/MP3 players.



easy. XM's plug-and-play technology lets you use the Inno in your car as well as at the gym, and an optional car kit features a built-in wireless FM transmitter to turn any FM radio into an XM radio. \$250

Both XM and Sirius are urging consumers not to wait until the merger is approved to buy a new satellite radio or pick a service; it could be well into 2008 before the new combined satellite service is offered. If you do plan to purchase a new satellite receiver before the end of 2007, make your purchase based on programming preferences. For example, in addition to a wide variety of commercial-free music, XM has Major League Baseball, NHL, and Oprah & Friends, among other stations. While Sirius offers Nascar, NFL, UEFA Soccer, Martha Stewart, and Howard Stern to name a few. For a complete list of programs offered, go to [www.sirius.com](http://www.sirius.com) to [www.xmradio.com](http://www.xmradio.com) and compare your choices.

Chances are, if you are purchasing a new car, either XM or Sirius will come standard or as an option. For example, Sirius is now standard on 80 percent of new Mercedes Benz models, including the S-Class and CLS. Audi, Lincoln, and Land Rover, among others, also offer Sirius as standard. XM service likewise comes standard on Hyundai's Santa Fe, as well as the Lexus LX 570, and all 2008 Infinity models, to name just a few. The automotive sector, both before market and after market, is a big one for both satellite radio providers.

The rapidly evolving "audio entertainment" market, however, is not just for satellite radio. In addition to the free over-the-air content of standard AM/FM radio, users are now streaming content to their iPods and mobile phones, Internet radio is catching on, and HD Radio is gaining steam.

Let's focus on HD Digital Radio for a moment. There is

## Editor's Picks

These are some of our favorite picks for satellite and HD radio.

*Note: prices do not include the cost of subscription to either XM or Sirius satellite radio.*

### ◀ Pioneer Inno Portable XM Satellite Radio

This portable XM Satellite Radio receiver records up to 50 hours of XM content, in addition to MP3 and WMA files. That means you can listen to XM content, even if you are in a place where you normally wouldn't get XM reception, such as underground in the subway. A full-color bright LCD display makes reading track info



### ▲ Polk I-Sonic Entertainment System

We'd be remiss if we didn't give the Polk I-Sonic home entertainment system a nod in this article. This little device is format-agnostic; it can receive HD Radio with multicasting, XM Satellite Radio, Sirius Satellite Radio, and standard AM/FM radio. It is also an iPod & MP3 player dock, DVD player, and CD player. Because Polk is first and foremost an audio company, sound quality is very good on this unit, especially in a smaller room, such as a bedroom or the kitchen. \$559

nothing "high-def" about HD radio. In fact, no one really knows what the "HD" in HD radio stands for. HD Radio is, in fact, on par with the quality you get with a CD.

In May 2007, HD Radio added HD2 multicast formats to 15 new markets, completing the rollout of 100 markets in an 18-month period. What's different about HD Radio is that it is higher quality than traditional AM/FM—although it is broadcast over the FM spectrum—and there is no subscription fee like satellite radio.

You'll start to notice more and more HD radio units hitting store shelves, with more than 50 different units currently available for the home and automotive market. On the auto side, companies like BMW, Jaguar, and others offer it in some form—whether as a standard feature or as an option.

Whether you are listening to HD Radio, satellite radio, or even Internet radio, one thing is for certain, the battle of the airwaves is about to get even more heated, but it only means higher-quality audio and better programming for consumers like you and me. •



### Delphi XM Audio System >

Tune in to XM Satellite Radio whether you're at home or on the road with this audio system bundle. The plug-and-play solution lets you take the receiver part of the radio and use it in the car through your stereo system, or in this portable boombox outside by the pool or at the beach. A pause/replay feature continuously and automatically saves the last 30 minutes of XM programming, and 30 channel presets let you tune into your favorite stations with ease. \$150

### < Tivoli Model Satellite Radio

We love Tivoli Audio's products for their old-school styling. This tabletop unit is no exception, the Model Satellite AM/FM/Sirius satellite table radio has good looks and brains. Crafted from furniture-grade cherry wood with a metallic taupe faceplate, the Model Satellite lets you search by artist, song, or channel. It's compatible with the Pod and other MP3 players, to boot, and includes a handy remote control. \$250







Best

PORTABLE

# WIRELESS WONDERS

Get ready for a new generation of cell phones on steroids—led by the new Apple iPhone

By STEWART WOLPIN

**A**h, for the good old days, when cell phones just made calls. Right before our eyes, this indispensable device is morphing into something that lets you watch live television, enjoy your favorite music—and even play games while you're stuck in traffic. What's forcing this dramatic change is the multifaceted Apple iPhone—which hasn't yet hit the market.

The Apple iPhone, due in June from provider Cingular, has generated headlines and buzz since January, when it was announced by Apple CEO Steve Jobs. Because of this potentially industry-shaking introduction, competing cell-phone makers and carriers are working feverishly to raise the level of their multimedia game to meet the iPhone threat.

Unlike the Apple iPod, which dominates portable audio, the iPhone has some very serious competition. Verizon has

just introduced live TV broadcasting to cell phones via V CAST Mobile TV, and Sprint lowered the price per track of its online music from \$2.49 to a more iTunes-like 99¢. Both of these top the iPhone, which can't receive live TV or offer wireless iTunes connectivity. And while it has the coolest interface this side of the iPod, the iPhone is expensive. A model with 4 gigabytes of memory is \$499, while an 8GB edition is \$599—hardly competitive with the free phone specials we're bombarded with daily.

Live TV and music are the major multimedia features found with today's advanced cell phones, but they're by no means the only ones. And to handle all these decidedly non-cell-phone functions, handsets are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Here's a roundup of multimedia cell phones from the wireless giants who plan to compete with the iPhone head to head.

## A TV IN YOUR POCKET

Cell-phone video is usually streamed to your phone via the cell network, but video signals must be extremely compressed to be able to squeeze through the thin wireless pipeline. In short, they're not very high quality. And even then, video streams are constantly interrupted by buffering delays, even with the fastest current networks.

Verizon is widening the streaming/buffering bottleneck with its V CAST Mobile TV service, which launched in March with eight channels: CBS Mobile, Comedy Central, ESPN Mobile TV, Fox Mobile, MTV, NBC2Go, NBC News2Go (mostly CNBC programming), and Nickelodeon. Powered by the FLO TV technology, from Qualcomm subsidiary MediaFLO, Mobile TV actually can carry 20 channels, although plans to expand beyond the current eight channels have not been announced.

By the time you read this, it's likely that half of the nation's major markets will be receiving FLO TV broadcasts from Verizon, with many of the other large markets scheduled to be online by the end of the year. You can get four channels (Fox, NBC, NBC News, CBS) for a monthly fee of \$13, all eight plus the video-on-demand channel for \$15, or the complete channel lineup—plus video-clip downloads, mobile Web access, unlimited e-mail

airtime, and unlimited e-mail—for \$25. Later this year, Verizon will be joined by AT&T/Cingular's FLO TV service.

Verizon sells two FLO TV-compatible phones: the T-bar LG VX-9400 (\$199 with contract and rebates), which is equipped with a unique 2.2-inch swivel screen; and the slider-style Samsung SCH-u620 (\$149), which has a 2-inch screen. Both phones display a familiar grid TV program guide, have small telescoping antennas for TV reception, and buffer-free V CAST Mobile TV reception, whether standing still or in a moving vehicle. The pair also feature 1.3-megapixel cameras, Bluetooth Stereo that works only with music but not for TV listening, a 2.5mm headphone jack, and MP3/WMA V CAST Music compatibility. V CAST Mobile TV sounds (and looks) wonderful, but some industry experts wonder if we'll actually watch TV on our cell phones.

Americans not watching TV wherever and whenever? They're kidding, right?



By the time you read this, it's likely that half of the nation's major markets will be receiving FLO TV broadcasts from Verizon

T-bar LG VX-9400

## STREAMING VIDEO

AT&T/Cingular (Cingular Video), Sprint (PowerVision), and Verizon (V CAST) each offers a combination of streamed video offerings, mostly clips two to five minutes long and shorts from HBO, CNN, Fox, CBS, NBC, ESPN, Comedy Central, and more. There's also a plethora of exclusive specialty channels. Some of these videos are free, but most cost extra, either as a package of channels for a flat monthly fee, individual channels for a monthly subscription fee, or pay-per-view/video-on-demand programs.

Separate from these carrier-provided TV services are several third-party streaming TV providers. These include MobiTV and GoTV, both of which offer a wide variety of brand-name and proprietary video and music content for a monthly fee and are available through Cingular and Sprint.

In addition, entrepreneurs are trying to take advantage of the new venue. Most prominent of these is Robert Redford. As part of the Sundance Film Festival Global Short Film Project, Redford's institute has commissioned five original "made for mobile" short films, which are available by texting "FILM" to +44 762-480-7811. (Don't worry—according to Sundance, no international phone charges will be applied.)

## DIY VIDEO

With the success of YouTube.com and similar sites, it was only a matter of time before there was a do-it-yourself video service for cell phones. Later this year, this void will be filled by a new service, Look@Me, from mobile video supplier Vidiator. Look@Me lets you distribute your homemade videos to friends, family, and anyone else whose phone number you have.

This free service lets you upload your videos to the Look@Me site, which downconverts your opus to a size that you can stream through any cell network. From the Look@Me site, you enter the phone numbers of your recipients. They receive a text message with a link that lets them download your video to their phone. Through the service, you can even stream live video from a Web cam to your "subscribers."

The best phones for video are obviously those with the largest screens—smartphones such as the Windows Mobile 5.0-powered Cingular 8525 (\$399) and Verizon XV6700 (\$399), both of which have 2.8-inch screens. Also good is the Motorola Q from Sprint (\$99), with a 2.5-inch display.

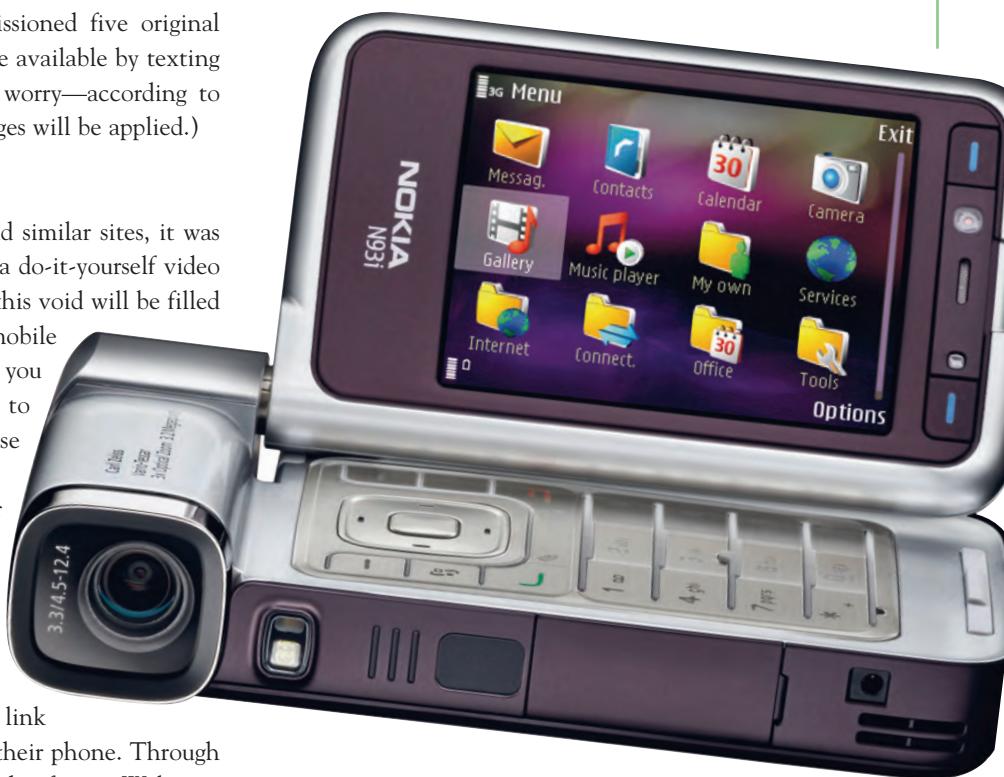
## GAMES ON THE GO

Most cell phones come with a couple of sample games, and Verizon, Sprint, and Cingular/AT&T all sell games. But not

all cell games are created equal, and each phone has a unique layout. As a result, game makers must re-configure their titles to not only work on most makes of cell phone, but to assign action keys and joystick controls to the buttons on a particular cell-phone model, which can vary game play from handset to handset. Each carrier also uses slightly different technologies for its games, and offers a limited selection of titles. As a result, your favorite game may not be available for your phone, or be transferable to a new handset.

Most new games are now called "3D," with graphics and game play far superior to older, "2D" titles. Cell-phone games are sometimes offered for free for a limited play time, but usually carry either a monthly subscription fee of \$3–\$6, or unlimited play for a slightly higher fee.

Nokia N93i



A carrier doesn't always carry all the games that are compatible with its phones, or with its older models. As a result, a number of cell-phone "content aggregators" have sprung up to meet the sudden demand for not only cell-phone video games but all manner of cell-phone multimedia content. The leading cell-phone content supplier is Thumbplay ([www.thumbplay.com](http://www.thumbplay.com)), which offers gaggles of games, music tracks, ring tones, graphics, and other fun cell-specific multimedia.

## MUSIC ON THE MOVE

No cell phone could play tracks bought on the popular iTunes website—until now. Beginning in May, iTunes is scheduled to begin selling tracks from EMI's vast song library, without those confusing digital rights management (DRM) issues that limit your ability to play songs on many devices. This development actually eliminates one of the iPhone's primary advantages—the ability to play iTunes tracks—over other musical cell phones. But a cell phone that can play songs bought at iTunes isn't necessarily an iPhone. Only Samsung, Sony Ericsson, and Motorola make cell-phone/music players, and the inexperience of the rest of the cell phone manufacturers has been evident in many so-called first-generation music phones. But the next crop of music phones is catching up with dedicated music players in both ergonomics and music-player software.

Most of Verizon Wireless's V CAST Music phones and Sprint's PowerVision phones offer a plethora of music-playback options, such as playlist creation, equalization (EQ) settings, segmentation by artist, shuffle play, and other MP3-player niceties. Many even offer FM radios, which iPods don't. One of the major drawbacks of cell phones as music players is

their lack of memory—even with a 2GB card, you'll have to be selective about which songs you take with you. But AOL now offers Winamp Remote on Mobile, a version of the popular Windows audio program that lets you access all your PC music through your cell phone. Simply go to [www.winamp.com](http://www.winamp.com), download the PC and mobile version of the software, create your account, then access the mobile-based Winamp WAP website on your phone to stream and play your music.

If you want a cell phone you can sing along with, look for one with either stereo Bluetooth or a 2.5mm headphone jack, which enlarges the available headphone pool. One of the best headphone solutions is the Plantronics Pulsar 260 stereo Bluetooth earphones. You get two pieces: a stereo Bluetooth dongle and a set of comfortable stereo in-ear earphones with an in-line mic and a 2.5mm jack. You can plug the earphones into the dongle for wireless listening, or directly into the 2.5mm jack in your non-Bluetooth cell phone. See below for a list of the best music phones we've recently used.

All of this adds up to a cell phone that differs quite a lot from "the good old days" of just a few years ago. And they make phone calls, too.

## THE BEST MUSIC PHONES



**< Nokia 5300 XpressMusic** This squat, two-toned, soap-sized, slider-type phone has low-tech external music-control buttons that function regardless of what else the phone is doing. Aside from its adroit music functionality, the 5300 XpressMusic can play MP3, AAC, and protected WMA files, has an FM radio, its microSD slot can handle a 2GB card, and its battery will crank out tunes for up to 12 hours. **T-Mobile, \$99**



**<Motorola ROKR Z6m** No need to worry about headphone compatibility with this sleek EV-DO slider—it's equipped with a standard 3.5mm stereo headphone jack. It also offers MP3, AAC, and WMA music compatibility, touch music controls on the front, stereo Bluetooth, 2GB microSD slot, a generous 2.2-inch display, and a 2-megapixel camera. **Verizon, Price Not Yet Determined**



**> LG Fusic** It looks sort of like an iPod and behaves sort of like an iPod. Aside from that, it's got a built-in FM transmitter to push your music through your car's stereo system. In July, LG will start selling the 570, a sleek clamshell-style phone that includes all of these features and functions, as well as a dedicated plane-mode button, which lets you access your phone's key function on an airplane, with the radio turned off. The phone will probably be dubbed the Fusic II. **Sprint, \$99**



**> Samsung UpStage m620** One side of the 0.37-inch-thin, EV-DO-compatible, candy-bar-shaped UpStage m620 looks like a standard cell phone, with a small LCD and a numeric keypad. The other side is an MP3 player with a 2.1-inch screen and music transport controls. You even get a 64MB microSD card. And when the UpStage is attached to its innovative extended battery wallet, it can give you an iPod-like 16 hours of music. **Sprint, \$149**

## THE BEST CELL-PHONE CAMERAS

Cell phones aren't going to replace standalone digital cameras or camcorders anytime soon, but cell phone cameras are becoming increasingly popular. Small, low-quality candid snaps and videos from cell phones can easily be passed around via e-mail and Multimedia Message Service (MMS). Just ask Michael Richards.

In recent years, many problems of cell-cam image quality and ergonomics have been addressed. Sony Ericsson's K-series and Nokia's N-series 3-megapixel cameras are all two-sided devices: a cell phone on one face, an ergonomically correct camera with Carl Zeiss lenses on the other, all snapping quality images that rival results from inexpensive point-and-shoot cameras.

There are many ways to extract photos from your phone. You can connect your cell to a PC or Mac with the oft-included USB cable. You can swap the memory card. And the Bluetooth option is easier than you think, so long as your PC is Bluetooth-capable (accessories to enable this are readily available).

A fourth option is direct-to-Web-based storage. Pictavision ([www.pictavision.com](http://www.pictavision.com)) and Sharpcast ([www.sharpcast.com](http://www.sharpcast.com)) are downloadable applications for cell phones and PCs that let you upload your cell snaps to online photo-album storage sites, from which you can edit, share, or print them. •

**What's so special about the iPhone?**

From a pure specs point of view, the Apple iPhone is an iPod with a 3.5-inch touchscreen, a 2-megapixel camera, Bluetooth Stereo, WiFi, mapping capabilities, and it's an EDGE cell phone with email like a Blackberry. But like most Apple products, iPhone promises to be far more than the sum of these parts.

For instance, the touchscreen will have gyroscopic sensors in it that sense when you're bringing the iPhone up to your ear to be used as a cell phone. When it senses this, it intuitively turns off the touchscreen so you don't activate it with your cheek or ear by accident.

The iPhone has visual random-access voice mail, which shows you a list of callers onscreen. You simply touch the call you want to hear instead of having to listen to all your messages linearly.

iPhone also uses the complete Mac OS X operating system, not a crippled "mobile" version. One advantage of this is complete HTML Web pages like you see on your desktop or laptop. You simply touch a link to surf.

Most of all, iPhone promises to be as intuitive as all Apple products. For instance, iPhone has no buttons on the device—every function is controlled via the touchscreen, including a soft QWERTY keyboard for texting.

All is not perfect in iPhone-land, however. You'll have to memorize some "multi-touch" combination finger movements to manipulate what's onscreen, for instance. Its 2-megapixel camera has escaped Apple's innovative eye—it's the same plastic pinhole lens found on "ordinary" cell cameras. There's no GPS functionality. And the phone connects to Cingular's EDGE network, not its speedier HSDPA system. This means no wireless iTunes purchasing capabilities.

But considering what iPhone brings to the table—and how it will force other cell phone makers to improve their wares—these small gripes are like complaining that a Mozart opera has too many notes, Manhattan is too crowded, and Simon Cowell is sometimes cruel. All may be true, but would you rather do without?

**LOST &**

**FOUND**

# How to take the [bleep] out of “Where the [bleep] are we?”

Best

PORTABLE

By BILL HOWARD

**W**ho gets lost more often—men or women? Who's less willing to stop and ask for directions? Those questions remain the stuff of comedy routines, but with the surge of portable navigation devices (PNDs), they may become moot. For anywhere from \$200 to \$1,000, you can have a portable GPS system that calculates your route over the river, through the woods, all the way to Grandmother's house, as it delivers turn-by-turn instructions and moving maps.

There's lots of good news for would-be purchasers: Every one of these devices, no matter how inexpensive, will get you there. Costs are coming down, so it's possible to buy a decent PND for less than \$500 and sometimes as little as \$200. And today you've got more choices than ever: PNDs with big screens, compact models that fit in purses or jacket pockets, and pocket PCs and cell phones with navigation.

## HOW THEY WORK

Every portable navigation device works the same way. A GPS receiver in the device picks up signals from the 30 global-positioning satellites orbiting 12,600 miles above the earth, and calculates your position, speed, and altitude. Their accuracy can be within 10 feet—the width of a typical highway lane. Your location is pinpointed on maps loaded on the navigation device. For portable devices, they're on memory chips or a removable SD memory card, and can be updated by connecting to your PC. With built-in car navigation, the information is stored on a DVD-ROM. The data also includes points of interest (POI) such as golf courses, churches, hospitals, restaurants, ATMs, and gas stations. Every device knows the location of Yankee Stadium in New York and of Mile High Stadium in Denver (and may or may not know that the latter is also called Invesco Field); more important to you is whether it knows the vest-pocket park behind the DPW building two towns away, where you're playing softball tonight.

You enter your destination by keying in the state, city, and street address, or a point of interest. Some PNDs are finicky, balking if you enter Springfield when it's really Springfield Township. Some search outward from your present location for the nearest matching street names. Most also let you scroll around the map, then center the crosshairs on your destination. A few portable and most car-navigation devices also let



you speak the commands, which they recognize with varying degrees of success.

When you've entered the destination info, you get a zoomable moving map overlaid with your route, and turn-by-turn instructions—visual and spoken. The map shows the road you're on, the name of the next road you turn on to, and the distance to the turn. As a turn comes up, most PNDs overlay a big arrow showing your turning direction at a glance. Virtually all let you display maps with a choice of what's "up" at the top of the map: north or direction of travel. Some show bird's-eye views in which nearby streets are displayed as large, other streets smaller as they become more distant, and your destination as a small checkered flag.

## WHICH IS BEST FOR YOU?

The most common PND is the portable car-navigation unit, which clips to the dashboard or windshield of your car, runs off the car's accessory power socket (and may have its own internal battery), and has a screen 3.5 to 5 inches diagonal. If the screen is 2.5 to 3.5 inches and it has battery power, then it's a handheld GPS unit best suited for those who want a portable GPS to carry along on business trips, or vacationers who want to navigate urban canyons. (But see the limits below on what handhelds can't do for pedestrians.) Some states, such as Minnesota, have windshield-obstruction laws that appear to apply to portable car-navigation devices.

Cellular providers now offer phones with built-in GPS capabilities, and they're pretty good—especially Verizon's VZ Navigator service. Typically, you pay \$10 a month (per phone, not family) or \$3 a day. Most any phone with a GPS chip can be upgraded to support navigation, and the way it works is pretty well known to cell customers: You buy a new phone, discounted, then lock in to a one- or two-year contract. Our suggestion: When your contract runs out, make sure the next phone you get has GPS capabilities; you'll find some phones for less than \$50.

If you like to plan out trips in advance, buy software for your laptop or desktop PC, such as Microsoft Streets & Trips or DeLorme Street Atlas USA Plus—about \$50 for the software, or \$100 to \$125 including a USB plug-in GPS receiver that lets you take your laptop on the road. Similar software can convert handheld portable digital assistants (PDAs) to PNDs; your best bet is a PDA with integrated GPS (a few have it) or Bluetooth for connecting wirelessly to a GPS receiver. If your car radio is removable, with what's called a single-DIN or double-DIN opening (about 2 x 7 or 4 x 7 inches, respectively), it's possible to upgrade to a CD/radio receiver with a slide-out display that's also a navigation system and, typically, a DVD player (when the car is stopped). These displays will be bigger than on portable GPS units.

The gold standard is the in-car navigation system, but it's also gold-plated, typically running from \$1,500 to \$2,500 (update discs, should you desire them, cost from \$150 to

\$200). In theory, in-car navigation should be most accurate, because the GPS receiver is backed up by a gyroscopic motion sensor and the car odometer; it's why your GPS works when you're in a tunnel, and why it's spot-on accurate, meaning it shows you crossing the state line just as you actually are crossing the state line. In practice, however, all the other types of GPS have pretty much caught up. In-car navigation is also the safest (big buttons, voice input, big screen, no windshield obstruction), and, because these systems are built-in, they're least likely to be stolen.

## BUYING ADVICE

A portable navigation device can be a big help. If you travel by car, get one with the biggest screen that doesn't overwhelm the car; if you want it for business or vacation travel, too, look for a slim, portable unit with a 3.5-inch display and battery power. Try the interface and see if it seems easy and intuitive to use. Punch in a few places you'd go that aren't well known and see if they're in the POI database. We recommend getting a unit with an integrated battery; at some point, you'll find it useful. Decide for yourself if you want to pay extra for bells and whistles (MP3 player, photo viewer, alarm clock). Don't worry so much about who provides the underlying maps. It used to be that Navteq had the better data, while TeleAtlas was more affordable; now both are quite good. While sub-\$300 prices are enticing, you may find greater satisfaction paying a bit more for a newer GPS chipset, bigger screen, and easier controls. If your phone contract is almost up, consider getting a phone that's navigation-capable, so that option will be available down the road.

## OUR FAVORITE GPS DEVICES

Here are some of the best GPS units small and large, cheap and not-so-cheap. All typically include a bracket with suction-cup mount, a car power adapter, a USB connector for updates and sometimes recharging, and a jack for an external GPS antenna (so you can mount the unit off the dash).



**Alpine Blackbird** Alpine gives you the best of both worlds: portability and permanence. The somewhat large Blackbird gives you walk-around portability and a dashboard cradle, plus optional real-time traffic information. You can also connect it to an optional Alpine dock or an in-dash DVD player. Then it's like a built-in car-navigation system with touchscreen and 6.5-inch display. **\$500 Blackbird only**



< **Garmin nüvi 680** Garmin provides virtually every feature you'd want in a premium portable car GPS: a 4.3-inch display, Bluetooth, anti-theft code, 2D and 3D (bird's-eye) perspectives, battery, location-based services (LBS) through MSN Direct (traffic conditions, gas prices, movie listings, weather), and a travel kit that includes an MP3 player, photo viewer, currency converter, and world clock. \$1,000



< **TomTom ONE XL** One of the best shirt-pocket, or handheld, GPS navigators, the TomTom ONE XL now has a 4.3-inch touchscreen (as opposed to its predecessor's 3.5-inch screen), integrated battery, and a simple interface. While the ONE XL provides spoken instructions, it's not complete text-to-speech; for example, street names aren't pronounced. The slide-in mounting bracket is especially easy to use. \$399



< **LG enV** It's a dessert topping and a floor wax—or, in this case, a Verizon cell phone with Bluetooth, a QWERTY keyboard, camcorder, music player, and navigation. As you key in an address, the phone locates you by the nearest cell towers, then finds satellites overhead. For each route, you download a small map (takes less than a minute), then off you go. \$250 (phone), \$10 a month (navigation)

**Navman F20 >** For about \$300, you can get basic navigation from a respected maker and the well-regarded SirfStar III chipset. Navman's F20 has a 3.5-inch touchscreen and 3.5-hour battery. You give up multi-segment routing and full text-to-speech (but not "Turn Left"). While it's touchscreen, you still get dedicated volume buttons on the side, something even pricey car navigation units typically lack. \$300

## 5 PND FEATURES WORTH HAVING

- 1. State-of-the-art chipset:** Newer PNDs pinpoint your location faster, provide most accurate positioning. Sirf's SirfStar III is the current benchmark.
- 2. Multi-segment routing:** Set up the day's three or four stops before you leave the house.
- 3. Real-time traffic information (RTTI):** Radio data signal downloads information about accidents, traffic tie-ups. Not always as timely or as accurate as you'd like, but still better than radio traffic reports.
- 4. Bluetooth:** Use the built-in speaker and microphone to give you hands-free calling with a Bluetooth cell phone.
- 5. Home button:** It's nice if the main menu has a take-me-home button, especially for less-skilled family members. Better: two to five "favorites" buttons for most-used destinations.



Type	Description	Pros	Cons
Navigation Systems: How They Stack Up	Portable Car Navigation	Mounts on dash or windshield. 3.5–5-inch screen. May have battery power. \$300–\$1,000	Nearly as good as integrated car navigation.
	Handheld	Fits in pocket. 2.5–3.5-inch screen. Battery-powered. Also specialized versions for hikers, boaters, golfers. \$200–\$600.	Great for business travelers, vacationers on foot.
	Car Radio	Replace car radio with navigation unit (screen typically slides out and up). \$900–\$1,800	As good as integrated navigation.
	Car Navigation	Integrated into car at factory, typically with speech recognition. Some with real-time traffic information. 6–9-inch screen. \$1,500–\$2,500	Big screen, big database, best accuracy.
	Laptop	Navigation software loaded on laptop. GPS receiver connects via USB jack. \$50–\$150	Big screen. Easy to pre-plan trips.
	Cell Phone	Phone doubles as navigation system. \$10/month or \$3/day	Always with you.

## WHAT THEY DON'T DO ... YET

Useful as they are, PNDs aren't yet perfect. Many of the smaller devices lack detailed maps of college campuses and large amusement parks. While many show pedestrian or bicycle routes, meaning you can walk against a one-way street or perhaps bicycle diagonally through a big park, they don't let you plan an urban trip using buses, subways, and trams. And most don't yet have an internal compass to correctly orient you, but that's coming.

While a PND can guide you correctly through most of a 300-mile trip, it may not show the locally known shortcut you take those last five miles to your house. And if you run multiple navigation devices at the same time (a Stupid Pet Trick that reviewers do to entertain themselves), you'll find they offer different routes through towns and cities. For the most part, a portable GPS lacks information about highway tollbooths (let alone how much the toll is, or if electronic toll-tag readers are used, or if there are high-speed toll-tag lanes), speed limits, or stop signs. Many of these things are in roadway databases, but there's concern about liability if, for instance, the database doesn't include a stop sign, or one put up only six months before; or if it cites a speed limit as 65 mph when it's since been reduced to 55. Some GPS units now offer real-time traffic information. Our take: A PND is more useful than nothing, but it's still not as accurate as we'd like.

If you're a hiker, there are special ruggedized PNDs with topographic trail maps, but all such devices carry the same, sensible warning: Don't go into the woods with a GPS unless you can figure your way out without one. Ditto for boaters, although for recreational boaters on lakes, and salt-water sailors who stay within sight of land, a portable GPS does a fair job of marking the shoreline and marinas—so long as it doesn't fall overboard. For the most part, these specialty devices don't include turn-by-turn navigation.

Many PNDs still lack anti-theft unlock codes entered by the user. We believe all vendors should make this available, just as makers of car stereos have, essentially ending the theft problem. British newspapers have run scare stories about GPS thieves smashing a car window, then hitting the navigation system's Home button and finding their way back to your house to burglarize it. But these stories don't explain how the PND tells the burglar that no one's home, or that you've got a house alarm. If you're nervous, we suggest you enter as your home address the house two or three doors down—the neighbor who raises Dobermans.

To differentiate themselves, PNDs offer features, sometimes as extra-cost options. Some, for instance, claim to locate the cheapest gasoline in your area, or movies playing at nearby theaters. We've found that not enough retailers are tracked to make this information accurate. Real-time traffic information helps—some—and it will get better. •



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# accessori<sup>i</sup>ze

An industry has built up around the Apple iPod, with manufacturers producing all sorts of accessories to help you get the most from your player

By STEWART WOLPIN



IMAGES COURTESY OF iATTIRE.NET

**A**n iPod without accessories is like a dinner without wine—it might be good but it's not as much fun. More than likely, your iPod contains a good portion of your music collection, and possibly some video. Thanks to various manufacturers looking to capitalize on this iconic product, there are plenty of other ways to enjoy your iPod than just waltzing around with those white earbuds. Think of your iPod as a portable hard drive, not just a portable music player, and you'll begin to grasp how this versatile little device can change the way you live. So after you've purchased a protective case—far and away the most popular iPod accessory—there are other essentials you should consider in order to enjoy your music and video wherever and whenever.

The first step is new headphones, possibly the best investment you can make. While the earbuds supplied with the iPod may deliver adequate sound, consider higher-end 'phones to get audio of



Think of your iPod as a portable hard drive, and you'll begin to grasp how this versatile little device can change the way you live

**Best**

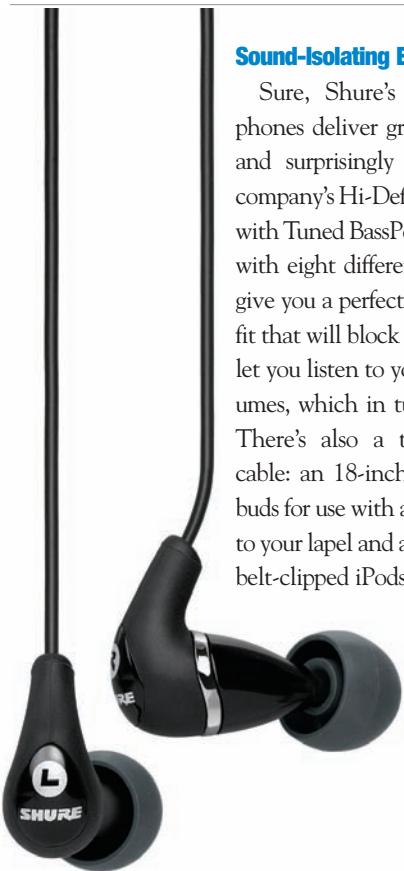
**PORTABLE**

the best quality—or wireless Bluetooth models that let you cut the cord completely.

With beach season approaching, you might want to shield your iPod from the elements with some weatherproof gear. And when driving to and from the coast, groove to your tunes by beaming them from your iPod through your car's stereo system. It's incredibly easy.

When you're home, you can use your iPod to listen to your music collection or watch downloaded TV shows or movies through your home theater system. There are also scads of portable plug-and-play systems to choose from, including iPod-powered clock radios, boom boxes, and powered speaker systems.

No matter where you go or what you do, your iPod music and video are always with you, ready to be the soundtrack (and the movie) of your life. Here are some of our favorite iPod accessories, gadgets, and devices.



#### Sound-Isolating Earbuds

Sure, Shure's SE310 in-ear headphones deliver great high-end response and surprisingly good bass using the company's Hi-Definition MicroSpeakers with Tuned BassPort. But they also come with eight different foam ear sleeves to give you a perfect, tight, sound-isolating fit that will block out ambient noise and let you listen to your audio at lower volumes, which in turn protects your ears. There's also a two-piece connecting cable: an 18-inch length with the earbuds for use with an iPod Shuffle pinned to your lapel and a 38-inch extension for belt-clipped iPods. \$250



#### Wide-Range Headphones

When you're walking or running on crowded city streets, it's good to know what's going on around you. Bose's surprisingly affordable In-Ear headphones don't close you off from the rest of the world, while still delivering remarkably crisp, clean sound through the company's TriPort acoustic headphone structure, which offers greater low-frequency output from small headphones. Designed to hang down from your ears, the buds include interchangeable ear tips (small, medium, large) for a perfect fit. By the end of June, you'll be able to order a lanyard that reduces the pull on your ears and a lapel clip. \$100

**Best** // 77



### Set Your Music Free

Cut your iPod's cord! Logitech's FreePulse Bluetooth headphones will wirelessly feed you music when you're up to 33 feet away from your player. And these over-the-ear, behind-the-neck 'phones are light—only 2.1 ounces. Inside each circular earpiece is a 30mm neodymium driver for crisp treble, and the right one has a bass-boost control. A matchbook-sized dongle with a 3.5mm jack slides into one of four positions to accommodate any flavor of iPod (or any other 3.5mm input). On a full charge, the headphone provides six hours of uninterrupted iPod play or cell-phone talk time. \$100



### Look, Ma—No Wires

Like all Bluetooth headphones, the great-sounding, collapsible, behind-the-neck Anycom BSH-100s let you listen to your iPod tunes or chat wirelessly on your cell. You can listen or chat for up to 12 hours on a full charge, then swap out the battery when it has run out of juice. The BSH-100s can be bought separately, or bundled with an iPod-specific Bluetooth dongle that lets you pause, skip, and fast-forward/rewind from controls right on the headphone's earpiece. \$130/\$230 with iPod dongle

### Blissful Isolation

Etymotic Research is one of the top makers of iPod headphones. The award-winning ER-6i Isolator earphones (available in black and white) deliver greater sound output and enhanced bass—which simply means your music sounds much better than with typical headphones. Since they have an in-the-ear design there's exceptional noise isolation and a very secure fit so you can work out while blissfully listening to your favorite tunes. \$149



### Take a Dive

Swim as deep as 10 feet without fear your iPod will get waterlogged, so long as it's encased in an H2O Audio for iPod waterproof housing. The case—available for iPod, Shuffle, and iPod Video models—is made of durable elastomers, and its diagonal T-seal provides absolute waterproofing to keep your iPod and headphone jack safe, whether you're snorkeling or have just hit a spot of bad weather. And the case is transparent—if you want to change songs, you can see what you're doing. H2O Audio Waterproof headphones are also available (\$39.95). Cases for: iPod, \$79.95; iPod Video, \$89.95; iPod Shuffle, \$39.95



## Bluetooth Beauty

Instead of physically connecting your iPod to your home theater system, the Belkin TuneStage II uses the latest Bluetooth wireless technology. Only its soap-dish base is wired into your system, to act as the Bluetooth conduit for transmitting your iPod signal to your audio system while simultaneously operating as your iPod's remote control. Any iPod model can be connected to the TuneStage II base via a dongle that can also be paired with Bluetooth headphones (the dongle will connect to whatever Bluetooth device is closest to it). \$150



## Apple TV for Less

With iTunes now offering almost as much compelling video as audio content, there are more reasons than ever to connect your iPod to your home theater system. This second generation of DLO's Home Dock, the Deluxe, connects via analog audio, composite-video RCA, and S-video jacks. Access to your content comes via the Home Dock's simple onscreen menus, which display complete lists of your iPod content, along with CD artwork. In other words, it's a basic version of Apple TV

without wireless connectivity and at only half the price—and it charges your iPod. \$150



## Eyes On the Road, Please

The cradle on the DLO TransDock FM transmitter-charger lets you see not only your iPod's video display screen, but also the TransDock's own small LCD, which displays which FM frequency the Dock is using to transmit tunes from your iPod to your car's audio system. A video output lets you play iPod video through whatever video system is installed in your car, and a USB jack lets you charge other USB-powered devices, such as a cell phone, while you're driving. As with most FM transmitters, you can tune the TransDock to any open FM frequency on your dial and program four station presets. \$100

## The Easy Traveler

Portable iPod speakers and a clock radio are combined in the DLO iBoom Travel, making it a handy compact travel companion. The iBoom accommodates and charges any iPod and lets you wake to your music, FM, or a buzzer. It also includes a backlit LCD screen and sleep-to-music modes of 15, 30, 60, 90, or 120 minutes, meaning it'll play music for any one of these time periods, then automatically shut itself off. It operates on four AA batteries or via a supplied AC adapter and comes with a padded travel pouch. \$90



## Transform Your FM Radio

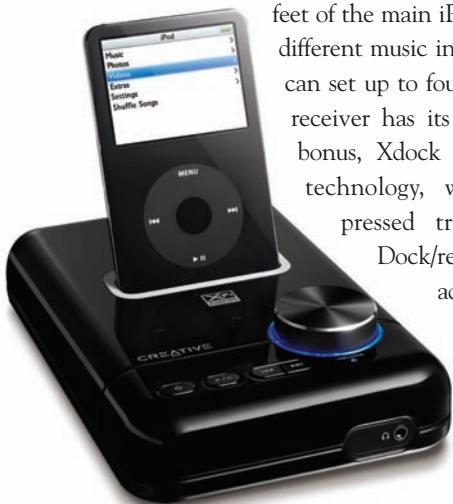
Not only does the Kensington RDS FM transmitter and car charger beam your iPod tunes through your car's sound system via a vacant FM-dial setting, it displays the track and artist info on the radio's display—as long as the radio is a Radio Digital System (RDS) model. RDS, a new technology available on about 80 percent of all new car radios, displays track, title, and other text info transmitted by a multitude of participating radio stations. Your iPod also remains fully charged—the Kensington plugs into your cigarette lighter and has an on/off switch so that it won't drain your car's battery when the engine is off. \$80



## Music iEverywhere

Stream your music into as many rooms as you like via the expandable Creative Xdock Wireless system. First, the main iPod dock connects to an A/V receiver or powered speakers via an optical audio cable. The dock wirelessly transmits your iPod's music to an Xdock receiver connected to another receiver or powered speakers via the 2.4GHz spectrum (similar to a cordless phone). You can then add as many receivers or powered speakers as you like, as long as all are within 100 feet of the main iPod dock. If you want different music in different rooms, you can set up to four zones (each Xdock receiver has its own remote). As a bonus, Xdock uses Creative's X-Fi technology, which makes compressed tracks sound better.

Dock/receiver combo, \$299;  
additional receivers,  
\$149 each



## Sweet Dreams

One of the most popular iPod products around, the iHome IH5 AM/FM clock radio includes a host of handy features. You can wake to the radio, buzzer, or your iPod (which of course charges while it's docked), and the iHome's Auto Set capability automatically sets the clock. The large backlit screen displays the status of clock, calendar, iPod, and radio tuner. The sleep timer can be set to 15, 30, 60, 90, or 120 minutes; Gentle Sleep gradually decreases the volume, while Gentle Wake gradually increases the alarm volume. If you set the alarm to wake up to iPod play but have forgotten to dock your player, the iHome will buzz to remind you; a battery triggers an alarm in case of a power outage. Available in black or white. \$100



Best // 80

## It's Magic

The flat-tray base of the unique Griffin Evolve speaker system performs three functions: it docks and charges any iPod, it transmits your iPod audio to the speakers, and it charges the speakers, which can be placed anywhere up to 150 feet away from the base. The speakers are completely wireless—no matter where you place them in a room, the speakers somehow know which one is the left and which one is the right. The cool part is that, to charge them, you don't even plug them in—you just place the speakers atop the tray. They'll play for 10 hours on a full charge. \$350



## Audio Video Master

Perfect for the kitchen, dorm room, or even bathroom, Altec Lansing's inMotion iMV712 powered speakers not only give good sound, but let you watch your iPod videos on an 8.5-inch widescreen LCD panel. The sound is great—these portable, wedge-shaped speakers have high-quality neodymium drivers and a built-in subwoofer. Your iPod docks on top and charges as it plays, and a remote control lets you manage playback. Runs on AA batteries or AC. \$350 •



# Mix it up.



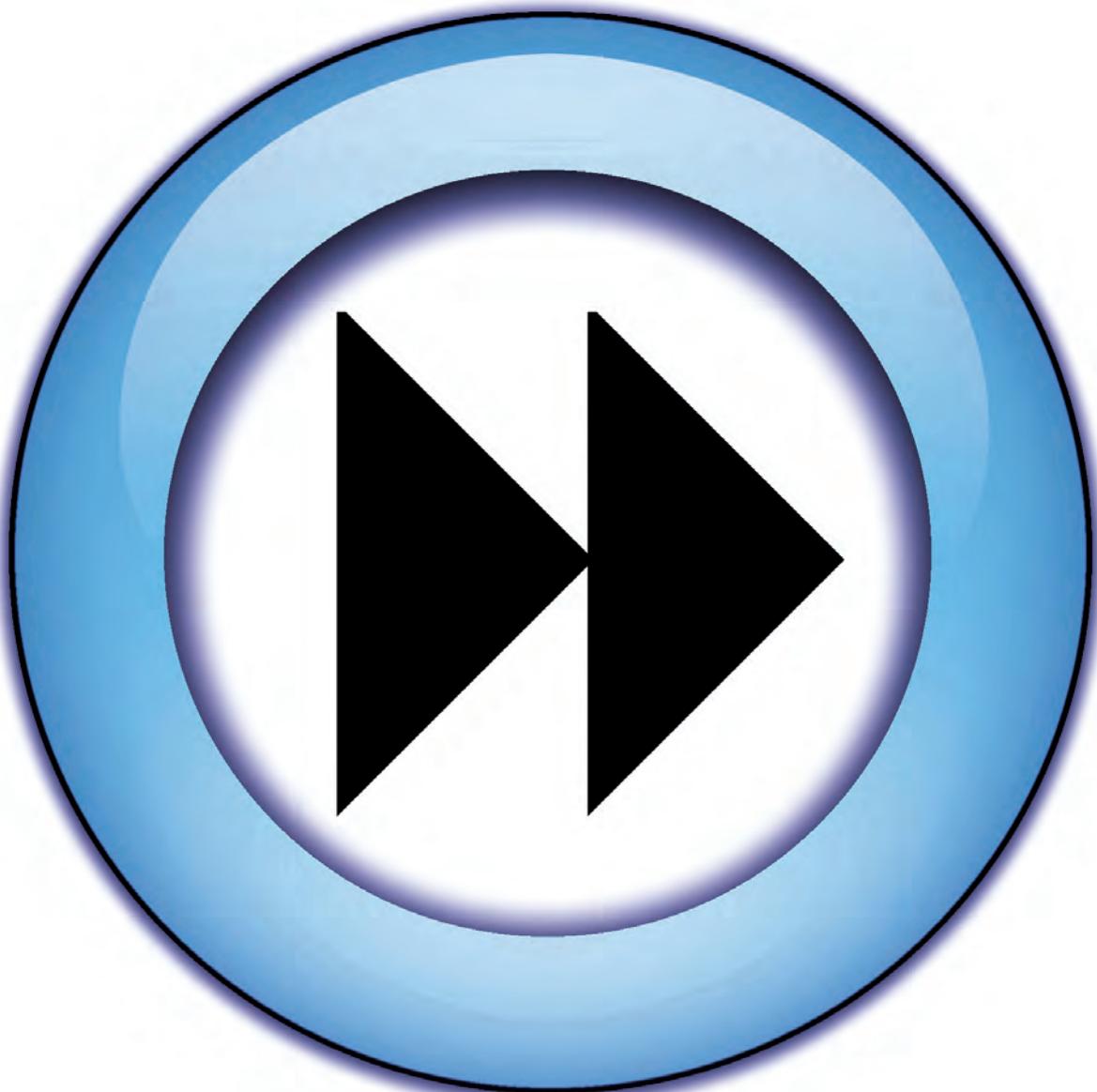
The new mixed ZonePlayer bundle from Sonos. With a great price to match.

Now you can wirelessly stream all your music all over your house and control it all from the palm of your hand for just \$999. The Sonos Bundle 130 makes it incredibly easy and affordable. Want to hear music in the living room? Just connect the

ZP80 to your home theater or stereo. Like to listen in the kitchen or backyard? Attach speakers to the ZP100 with built-in amplifier and place in any room. Now grab the full-color wireless Controller and simply pick a room, pick a song and hit play.

[www.sonos.com](http://www.sonos.com) 1.866.365.6612

SONOS®



Each new release of Microsoft Windows brings more features, stability, and security. But it also requires more hardware horsepower, and there's a slight learning curve. Now for the 64-megabyte question: Is the new Windows Vista for you? In two words: Yes, but . . .

First, you need to think about whether you want to upgrade your existing PC or

is not as easy as it might seem, so when in doubt, opt for a new computer with Vista pre-installed.

### VISTA'S FIVE MAIN FLAVORS

Vista comes in five flavors: Home Basic, Business, Enterprise, Home Premium, and Ultimate. Home Basic gets you in at a low price—about \$100 to upgrade if you already have Windows—but it lacks the jazzy Aero graphic user interface that makes it all worthwhile. If you buy a relatively inexpensive PC selling for around \$300, it will probably come with Home Basic.

For upgraders, each additional step up the Vista ladder adds about \$50 to the price. Most users will be well-served with Home Premium—and that's what's included on most new PCs and notebooks. Home Premium gives you the Aero interface as well as features previously found in the separate Media Center Edition of Windows. Vista Business, for small business users, lacks Media Center features but adds some business networking and backup features. Enterprise is for larger businesses. Finally, there's Ultimate, which combines the features of the other three editions.

## SET YOUR SIGHTS ON VISTA

**Our complete guide to buying Windows Vista—plus our picks for the top new computers**

By BILL HOWARD

notebook by installing Vista—or get a new computer with Vista pre-installed. As a rule of thumb, if you have to make more than two upgrades to an existing computer as part of the Vista upgrade, you're probably better off shopping for a new one unless the computer you already have is a high-end system. Upgrades might include more memory, a bigger hard-disk drive, a faster microprocessor, and Vista itself. Generally, upgrading to Vista

### THE AERO DIFFERENCE

The gee-whiz part of Vista (except Home Basic) is the Aero interface, where translucent layers of information ride on top of each other, with subtle animations, document previews, and the ability to scale the size of icons and image previews. Curmudgeons and a few traditionalists will resent the fact that Vista looks much like a Mac OS. But most people find the Aero feature an attractive improvement.

### VISTA SIDEBAR

To help users cope with multiple open applications, even on big screens, the Sidebar provides a dock, usually along the right side of the screen, where you can place “gadgets” (software applications) such as your media player, RSS feeds, news tickers, traffic reports, IM contacts, clock, or calendars. It works especially well with widescreen monitors.

Sidebar information can also be displayed on a small, second LCD display, anything from a second monitor to a tiny panel on the keyboard deck of your laptop—a technology known as SideShow. If you're using your laptop as a portable music player, this means you won't need the main display powered up and draining the battery. (On laptops, this second LCD would be built in by the laptop manufacturer.) Not all early testers liked the Sidebar; like most Vista features, including Aero, you can disable it.

## GAS-GUZZLER SECURITY OPTIONS

Vista is more secure than Windows XP, particularly in stopping rogue programs from installing themselves or taking over your Web browser—a very good thing. However, the security features soak up memory and annoy with incessant questions, particularly the User Account Control (UAC) and optional OneCare added-security program. With UAC, you can fine-tune kids' access to the Internet, but if you turn off UAC for more speed, every time there's an access question, mom or dad needs to be on hand to answer it. These security features also use so much memory that you may find yourself most comfortable with at least 2GB of RAM, not the 512MB Microsoft says is adequate, or even the 1GB most often recommended.

## SHOULD YOU BUY?

Take a look at the comparison boxes in this feature to get a sense of whether one of the Vista packages is for you. If your PC is three or more years old, the answer is simple: Get a new PC and Vista with it, first verifying that you're getting Vista Home Premium, not Home Basic. Even if your old PC is chugging along fine, it's getting old. Remember, PCs age in dog years. Conversely, if your PC is no more than a year old and is fairly powerful, you could upgrade to Vista, but as stated before, it's not an easy upgrade. It's possible to upgrade to Vista from older (non-XP) versions of Windows, but odds are that a system without XP is more than three years old and not worth the effort.

## EDITOR'S PICKS

### VISTA PCS & NOTEBOOKS

Here are some of our favorite configurations for general use (e-mail, Web surfing), multimedia (especially photos and video), gaming, road-warrior applications, and cost-conscious computing. Note that model numbers may vary by region and dealer, so shop by specs as well.



### < Value Home Desktop

#### eMachines T3612

This mini-tower is more than enough for Web surfing, e-mail, and word processing. eMachines gives you an entry-level Intel Celeron D processor, a 120GB hard drive, and a multi-format DVD/CD optical drive.

eMachines has a nice 17-inch monitor for around \$100 that works great with this desktop. The computer is preloaded with Microsoft Works 8.5 to handle basic chores such as writing documents. To keep the price in check, RAM is 512MB and Windows is the entry-level version, Vista Basic. **Starting at \$349 after rebates**



### < Value Desktop Replacement PC

#### Compaq Presario SR2150NX

Already have a monitor and printer? Check out the entry-level Compaq Presario, similar to the eMachines T3612 with such key features as a 120GB hard drive and Intel Celeron D processor. It also has a Lightscribe

DVD burner that lets you inscribe discs with graphics rather than placing labels on them. A dedicated ATI Radeon Xpress graphics card helps you keep up with today's PC games. **Starting at \$375**



### < Value Multimedia PC

#### Hewlett-Packard Pavilion a6000n

For most buyers, this is the real entry level. A multimedia PC such as HP's Pavilion a6000n gives you card-reader slots to easily upload digital images, an IEEE-1394 (FireWire) port to connect a camcorder, as well as photo- and video-editing software. The Pavilion uses AMD's Athlon 64 X2 dual-core processor 3800+, a 250GB hard drive, an NVIDIA GeForce 6150 LE graphics adapter, and comes with Vista Home Premium. People looking to save space should also check out the new HP s3000 Slimline PC series that are one-third the size of most PCs. **Starting at \$565**



### < Home Entertainment PC

#### Gateway GM5442

Home-entertainment systems add TV-tuning and recording capabilities to a multimedia PC. Now you can keep tabs on your favorite shows in a window onscreen while you're working hard on that business report; it's

an analog/digital TV tuner with a 3D comb filter. A Media Center remote is supplied for channel surfing convenience. This Gateway has an Intel Core 2 Duo Processor E4400, a 500GB hard drive and 2GB of system memory. It has a 15-in-1 card reader so it can handle any digital camera memory format you can throw at it. FireWire connections—one on the front, one in the back—make it camcorder-friendly as well. The double-layer optical drive creates 8.5GB DVDs—that's good for backing up lots of photos or videos. The GM5442 comes with amplified stereo speakers and features Windows Vista Home Premium. \$929



### < All-In-One Home Entertainment PC

#### **HP TouchSmart IQ770**

If you want a powerful multimedia PC that's also attractive enough for the counter of an upscale kitchen or the main room of a sleek loft, look no further than this HP TouchSmart. It's an all-in-one Vista PC with an AMD Turion 64 X2 dual-core processor. It works like a touchscreen kiosk, using your finger or the included stylus on the 19-inch widescreen display. While it's a PC, it's also a digital photo-printing station, family message board, TV, and DVR. You can attach a small 4x6-inch photo printer to the back of the display and prints slide through a slot under the monitor. Starting at \$1,800



### < Ultimate Gaming PC

#### **Velocity Micro ProMagix E2445 Ultra**

Gamers who won't settle for almost-the-best may want this Velocity Micro ProMagix system unit with an Intel Core 2 Extreme Processor running at 2.93GHz. An NVIDIA GeForce 8800

GTS graphics adapter can handle any display, including 30-inchers. 2GB of system RAM are included, as is a beefed-up power supply with two fans, a 400GB hard drive, a dual-layer DVD burner and an 8-in-1 media card reader. The operating system, of course, is Windows Vista Ultimate. (Note that you can get much of this performance for a little over half the price with the ProMagix E2230.) \$3,899



### < Mobile Business Workstation

#### **Lenovo ThinkPad**

Engineers, graphic artists, and businesspeople with big spreadsheets all want Lenovo's high-resolution, widescreen notebook with integrated ATI Radeon workstation graphics providing WSXGA resolution: 1680x1050 pixels on the 15.4-

inch display. The notebook handles 802.11 a/b/g networks as well as Bluetooth. With Intel's Centrino Duo processor, a huge hard drive (120GB), 1GB of system memory, and an optical drive bay with a DVD/CD burner, it's the computer to have when you're serious about your work. \$1,599



### < Ultimate Notebook

#### **Sony VAIO VGN-AR390E**

If you believe Blu-ray Disc is the future of high-definition optical formats, then check out this stunning Sony notebook. It's chock-full of high-end multimedia features (gamers would like it, too), such as a 240GB hard drive, 17-inch Xbrite (high-contrast) display, media slots, 2GB of RAM, and a 2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo mobile processor T7200. The icing on the cake is the Blu-ray drive with current support for CDs, dual-layer DVDs, and next-generation BD discs. \$3,300



### State-of-the-Art PC **Gateway FX530XT**

**Why drive a Saturn when a Lexus will get you there faster and with style? The same holds true in the PC world, as some enthusiasts simply want the best in class. The Gateway FX530XT is it. This *uber* computer features a factory overclocked Intel Core 2 Extreme Quad Core processor running at 3.2GHz, 1066MHz and an overclocked NVIDIA GeForce 8800 graphics card. Overclocking—akin to adding a supercharger to a car engine—allows the computer to handle the most difficult tasks with ease, such as creating multimedia projects or conquering the most complex gaming worlds. State-of-the-art in 2007 also means 4GB of RAM, a terabyte of storage (1000GB), a HD-DVD ROM drive to watch videos on the supplied 24-inch widescreen LCD monitor, and Windows Vista Home Premium. \$4,551**



## QUICK SELF-TEST: IS YOUR PC READY FOR WINDOWS VISTA?

Microsoft can run a free system check to see if your PC is likely to work with Windows Vista. Go to [www.windowsvista.com/upgradeadvisor](http://www.windowsvista.com/upgradeadvisor). It reports the compatibility of your PC and any connected printers, scanners, and external hard drives in table format, showing you what will and what won't work. You may find, for instance, that your PC is ready to go but that your four-year-old photo scanner won't work with the new Vista interface.

It doesn't, however, tell you if it's a good idea to upgrade from the bare minimums your computer may have. For example, if you have just 512MB of system memory, Vista will run, but just barely. Still, it's an excellent tool to find out if your current computer is Vista-ready (or close to it).

### Should I Upgrade? > > > The Simple Decision Box

PC Type		
Age	Entry	Mid-range, high-end
3+	Buy a new Vista PC	Buy a new Vista PC
<1	Buy Vista PC in 1–2 years	Upgrade to Vista (maybe add memory) if you are computer savvy. If not, get a pro to help install it for you.

	Stay with XP	Upgrade to Vista	Buy New Vista PC
Cost	None	\$100–\$260	\$300–\$3,000
Pros	Cheapest solution. Fewest hassles. Old scanners, printers still work.	Nicer interface. Better built-in applications. More secure.	Plug in the box for instant Vista.
Cons	Lose out on some security features and cool Aero interface.	Individual pays more for Vista than a manufacturer. Possible compatibil- ity hassles. Not an easy upgrade. Consider purchasing a new computer.	Still have to re-install existing software, learn to use Vista interface.
Bottom line	Grandpa's rule makes sense: If it ain't broke, don't fix it.	Makes sense if you've got a solid PC with at least 1GB of RAM.	The best way to go, certainly if your PC is more than 18 months old.

## MICROSOFT OFFICE 2007

While Microsoft Vista and Microsoft Office 2007 arrived at almost the same time and Microsoft calls them a natural combination, the newest Office runs just fine on existing, pre-Vista PCs. There is a dizzying array of versions and features (Office Basic, Standard, Home and Student, Small Business, Professional, Professional Plus, Enterprise, and Ultimate). All have at least Microsoft Word word processing, Excel spreadsheet, Microsoft PowerPoint (except Basic), and Outlook e-mail.

The new Office has a different look and feel that may take you a week or so to get completely comfortable with. If you save in the Office 2007 file format, older versions of Office won't read your files, but there are easy workarounds: you can save in the older formats.

Hint: Home users will probably want Home and Student; and unlike the earlier Student and Teacher edition, Home and Student doesn't require a student in the household to qualify you for purchase. Some lower-cost PCs come with Office Basic, but Basic has a problem: It's lacking PowerPoint, which many students need for schoolwork. Short of buying Home and Student, there's no easy way to upgrade. Do you need Office 2007? Not at all. But it is easier to use, once you learn your way around it.



	Home Basic	Business	Home Premium	Ultimate
Upgrade	\$100	\$200	\$160	\$260
Standalone	\$200	\$300	\$240	\$400
Aero Interface		✓	✓	✓
Media Center			✓	✓
For laptops, tablets		✓	✓	✓
Extra backup features		✓		✓
Business networking		✓		✓
Drive encryption				✓
Notes	Great price, but you miss the best features of Vista.	Not if you want Media Center features. Separate Enterprise edition for big firms.	Best for most home, small office/home office (SOHO), small- business users.	Extra secure, but adds \$100 to cost of new PC.

## TIME TO UPGRADE YOUR MONITOR

You're more productive if you can have several tasks open in multiple windows. Big-screen monitors let you have open your e-mail, a Web browser, and a word processor, along with a small window for your music player. Or you can have dozens of photo thumbnails onscreen at once. Most PCs come with 17-inch (diagonal dimension) monitors. Think about upsizing, to 19 to 22 inches, for less than \$500. This is money well spent.

To take best advantage of side-by-side windows, get a widescreen display with an HDTV-like 16:10 aspect ratio instead of the standard 4:3. (Big PC displays are typically 16:10, as opposed to most widescreen TVs, which are slightly

smaller at 16:9. The PC screen leaves a tiny black border top and bottom, which accounts for this tiny amount of additional height on the screen.) With larger monitors, a word-processing document in print preview mode is the same size as the final printed page.

You can now buy dazzling displays up to 30 inches (for \$2,500 from Apple, Dell, and Samsung). They're great for games and photo editing, if not your wallet. Watch for more screen sizes between 22 and 30 inches by year's end, most for under \$1,000. Once you've seen a big screen and used it for just a few minutes, you will have trouble going back. •

Best

6'6"

GAMES

6'0"

5'6"

5'0"

4'6"

4'0"

# ONLINE GAMING'S NEW LINEUP



## Online connectivity takes gaming to the next level

By SCOTT STEINBERG



Imagine joining a virtual army of thousands to battle evil in a fantastic make-believe world. Or simply matching wits with someone halfway around the planet in real time. It's easy, courtesy of Internet-ready PCs and next-generation consoles like Sony's PlayStation 3, Microsoft's Xbox 360, and Nintendo's Wii. And best yet, massively multiplayer diversions, such as the 8.5-million-user fantasy smash World of Warcraft are just the tip of the iceberg. Today's online gaming has evolved to encompass original, user-friendly coffee-break-style amusements, classic board/card game adaptations, and even IQ-building exercises.

Here are three good reasons to make the online gaming connection.

### CASUAL GAMES

Poised to become a billion-dollar industry by 2008 (nearly triple its value last year), according to Jupiter Research, so-called "casual" distractions are enjoying explosive growth. It's easy to see why: Anyone can get in the games, and they're lots of fun.

#### The Pitch

Downloadable or boxed games are easy to play by users of all ages, skill levels, and interest types. They aren't just instantly gratifying, they also serve to prove an important point by appealing to nontraditional gaming audiences such as women and seniors. In short, what Tetris is to Tomb Raider, or Minesweeper is to Mario



Kart, so too are casual games to typical PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, or Windows Vista/XP outings.

#### The Play

From puzzles to word games, platform-hopping romps, and even action-packed shooters, a huge range of titles is available, most priced at \$19.99 or below. Think vocabulary-building challenge Bookworm, award-winning mouse-masher Zuma, and pattern-matching brainteaser Bejeweled 2, to name a few.

Happily, system requirements are generally low, presenting no need to replace your current hardware (although better sound and video cards and game controllers do add to the experience). What's more, all you usually need to

purchase these games is an Internet connection, a credit card, and Web browser. Many games are available free for your enjoyment just by surfing over to them in popular browsers such as Internet Explorer, Safari, and Firefox.

The best part? You don't have to know anything about the pastime, or even consider yourself a "gamer," to appreciate them. For that matter, you can try full versions of each firsthand for a limited period, typically 60 minutes, before purchasing.

#### The Potential

Recent findings by market researcher Harris Interactive show that over half of all adults turn to casual computer games for stress relief. Additionally, more than 64 percent say they play to relax and unwind. Publisher RealNetworks announced that 70 percent of its sales come from women 40 and up—hardly the stereotype of the avid gamer.

That said, it's no surprise that you'll find a huge selection of these games at your favorite local retailer. A quick scan of the aisles reveals casual titles of all shapes and sizes, from virtual dollhouse *The Sims: Life Stories* to charming head-scratcher *Pat Sajak's Lucky Letters Deluxe*. The category has become so popular that it's even migrated onto the PlayStation Portable (PSP) and Nintendo DS via games such as *Luxor 2*, *7 Wonders*, *Super Collapse 3*, and *Pogo Island*.

Best of all, there's no need to go it alone. Sites such as Pogo.com, Games.com, and King.com let you compete live with thousands worldwide for cash and prizes.

#### CONSOLE TITLES

To really make the most of that pricey new console system, try taking your game online.

#### The Pitch

Nearly every videogame console currently in circulation, including old standbys like the GameCube, PlayStation 2, and Xbox, or handhelds such as the Nintendo DS and PSP, is Internet-ready. Many—including the PlayStation 3



*America's Army*



*America's Army*



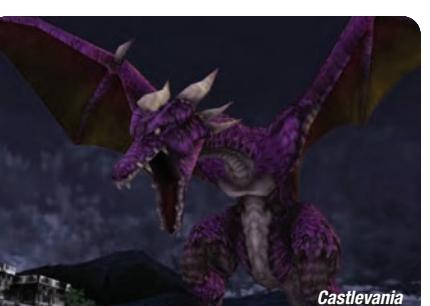
*Anarchy Online*



*Anarchy Online*



*Forza Motorsport 2*



*Castlevania*

(\$599 premium version only) and Wii—even ship with built-in wireless networking. Using these features, it's possible to download, sample, and purchase games, demos, movies, and such collectibles as extra characters and levels, on demand. Not to mention that you can also link up and go head to head with fellow enthusiasts worldwide. While setup varies with the system and title, step-by-step, menu-driven tutorials simply walk you through the process of configuring network access, logging in, and finding waiting allies or opponents.

#### The Play

First, the good news: Most platforms don't charge for basic connectivity, or require any technical know-how to get Internet access up and running. So long as you're packing a dial-up or broadband connection and a game designed for multiple players, you're typically good to go. Get ready to duke it out with buddies in *Gears of War*, or join forces to take on *Coded Arms: Assault*.

Now for the downside: Certain perks cost extra, with fees payable by credit card. For example, Microsoft's Xbox Live online networking service is complimentary at the basic Silver level, which also lets you download classic titles and exclusive first-run games for a small fee (typically, \$5–\$10). But proper multiplayer access requires upgrading to a Gold membership, which costs \$50 a year. Advanced matchmaking, which pairs players based on their interest and skill levels, plus video chat/messaging functions (Xbox Live Vision camera required), are included in the price.

All console systems offer some amazing online features, whether it's the chance to revisit childhood favorites via the Internet, sample the best in independently developed games, or just sock it to friends and family. But, as a general rule, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$3 to \$15 for bonus items, additional maps, streaming videos, or other digitally delivered software purchases.

#### The Potential

It's one thing to play buddies in *Madden NFL 08* or *Diddy Kong Racing*; it's another to download weather reports and surf the Web from your couch, or sample games for old-school systems like the NES, SNES, Genesis, and TurboGrafx-16 via the Wii's Virtual Console emulator.

Between options to download PSOne games and play on the go by transferring them to a PSP, or to just throw down at whim during a few rounds of *Resistance: Fall of Man*, the sky's the limit. Today, online console gaming isn't just about finding new and ever more inventive ways to kill time, it's also the easiest way to extend the life of any game and get more bang for the buck.

#### MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER AMUSEMENTS

Massively multiplayer online outings, or MMOs, as they're known to insiders, are the hottest trend in interactive entertainment. These virtual worlds are accessible any time via cyberspace, so it's no wonder analysts predict that this business will grow globally from \$3.4 billion in 2005 to more than \$13 billion by 2011.

#### The Pitch

Single-player-focused games such as *Assassin's Creed* offer tremendous entertainment value, but mostly fixed, static experiences. Conversely, MMOs—including *The Lord of the Rings Online*, *Vanguard*, and *Sword of the New World*—specialize in dynamic experiences meant to be enjoyed by hundreds upon hundreds of aspiring heroes. Such Internet-accessible universes don't just offer sprawling landscapes rich with excitement and danger, they exist and evolve even while your system is powered down.

No two play sessions are ever alike, and relationship-building is paramount. You are, essentially, who you know. Amazingly, you may even find true love—dozens of players have met their significant others just by donning simulated sword and shield or faux capes and pixelated pastel tights.



*Age of Conan*



*Age of Conan*

Massively multiplayer online outings, or MMOs, as they're known to insiders, are the hottest trend in interactive entertainment



*Assassin's Creed*



*Pogo Island*

#### The Play

While many MMOs, such as *EverQuest II* and *Gods and Heroes: Rome Rising*, traditionally revolve around medieval role-playing themes, there's a lot more: *Anarchy Online* offers sci-fi thrills, *Freestyle Street Basketball* is full of rim-rocking excitement, and *Second Life* is a chance to visit virtual nightclubs, attend lectures, and mingle in simulated settings with real-world politicians and celebrities.

Starting out is easy—all that's needed is the base software itself, a credit card, and Internet access. Begin by purchasing a boxed copy of the game at your local Best Buy. Once that's installed on your PC or home console, you'll be guided through the process of connecting to a server, creating a user name and password, and setting up a character.

Unlike solo outings, which you pay for once, many MMOs charge a monthly subscription fee (\$10–\$15). However, some waive this charge in favor of asking you to pay for optional in-game bonuses, such as power-ups, which give your character more power and equipment, like guns or ammo.

#### The Potential

MMOs aren't so much simple games as sound investments—you can play for hours a day, every day, for weeks, months, or years on end. And while they've traditionally been most populous on the PC (and should continue to be, courtesy of upcoming titles like *Tabula Rasa* and *Warhammer Online*), console manufacturers are quickly catching on.

With even free-to-play titles such as *America's Army* racking up 8 million user accounts, it's no wonder Microsoft's got a Marvel superheroes title coming, or Sony Online has one based on DC Comics in the works. Expect to see even more massively multiplayer online titles arriving shortly, as people just can't seem to stop playing. One peek and neither will you . . . •

**Best**

GAMES

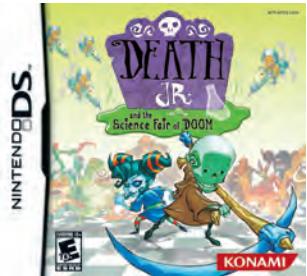
# GAMING TO GO

PSP and Nintendo DS keep the hits coming ➤

**D**espite the recent furor over must-have videogame consoles such as the Sony PlayStation 3, Nintendo Wii, and Microsoft Xbox 360, the hottest action this season is actually happening with handheld games. Consider this: With more than 35 million Nintendo DS systems out there worldwide, this popular system isn't just kid-tested and online multiplayer-ready—it's also home to avant-garde outings like *Hotel Dusk* and the *Phoenix Wright* series. The Sony PlayStation Portable (PSP) doesn't simply play music, movies, and solo/Internet-ready digital diversions—it now also supports RSS audio/video feeds, LocationFree TV/TiVo broadcast viewing, and downloadable PSOne games. Whether you're lounging by the pool or flying cross-country, the following are just a few choice picks worth packing along on your next trip.

By SCOTT STEINBERG

## NINTENDO DS



### < Death Jr. and the Science Fair of Doom

Due in May, this is a whimsical, scythe-swinging, platform-hopping romp through a creepy-crawly world seemingly lifted straight from a Tim Burton film. Switching between the son of the Grim Reaper and gal pal Pandora's disembodied spirit, you travel through twisted realms, avoiding pitfalls and tapping on the touchscreen to assault fiendish foes. *Death Jr.* offers a ghoulishly delightful mix of 2D and 3D challenges; you're sure to scream out loud with delight at its reflex-intensive thrills, and three minigames offer more instant gratification. Heavy on humor and light on frustration, it's a disturbingly entertaining way to celebrate your darker side—and improve your hand-eye coordination. Konami, \$29.99, Rated E [Everyone]



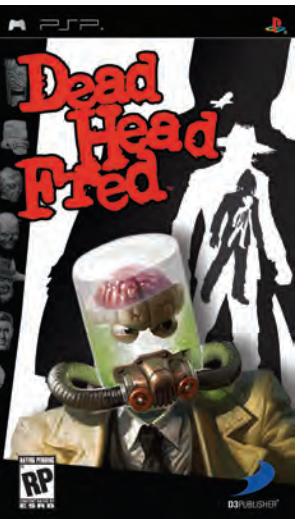
### < Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales

The biggest name in fantasy role-playing finally gives props to chocobos—those overgrown chickens we all adore—in an unlikely spin-off casting you as a feathered hero on a quest to save your entire species. Traveling across a succession of imaginative, candy-colored environments disguised as the pages of magical storybooks, use standard controls or the stylus to engage in compelling playing-card-based duels, or enjoy sweat-inducing arcade-style distractions. Rewrite your own happy ending by successfully completing each, or sync up wirelessly and sock it to friends in nail-biting head-to-head showdowns. Suitable for anime lovers and aspiring adventurers of all ages. Square Enix, \$29.99, Rated E [Everyone]



### < Pokemon Diamond/Pearl Versions

Adorable visuals and intuitive play aside, there's a reason this series has sold more than 155 million copies worldwide. As evidenced in its latest two creature-collecting installments (the fastest-selling in the celebrated lineup to date), it's the franchise's sheer depth that's sure to appeal to kids and adults alike. Nurture and send into battle more than 100 new beasts, including Munchlax, Weavile, and Lucario, as you explore the all-new realm of Sinnoh in the boots of a male or female trainer who's angling for League Champion status. Enhanced visuals, improved combat mechanics, and wireless connectivity ensure that you'll be enjoying this game's mêlée-heavy antics for months to come. Nintendo, \$34.99, Rated E [Everyone]

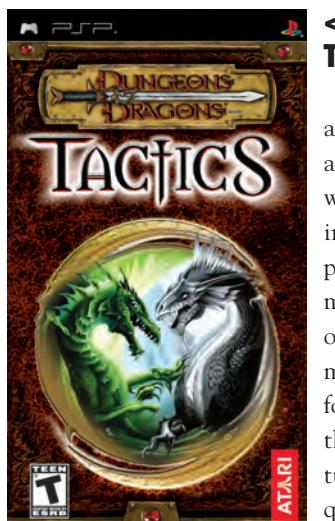


### < Dead Head Fred

Private eye Fred Neuman's having a bad day. Not only has he just been murdered, he's also been resurrected in a strange scientific experiment—and someone's stolen his head. As you explore a bizarre, alternate version of 1940s America, scale buildings or leap ragged gaps as you hack and slash your way through action-packed levels brimming with undead baddies and mutants. Bonus: Ripping rivals' craniums off and attaching them in place of

your own noggin grants you special powers, such as barrier-smashing attacks or the option to spit crackling flames. Due in June, this one is not for the faint of heart or weak of stomach. D3, \$39.99, Rating Pending

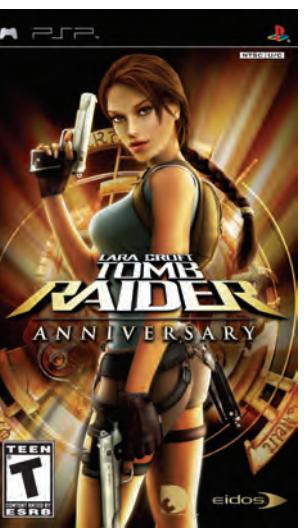
## SONY PSP



### < Dungeons & Dragons Tactics

Might and magic collide in a brow-scrunching test of wits as you command half a dozen wizards, warriors, and psychics in the most compelling portable strategy game in months. Customize champions to your taste, then plot moves and plan attacks as you follow the path of good or evil through a string of turn-based, combat-driven quests. Built around the popular D&D's 3.5 rule set

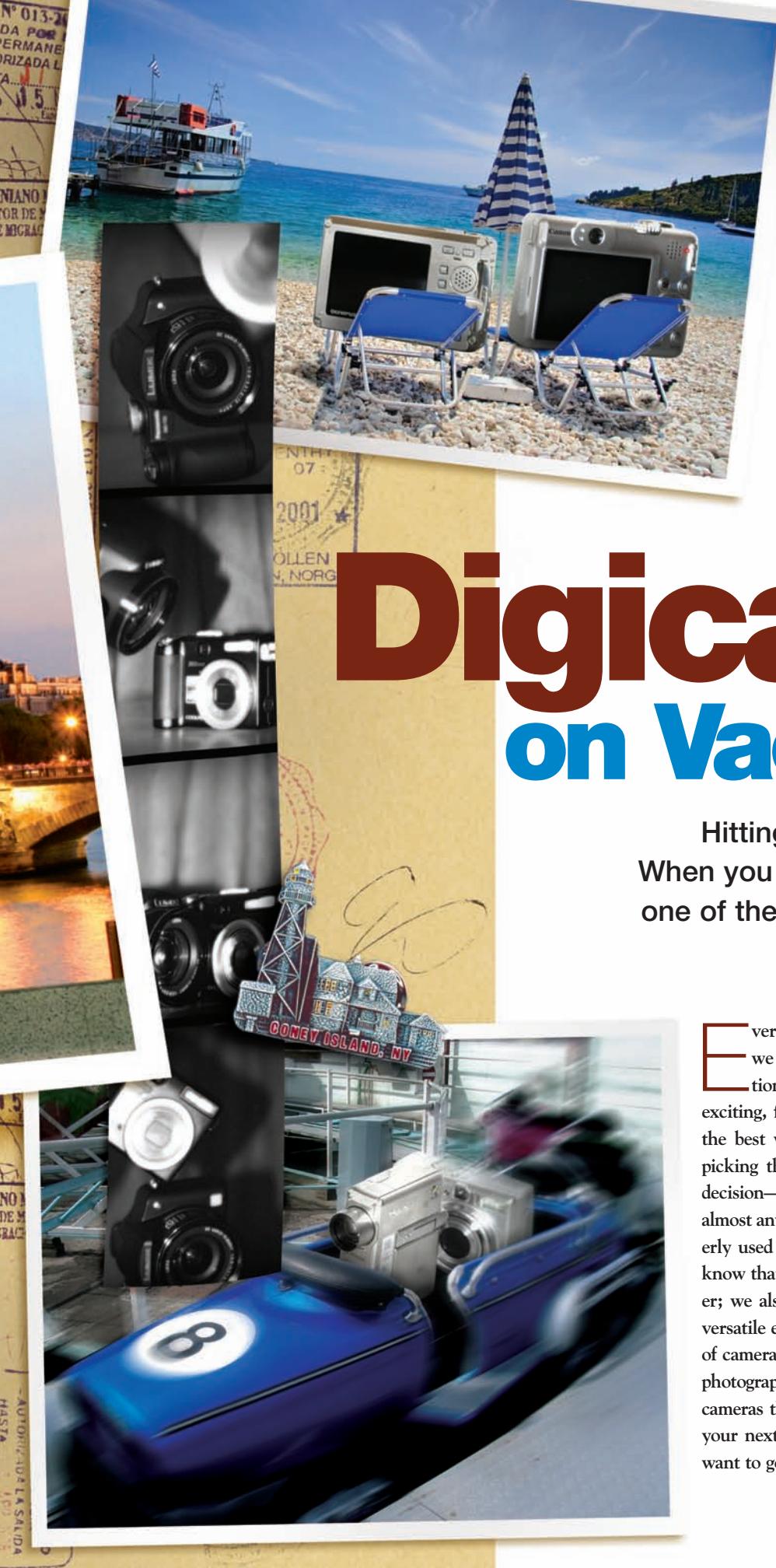
and featuring a host of familiar classes (Paladin, Rogue, Ranger) and critters (skeletons, zombies, etc.), *Tactics* is a great way to get medieval on opponents. Extras like wireless co-op/competitive play and downloadable content guarantee a heroic effort on your part. The battle begins at the end of May. Atari, \$39.99, Rated Teen



### < Tomb Raider: Anniversary

First lady of gaming Lara Croft gets a second, stunning lease on life in this value-priced remake of her 1996 debut, powered by the same slick engine that fueled last year's comeback smash, *Legend*. Hunt for magical artifact The Scion while enjoying a globetrotting adventure spanning crumbling ruins and snowbound caves. Combining furious shootouts that see the heroine tumbling through the air, pistols blazing, with wall-climbing stunts, grappling-hooked swings across bottomless chasms, and puzzle-solving vignettes, the experience couldn't be more cinematic. From Peru to Greece to Egypt, beware arrow-spitting booby traps and rampaging Tyrannosaurs alike. Eidos, \$29.99, Rated Teen •



A vertical collage of travel-related images. At the top is a boat on the water. Below it is a beach umbrella. To the left is a close-up of a camera. In the center is a digital camera sitting on a beach chair. To the right is a passport with a stamp. At the bottom is a blue suitcase with the number '8' on it.

**Best**

DIGITAL  
IMAGING

# Digicams on Vacation!

Hitting the road this summer?  
When you do, don't forget to pack  
one of these great digital cameras

By SHAWN BARNETT

**E**veryone's busy. The only concentrated time we have with friends and families is on vacation, so those rare times should be relaxing, exciting, fun—and create great memories. Because the best way to save memories is with a camera, picking the best vacation digicam is an important decision—just like picking a great resort. Although almost any camera will bring back memories if properly used and cared for, the experienced among us know that everything travels better when it's smaller; we also know that it's better to have the most versatile equipment available. Alas, no single model of camera is perfect for every trip, or best for every photographer. That said, we've compiled a list of 10 cameras that will be great traveling companions on your next vacation—no matter how or where you want to go.



capture cathedral and museum interiors as never before, often without having to use a tripod or flash, thanks to the SD800 IS's Image Stabilization and remarkably clean ISO 400 setting. You can take the light sensitivity up to ISO 1600 as well, creating a more moody feel with subdued color. However, you're better off sticking with ISO 400 or lower for photos of people, and the SD800 IS's Face Detection AF/AE mode will help you find, focus on, and expose the faces of your entourage for better pictures more often. You can zoom to between the equivalents of 70 and 105mm lenses for terrific portraits, as well.

On vacation, some of the best lighting and most relaxed poses occur while dining; the SD800 is ready to capture candid shots, and even wide-angle videos, to bring back the laughter with more than a snapshot. The camera's smooth contours and easy pocketability mean that you'll have the SD800 IS with you everywhere. It's the perfect companion. \$399

### Canon PowerShot TX1

*A digital camera that takes high-definition videos!*

#### Canon PowerShot SD800 IS Digital Elph

*Big-camera stabilization in a model small enough to be a carry-on*



Already legendary, the 7.1-megapixel Canon SD800 IS packs just about everything you want in a travel camera. True optical image stabilization is paired with a 28–105mm equivalent 3.8x zoom, making for an ideal indoor camera. You can



Canon is often late to a product category, but that's usually because they're working on a solution that will leapfrog everything that came before it. Their new 7.1-megapixel PowerShot TX1 is just such a camera, offering a 10x optical zoom with optical image stabilization in an unusually small package of brushed stainless steel. It looks like a cross between a camcorder and a Canon Digital Elph—and

that's just what it is. Like the larger PowerShot S3 IS, the TX1 is always ready to shoot either video or stills, depending on which button you press. Its 1.8-inch, scratch-resistant LCD is mounted on a sturdy swivel, making low- or high-angle framing easier, and its 1280x720-pixel video mode lets you capture HD-quality movies—not bad for a pocket camera. Canon's use of MJPEG rather than MPEG4 makes for higher resolution per frame than competing cameras.

With today's more affordable prices for 4GB and 8GB Secure Digital High Capacity (SDHC) cards, you can shoot a lot more higher-quality video than ever before, and play it back via a 1080p component-video connection to your HDTV. For stills, you're looking at 7.1-megapixel images, rather than the 2.0 megapixels offered by the typical camcorder. Face Detection joins the usual suite of fine new Canon PowerShot features—plus there's nine-point auto-focus and red-eye removal. With the PowerShot TX1, you can come back with far more than the typical snapshots, and create video logs or DVDs to send to friends and family that let them share your adventure. **\$499**

## Nikon D40x

*Nikon excellence in a small, easy-to-pack D-SLR*



Last year's late surprise in digital single-lens reflex (SLR) cameras was the Nikon D40, a small, inexpensive model that offered amazing low-light performance and 6-megapixel resolution. Nikon surprised everyone again in early 2007 with the Nikon D40X, a 10.2-megapixel camera with everything that made the D40 so impressive, plus a new three-frames-per-second burst mode (the D40's is 2.5 fps). The D40X's small size and low weight make it a natural traveler; at just over 1.6 pounds including battery, card, and 18-55mm lens kit, it packs easily and makes getting great shots even more effortless.

The D40X has the softest shutter sound of any SLR we've tried, and its lens focuses quietly too—welcome features in quiet environments. Its generous 2.5-inch LCD makes sharing your



photos right

from the camera quite easy, and viewing the camera's settings is a breeze, thanks to the smart graphical interface design. And with in-camera editing, you can try out a few special effects after capture, like adding sepia toning to a museum shot, or enhancing the colors of a stained-glass window. Nikon's D-Lighting is also just a touch away, allowing you to rescue detail from shadows while retaining your original image for later use. The D40X's list of great features is long, but the bottom line is this: It's the best way to get a high-quality, 10.2-megapixel sensor that a professional could use, in a sweet, nimble little package that won't break your back. **\$799** with 18-55mm Nikkor lens

## Olympus Evolt E-410

*The world's smallest, lightest D-SLR, packed with cutting-edge features*



choice for an SLR you can throw in your backpack.

Pushing the weight envelope for the small D-SLR, the new Olympus Evolt E-410 wins, coming in at just 1.24 pounds with its very small 14-42mm zoom lens attached (28-84mm equivalent). Much like its spiritual predecessor, the Olympus OM-1, the E-410 is an excellent

doesn't have a big grip out front like its chief competitors, the E-410's low weight means it doesn't really need one. Its slender right side is nicely contoured, front and back, for an excellent hold. The camera is available as body only, or with one or two accessory lenses; the obvious bargain is the bundle that includes two small Zuiko Digital ED lenses, a 14–42mm f/3.5–5.6 and a 40–150mm f/4.0–5.6. The combination will take you from equivalents of 28 to 300mm for well under \$1,000. **\$699** body only, **\$799** with 14–42mm lens, **\$899** with additional 40–150mm lens

## Canon PowerShot A570 IS

*Stripped of glamour, packed with features, this digicam is a winner*



Never before has Canon's affordable A series of PowerShots been so versatile and feature-packed. Given Canon's strong history of bringing top-end features into their bargain-priced cameras, that's saying something. The A570 IS has just about everything you'll want along with you on a trip, including optical image stabilization, 4x zoom, Face Detection auto focus, a full suite of automatic and manual exposure modes, plus a gaggle of scene modes.

Though the A570 IS is light and small, there's a decent grip built into its attractive silver body. Many experienced travelers insist on AA-battery compatibility, and the A570 is among the most powerful cameras you can get with this often picture-saving option. With a sharp 7.1-megapixel sensor, the A570 IS accepts accessory lenses and large-capacity SDHC memory cards. It serves as a video recorder as well, capturing 640x480-pixel movies at up to 30 frames per second. Its f/2.6 lens and ISO 1600 sensitivity setting, combined with its optical image stabilization, lets you capture more flashless images indoors. In short, it's the ideal inexpensive travel solution for just about anyone. **\$279**

## Olympus Stylus 770 SW

*If your trip involves water, action, or altitude, this is your best choice*



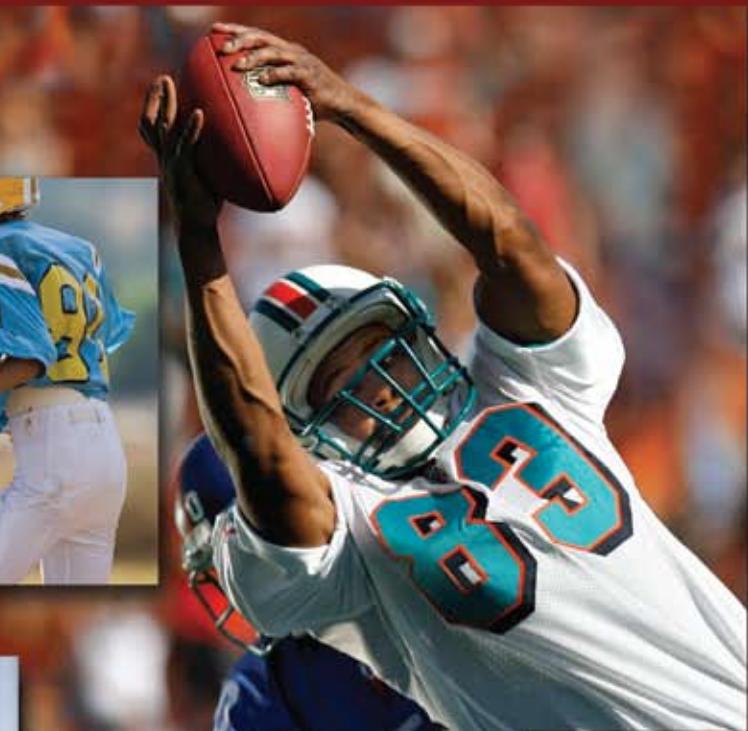
Though many of our travel choices can be made waterproof with special housings, only the Olympus Stylus 770 SW comes out of the box ready to join you on a dive down to 33 feet with no housing at all. Olympus has made the 770 even more travel-worthy by including impact resistance—this Stylus can withstand a drop onto concrete from up to five feet. More practical for the busy traveler in the habit of pocketing small accessories is the 770 SW's unique ability to withstand up to 220 pounds of force. This means that if you sit on it, or leave it at the bottom of your pack, it'll still work when you need it.

As if that weren't enough, the 770 SW can withstand temperatures down to 14°F ( $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ )—great for cold-weather adventure hikes. Its handsome exterior is sturdy, and its use of folded optics means that no lens protrudes from the body—yet it has got 3x zoom. The Stylus 770's 7.1-megapixel sensor captures images that are good for prints up to 11x14 inches, and





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**Canon**  
*image*ANYWARE

10.1-MEGAPIXEL CMOS SENSOR • DIGIC II IMAGE PROCESSOR • 3 FRAMES-PER-SECOND • 2.5-INCH LCD SCREEN • PICTURE STYLE FUNCTION

To learn more about how you can get the most out of your EOS Digital Rebel XTi, visit the **Canon Digital Learning Center** at [www.usa.canon.com/dlc](http://www.usa.canon.com/dlc)

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even its high ISO setting of 1600 can produce decent 4x6 prints. For those who will indeed be diving with an 770 SW, there's a special LED to help with focus underwater, and many underwater modes to choose from. If you're curious about your altitude during some extreme sporting activity, just take a picture—the Stylus 770 SW's built-in altimeter records your altitude along with the image. Now that's a camera built for the adventure traveler. \$399



## Nikon Coolpix P5000

*Who says small can't be beautiful and functional?*



You don't have to be an enthusiast to appreciate the P5000's 10-megapixel quality, 3.5x zoom, optical vibration reduction, and excellent 2.5-inch LCD. Travelers will especially appreciate its attractive black body with silver accents, extremely small size, and low weight: only 7 ounces. You can have full manual or full auto control, and also benefit from the i-TTL-compatible flash hot shoe, which, when used with an SB-800 flash, gives you access to Nikon's entire Creative Lighting system.

The P5000's grip and SLR-like controls give you a big-camera feel in a remarkably small size. Optional accessory lenses will give the P5000 views equivalent to 24mm and up to 378mm. As slick and feature-rich as the Coolpix P5000 is, with tons of photographer-friendly features, it's available for a surprisingly low price. \$399

## Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ8

*An excellent, compact, long-zoom camera for an excellent price*



Camera companies are again starting to make digicams that appeal to the nostalgic among us, who want ease of use combined with good looks and true photographic versatility. Nikon's new Coolpix P5000 is just such a creature, and has camera aficionados drool-

ing. Though pocket cameras make a lot of sense when you travel, there's something to be said for a long-zoom lens in a small package. Panasonic's Lumix FZ series has always delivered quality optics and has won itself many fans. Their latest, the Lumix DMC-FZ8, includes a

12x Leica zoom equivalent to a 35–420mm lens. Its maximum aperture of f/2.8 combines with its Optical Image Stabilization to give good low-light performance and sharp long-zoom capability. It's smaller and lighter than the smallest, lightest digital SLRs, and its zoom range extends farther than you can take an SLR without a bag of expensive lenses.

Depending on your needs, the DMC-FZ8 can be a great choice. Its video mode includes wide-aspect, 848x480-pixel quality at 30 frames per second, something else you can't get from a digital SLR. Its 7.2-megapixel sensor serves up sharp images that print great up to 11x14 inches. If you shoot in RAW mode, you can take advantage of the camera's higher ISO settings and tweak them afterward at your leisure, in software. Bottom line: The DMC-FZ8 is an impressive vacation camera. \$349



## Sony Cybershot DSC-H9

*Sometimes you want to bring along everything—in one camera*



Though it's a little larger than some of the other long-zoom options, Sony's Cyber-shot DSC-H9 has features offered by no digital SLR or long-zoom digicam. Not only does it have a 15x optical zoom lens with optical image stabilization and Face Detection, the DSC-H9 has a huge, tilting, 3-inch LCD and Night Shot digital infrared mode. Night Shot lets you focus easily in low light, and even gives you the ability to capture wildlife from a distance without a flash.

The DSC-H9's 8.1-megapixel sensor means you can print images up to 13x19 inches with no problem, and its f/2.7 lens and Super Steady Shot mode improves its low-light performance. You can even extend that 15x zoom's impressive 465mm maximum equivalence to 790.5mm with an optional telephoto lens. A wide-angle lens adapter makes the already-wide 31mm lens into a 23.25mm lens. The DSC-H9's burst mode (when the camera takes one shot after another as you hold the shutter down) is capable of capturing 100 frames at up to 2.2 fps, and its top shutter speed of 1/4000 second will freeze almost any sports action.

The DSC-H9's video modes include recording up to 640x480 pixels at 30 fps, and its MPEG4 video encoding means that you can fit more video on a memory card. Add direct high-definition video output, and the DSC-H9 is a powerful travel imaging tool that will integrate easily with your modern home-entertainment system. The Cyber-shot DSC-H9 is at the top of the heap of impressive long-zoom digicams, offering the most bang per buck. **\$499**

## Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T100

*Smart, chic, and ready at the flip of a very slick slide power switch*



Sony's Cyber-shot DSC-T series has always been impressive: these are ideal travel cameras with large LCDs and superslim designs. The new DSC-T100 continues that tradition, this time with a 5x optical zoom jammed into its tiny folded-optics design. Sony has kept the excellent, stylish, and essential sliding lens cover that has set this series apart, and has added two more colors—black and red, in addition to the standard silver—for extra style. The big 3-inch LCD makes using the DSC-T100 a beautiful experience, and Sony's face-detection technology not only tracks up to eight faces simultaneously; when necessary, it uses that data to focus and set white balance and flash exposure.

The DSC-T100's 35-175mm lens, augmented by Super Steady Shot optical image stabilization, completes the wow factor. Sony's new Bionz image processor gives the 8.1-megapixel image sensor improved quality, better noise processing, greater responsiveness, and longer battery life than previous models. Perhaps most important for the traveler is the DSC-T100's slim profile and minimal heft: this pocket-friendly, drop-dead-gorgeous digicam weighs only 6 ounces. **\$399.** •



# picture perfect prints

**The best photo printers offer lab-quality prints  
in the comfort of your home**

By JON SIENKIEWICZ

Since the arrival of the digital camera, it's been possible to review, enjoy, and even share images without ever printing them.

Even so, nothing beats the delight of holding a printed photograph in your hands.

**H**ome photo printing is easy and rewarding, and technology is making the process better and more intuitive than ever. All you really need to get started is a printer—many of today's cameras allow direct printing, so a computer is essentially optional. However, to get truly magnificent prints—the kind you'll be proud to hang on the family-room wall—you'll want to do some tweaking on a computer.

Many seasoned photographers compare the current state of digital image editing to the chemical darkrooms of yesteryear. Image-editing software applications such as Adobe Photoshop or ArcSoft's PhotoImpression allow you to sharpen and resize images, crop out unwanted backgrounds, correct the colors, add text or borders, and so forth. Image editing is really an art and a science, and while there are limits to what can be manipulated, most of the common imperfections can be corrected.

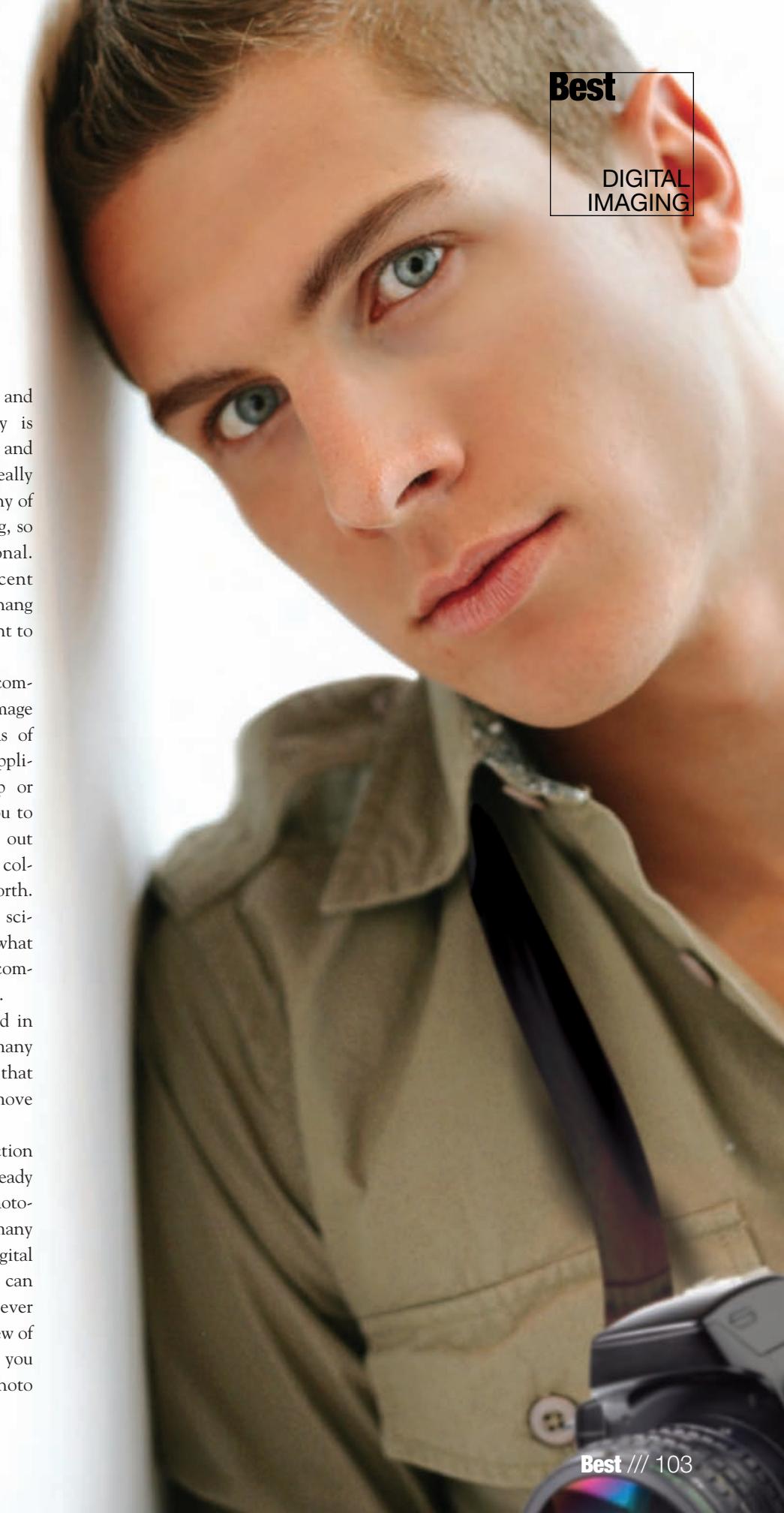
For folks who are more interested in taking pictures than editing them, many programs include "auto fix" options that automatically correct colors and remove such flaws as red-eye.

After you've accumulated a collection of optimized digital images, you're ready to print—almost. You still need a photo-quality printer. There are almost as many printers available as there are digital cameras, and choosing the right one can be challenging, to say the least. Never fear will help guide you. Here are a few of the things you need to learn before you begin your quest for the perfect photo printer.



**Best**

DIGITAL  
IMAGING



## Sizing Up the Perfect Photo Printer

Photo printers are categorized by the smallest and largest print they can make. Some printers are designed to produce 4x6-inch prints and can't print anything bigger (although some snapshot printers can turn out 5x7s, small stickers, and wallet-size images). Other printers can make prints up to 8.5 inches wide (commonly called "letter-size"), which limits you to a maximum output size of 8.5x11. Professional printers typically print on paper up to 13 inches wide, which makes it possible to create large, 13x19 prints. Larger formats are available, but they're impractical for home printing and are much more expensive.

### Simple Secrets for Great Prints

Although there's no magic bullet for getting great prints every time, you can come very close to that target by following some basic rules. No matter which brand of printer you buy, stay within that company's system. In other words, if you buy a Canon printer, use Canon ink and Canon paper. And if you use another photo-editing program, once your photo is ready to print, use Canon's printing software. In Canon's case, the software has the proper drivers and settings to make quality prints within the Canon system. With Canon's Easy Photo Print software, supplied with most Canon printers, you simply choose the image, pick the size and type of paper (such as Canon's Photo Paper Pro), and click Print. All settings are thus optimized for this ink and media, and the results are quite good. (Epson, HP, and others offer similar solutions.) Naturally, you can spend hours tweaking your prints for the ultimate quality, but follow these basic rules and, before you know it, your family-room walls will be covered with museum-quality prints.

## Editors' Picks

We've done the legwork for you and tested several inkjet and dye-sublimation printers. Here are our picks for the best-in-class photo printers that will have you printing lab-quality prints in no time.

### Canon PIXMA Pro9000

If you're looking for impressive, large, pro-quality 13x19-inch prints, consider the Pro9000. This inkjet printer uses Canon's revolutionary FINE print head to deposit ink droplets as small as 2 picoliters. FINE stands for Full-photolithography Inkjet Nozzle Engineering; Canon has harnessed this technology to deliver incredibly brilliant prints of photo-gallery quality. The Pro9000 uses Canon's ChromaLife100 dye-based ink system to ensure archival print quality. Canon claims the prints made using ChromaLife 100 ink and matching Canon media can last up to 100 years without fading or color shift, even when displayed. The PIXMA Pro9000 is very speedy as well. Using eight ink color cartridges that can be replaced individually—a feature that saves you money—it can produce an 11x14 print in less than 90 seconds. A generous software bundle includes Easy-PhotoPrint Pro plug-in software for Adobe Photoshop Creative Suite and CS2, but not the new Photoshop CS3. An updated version of the EPP Pro (version 1.3) will be released soon that will support the newest version of Photoshop. \$499

### Canon PIXMA MP600

The multitalented, multifunctional MP600 is an all-in-one printer, scanner, and copier offering a maximum print

## Which Photo Printer Is Right for You?

There are several different types of color print technologies, but only two deliver output good enough to be considered "photo quality." Inkjet printers are by far the most popular. Dye sublimation has a strong following for certain applications, particularly 4x6-inch printmaking. In fact, a lot of professionals use dye sublimation printers because they print very fast. Running a distant third, color laser printers are improving with each generation but still can't provide the quality most people demand.

Inkjet printers spray tiny droplets of ink to form an image. The volume of ink is

measured in picoliters (a millionth of a millionth of a liter), and naturally, the smaller the volume of ink, the tinier the dot and the better the print. These tiny microdroplets of ink are arranged in a standard pattern on the paper. The pattern density can be measured in terms of the number of dots per inch (dpi). In this case, the more the merrier—a high dpi rating means that ink is deposited in a very high-resolution dense pattern, and that the image will be closer to what is known as "continuous tone"—the type of print you get from the local drugstore.

Generally speaking, a printer must use at least four inks to be of photo quality. Some manufacturers bundle several colors in a single cartridge, while others use as many as 10 individual cartridges. There are no set rules as to which is better. That's why we suggest you ask to see a sample print from the model you're considering.

Dye-sublimation printers work differently from inkjets by heating a thin ribbon of ink until the right color layers fuse with the paper. Because the process requires strict alignment and control, the paper and ink are always sold as a set. It also costs fractionally more for standard 4x6 prints. If you want to make prints larger than 4x6, think inkjet. Large-format dye-subs can be expensive. On the

positive side, dye-sub prints are high quality and last a long time, but not as long as inkjet prints.

Eventually, all dyes fade. Pigment inks and certain so-called archival dyes and inks are said to last upwards of 100 years. Many different variables directly affect how long a printed image will endure before it fades and disappears. An important variable is the paper you use as well as storage conditions, including humidity, and exposure to ultraviolet and other light sources. If your intention is to make prints that will last for generations, use an inkjet printer with archival ink and paper. Keep your prints dry and cool and away from bright light, and when framing them for display purposes, always use UV-protected glass.

### Need for Speed?

Print speed is specified in terms of pages per minute (ppm). Be advised that in most cases the ppm figure is a theoretical number that a manufacturer determines based on proprietary test conditions that may not exist at your house. Use the number as a guide when comparing two printers from the same manufacturer, but be wary when comparing different brands.

### Printer Shopping Tips

- What's in the box? You might be surprised. Some manufacturers provide an interface cable—usually USB—but most do not include this necessary accessory. Check, and plan accordingly. Ditto ink cartridges.
- Find out what software's included, if any.
- Don't want to fuss with a computer? PictBridge is the brainchild of the Camera & Imaging Products Association (CIPA), a Japanese organization made up of members representing every maker of cameras and printers. They've standardized the way cameras communicate with printers without having a computer spliced in between. The PictBridge print-communications protocol allows any PictBridge-compatible printer to work with any PictBridge-compatible camera—regardless of manufacturer. Look for the stylized PictBridge logo.

size of 8.5x11. At a price other manufacturers charge for a single-function device, Canon delivers three fine components with each function optimized to deliver the best possible results. Canon uses Dual Color Gamut Processing Technology (DCGPT) to ensure that prints of scanned photos match the colors of the original. Print resolutions of up to 9600x2400 dpi are achieved using 1-picroliter ink drops—that's exceptional performance. The MP600 allows direct, one-touch printing from cameras and camcorders—you can even print from Bluetooth-compatible camera phones (with an optional adapter). \$179



### Canon PIXMA Mini260

Party animal—that's how you'll describe the Mini260 inkjet. It's small and lightweight, so you can take it with you everywhere you travel and show off the gorgeous 4x6 prints that you shoot and print right on the spot. Think of the hit you'll be at weddings. With the optional battery pack, you don't even need an AC outlet. The PIXMA Mini 260 can print directly from memory cards, Bluetooth devices (with optional adapter), digital cameras—even your infrared-enabled camera phone. It's easy to operate and produces great-looking snapshots, up to 4x8-inch panoramas, popular photo stickers, and credit-card-size prints. You can preview images on the built-in 2.5-inch LCD display. Despite its tiny size, the Mini260 packs a huge wallop, delivering resolution up to 9600x2400 dpi. It will never replace your main photo-quality printer, but it offers awesome performance at a minuscule price. \$179



### Kodak EasyShare 5300

This "new concept" machine is an all-in-one photo printer-copier-scanner that couples low purchase price with low cost of ownership. You can save up to 50 percent on everything you print compared with other inkjet systems, thanks to the low cost of the ink cartridges and paper, according to Kodak. The jury is still out on this one, but it is certainly worth watching. The EasyShare 5300 doesn't skimp on features. It is a full-function, photo-quality printer that produces stunning, borderless 8.5x11-inch prints. The EasyShare 5300 has a 3-inch LCD display that lets you preview images before you print. It also lets you print directly from the memory card without fooling with camera or computer. Kodak's embedded Perfect Touch image-enhancement technology delivers clearer, brighter pictures, and the company's popular EasyShare software is also included. The 5300 is a printer that the whole family can enjoy—and it will fit right into any small-business environment. \$199

### Epson Stylus Photo R800

This printer combines high-quality output, high-speed operation, and ease of use, all in one package. It delivers a very high-resolution 5760x1440 optimized dpi and deposits ink droplets as tiny as 1.5 picoliters. Epson is widely considered to offer the largest selection of paper and print media of any printer manufacturer. The Epson Stylus R800 accepts all

## Editors' Picks (cont.)

flavors of Epson media, and can print directly on printable CDs and DVDs. Bundled applications include the Epson Software Film Factory and Epson Print CD software—both designed to make your home printing experience easy and enjoyable. And did we mention that the R800 is fast? You can knock out a 5x7-inch print in 45 seconds flat. The printer offers a maximum print size of 8.5x11. \$399

### Hewlett-Packard Photosmart A717

Think of it as a snapshot printer with attitude: the A717 portable photo printer delivers 4800x1200 optimized dpi resolution and produces prints up to 5x7 inches—but it does way more than just these basics. For example, it has 4GB of built-in memory, so you can store upward of 4,000 images right in your printer—no PC or camera required. At 3.5 pounds, it's highly portable—it even has a convenient carrying handle—and includes a 2.5-inch LCD display where you can perform basic zoom and crop procedures. It also has HP's exclusive Photo Fix button, which automatically reduces red-eye effect, sharpens images, and improves color. Perhaps the A717's nicest feature is its ability to add artistic effects to your photos, including more than 100 different frames. \$179



### Hewlett-Packard Photosmart Pro B9180

Moving up the HP ladder, the network-ready Pro B9180 uses eight individual ink colors to deliver high-quality, photo-quality prints up to 13x19 inches. It can print a 4x6 snapshot in as little as 10 seconds and can handle your monochrome document printing chores at a speedy rate of 28 ppm. This baby provides 4800x1200 optimized dpi resolution for rich blacks and vibrant colors. The photo-pigment Vivera inks produce durable prints that will resist fading for as long as 200 years, according to HP. Despite its reasonable price tag, the Pro B9180's ability to make true edge-to-edge borderless photos up to 13 inches wide puts it in the special class of professional printers. \$699



### Epson Stylus Photo 1400

Delivering 13x19-inch prints at a price we can all afford and features that are hard to beat at any price, this true six-color printer uses Epson's new high-capacity Claria Hi-Definition ink cartridges to produce 4x6-inch prints in 46 seconds, 8x10-inchers in under two minutes, and it can print directly on inkjet-printable CDs and DVDs. The bundle even includes Adobe Photoshop Elements—a \$100 dollar value in itself. \$399



### Sony DPP-FP90

Even if you use a large-format inkjet for most of your serious printing, a 4x6 snapshot printer still has a place in your stable. The Sony DPP-FP90 Picture Station Digital Photo Printer is the finest example of the 4x6 breed. It's relatively fast—45 seconds per print—and produces prints of superior quality. The dye-sublimation print process delivers 256 shades for each of three dye colors—that's more than 16 million different possible colors for each pixel. The Picture Station is PictBridge-compatible, and includes direct memory-card slots for most current flash-media card formats. Best of all, there's a very large (3.6-inch), built-in, Clear Photo LCD monitor, so you can perform robust editing functions—cropping, rotating, adding filter effects, color shifting—withou

# CREATIVE EDITING

**Adobe Photoshop Lightroom and Photoshop CS3 take your photos to exciting new levels**

By JON SIENKIEWICZ

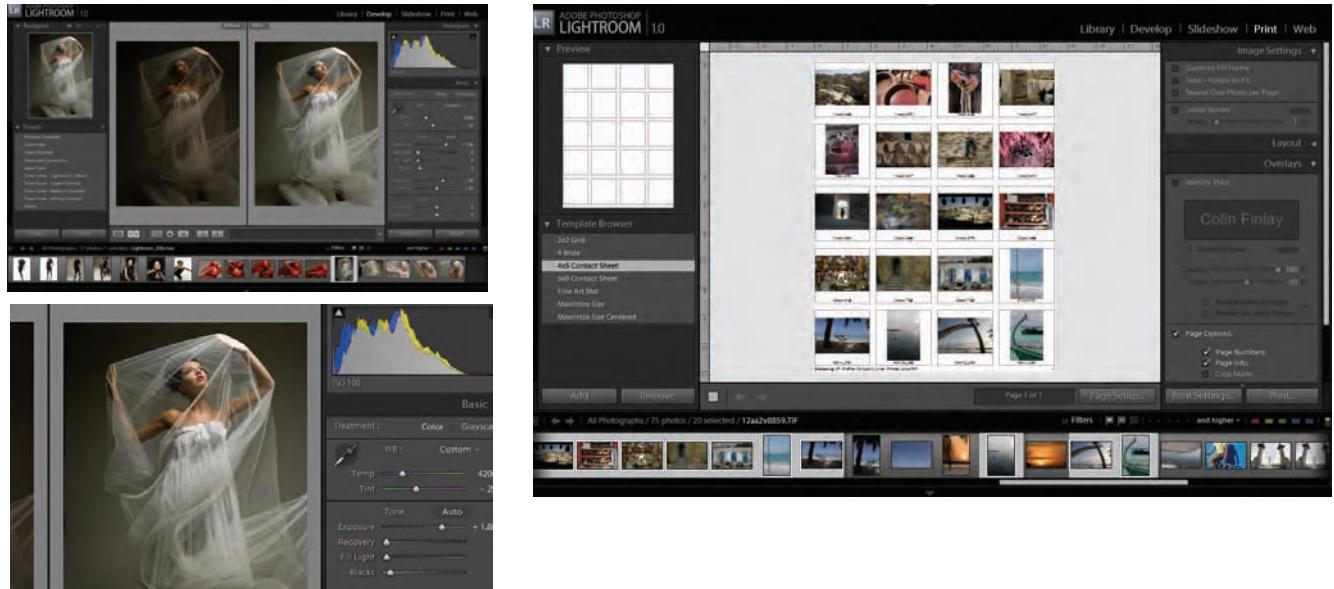
If you use your digital camera more often than just on holidays and birthdays, you need Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. And if photography is your passion, you can take your creative enjoyment to profound new levels with Adobe's new Photoshop Creative Suite 3 (CS3). Both of these new programs put the excitement back into the editing of images, allowing users, both newbies and seasoned pros, to do new, fun, creative things with their photos while staying completely organized.

## ADOBE PHOTOSHOP LIGHTROOM

A "super browser," Photoshop Lightroom provides tools that streamline the process of viewing, evaluating, sorting, and selecting images for further processing. It allows smooth and efficient workflow, and makes it easy for you to perform all vital housekeeping tasks, from image capture through importing and RAW image processing through metadata manipulation, renaming, and more. On the output side, it provides easy ways to create thumbnail proof sheets, online Web galleries, and high-quality slide shows. It also facilitates and organizes printer output, and allows you to save and recall favorite page layouts.

Photoshop Lightroom was designed with professional photographers in mind; in fact, through a landmark public beta program, Adobe aggressively collected input from 500,000 pros over a 12-month period and configured the software to fully meet their needs. Serious amateurs and pros alike will benefit from the clean, straightforward interface and the robust assortment of tools this software provides.





Lightroom works seamlessly with Adobe's Photoshop image-editing software, so it's simple to switch back and forth during post-processing. This will be important to everyone who works with more than just a few digital images during a typical session. Furthermore, Lightroom uses nondestructive editing, which means the adjustments you make to your images will not corrupt the original data, regardless of which file format you're working with. Batch processing lets you correct color cast and white balance point, make exposure adjustments, tweak tone curves, and compensate for lens distortion on several images simultaneously. Once the right combination of corrections has been determined, you can apply it to all of the selected images—a real timesaver when processing a group of image files that were all captured under the same lighting conditions.

Adobe Lightroom 1.0 runs on Windows and Mac computers and is available for \$299.

## ADobe PHOTOSHOP CREATIVE SUITE 3 (CS3)

Photoshop is, quite possibly, the world's best image-editing software. Photographers, graphic artists, and others who work with digital images all depend on the Photoshop family of products to bring their artistry to life. Much more than a mere editing tool, the Photoshop Creative Suite gives image makers the ability to share their imaginations.

Since the introduction of Photoshop 1.0 in 1990, Adobe has labored continuously to refine and improve the product family. Photoshop CS2 introduced us to new tools and techniques, including noise reduction and optical lens correction filters, Vanishing Point, Image Warp, and the highly important Adobe Bridge file handler. Then, just when we thought the product had gotten as good as it could get, Adobe announced Photoshop CS3.

For the remarkably reasonable upgrade price of \$199 (or \$649 for first-time buyers) for both Mac and Windows



A 3D model of an Aquo energy drink viewed from different angles in Photoshop CS3.



platforms, Photoshop CS3 piles on even more great features we wonder how we ever did without. For example, the new version of Bridge lets you organize and manage images more efficiently, includes improvements in the search functions, and adds image grouping, a magnifier, and offline image browsing.

Limited dynamic range has long been the bugaboo of digital imaging systems and post-processing setups. Not any more. Photoshop CS3 is endowed with enhanced 32-bit high dynamic range (HDR) support. That means you can create and edit 32-bit images and combine multiple exposures into a single 32-bit image that preserves a scene's full dynamic range.

Plug-in filters are an integral part of Photoshop. By providing an open architecture, Adobe has encouraged the development of third-party plug-ins that perform specific processing tricks. For example, there are sharpening filters, filters that manipulate colors, and filters that can alter the appearance of an image in every imaginable way. The new Smart Filters feature allows users to apply filters and experiment with adjustments without having to resave or start over again. And the new Nondestructive Smart Filters allow users to preview changes without altering original image files.

If you shoot with a digital single lens reflex or high-end compact camera, chances are you're taking advantage of the benefits RAW image capture delivers. Photoshop CS3 supports over 150 RAW formats and offers useful new tools, such as Fill Light and Dust Busting. The latest Adobe Photoshop Camera RAW plug-in adds support for JPEG and TIFF formats, too.

Adobe Photoshop CS3 has many other new features—too many to list here. Enhanced Vanishing Point truly does take perspective-based editing to a new level, and the improved Photomerge technology gives access to phenomenal, automatic horizontal or vertical stitching. You'll also find an Auto-align Layers command that, as its name implies, perfectly aligns the various layers of text, background, image, etc. you are working with, and an Auto-blend Layers command that automatically merges the layer colors and shading.

Used together, Adobe Photoshop Lightroom and Photoshop Creative Suite 3 provide a complete imaging environment. If you're not using both, you'll never know how good your digital images can be. •



# SAVE THOSE MEMORIES!

How to keep those great photos for generations to come

By SHAWN BARNETT

Along with the convenience of digital cameras comes the burden of storing all those digital pictures. If you have purchased a new 8- or 10-megapixel digital camera lately, you've probably noticed your computer's hard drive is filling up much faster than it did with your old 2MP or 5MP digicam. With just a few small investments, you can offload those pictures from your main hard drive and store them in a much safer place. The truth is, all drives fail eventually, and all media fades: magnetic, optical—even prints. That sad fact on the table, you definitely need a backup plan for your growing collection of digital photos if you want them

to outlive your computer, and if you want to keep those memories for generations to come.

## What I Do ...

My storage and backup strategy includes DVD media, external hard drives, and online storage. An experienced computer user, I add an extra pinch of caution: I choose quality media and make copies to store off-site. You can vary your approach, but you should have at least two copies of your important images.



Verbatim DVD-R 10 pack

## CD and DVD Media

Simple, cheap, and easy to use, CD and DVD storage is best done immediately. Copy your photos from your camera to your hard drive, then back them up to CD or DVD. Place the disc in a jewel case and store it vertically in a dark, room-temperature location. Use CD-R or DVD+R discs for greater reliability. If you follow this first step, you'll always have a ready backup in case you make a change to an important file or if your hard drive crashes.

Be sure to buy quality blanks. Cheap ones are inexpensive for a reason. Consumer-grade discs should last five to 20 years, but knowing what grade you've purchased is not easy, as even the major brands source from several manufacturers. Taiyo Yuden, Verbatim, and Maxell are excellent choices and readily available. Try to stick with quality brand media to avoid disappointment later. I copy my discs to new media every five years to be doubly safe. Some accuse me of overkill, but this strategy also helps me maintain compatibility with new disc formats and take advantage of higher capacities already on the horizon (the new Blu-ray and HD DVD discs, for example).

Off-site storage is also wise in case of a household disaster, and is easier than ever. Just send a disc to friends or family so they can have a look at your pictures, and ask them to keep it in a safe place.

## External Hard Drives

Hard drives are very affordable. You can get a good-quality 320-gigabyte hard drive for \$75 if you shop around, and a \$30–\$60 housing to put it in. If you want one-stop shopping, simply buy a hard drive that's ready to go out of the box (drive and housing). Most computers have either USB or FireWire ports available to accept external drives.

Assembling your own external drive is easy, but not for everyone. Drive makers such as Western Digital, Maxtor, Seagate, and others offer very affordable external drives, some designed to back up all of your files and images at the push of a button; others just appear as regular drives on a PC's My Computer screen. I advocate the latter approach for greater control. First find out where your camera's software stores your images on your computer—usually My Pictures for a PC.



Maxell HD DVD-R 15GB

**Best**

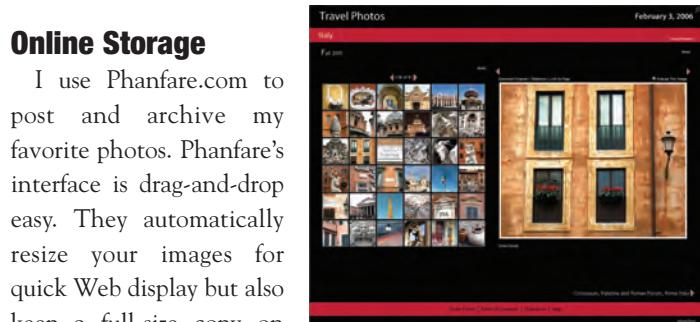
## DIGITAL IMAGING

Then create a directory on your external drive—call it, say, “2007 Pictures”—and drag the picture folders from your main hard drive to the new one. As your main computer drive fills up, delete older pictures from it after making sure you've backed them up in at least two other locations (on a DVD and a hard drive, for example).

## Online Storage

I use Phanfare.com to post and archive my favorite photos. Phanfare's interface is drag-and-drop easy. They automatically resize your images for quick Web display but also keep a full-size copy on their server that you can download at any time. This is important, as most sites will not let you upload and store full resolution, big files. You can print through their service and direct as many folks as you want to your site to view the pictures (or keep it private). Other options are sites like Smugmug and Shutterfly. All charge a nominal fee.

There are other strategies, but whatever you do, be sure to maintain at least two copies of your important images in addition to the ones you keep on your computer. Do this bit of digital housekeeping regularly, and you and your family will be able to enjoy those images for years to come. •



A sample photo album on Phanfare.com, where drag-and-drop functionality makes uploading a cinch.

The Phanfare homepage features a large image of three young children smiling. Below the image is the tagline "Tell Your Story. Save Time. Gain Peace of Mind. Phanfare Photo and Video Sharing." The page includes sections for "Already a Member?", "Home", "Learn More", "Why Phanfare?", "Sample Album", "Tour", "Pricing", "Sign Up", and "Amaze your friends with photo and video slideshows", "Create your online album in minutes", and "Unlimited storage for all your photos and videos". There are also sections for "Automatic background uploading makes this site stand out" and "Check out our amazing photo and video slideshows!". At the bottom, there are links for "Home", "Sample Album", "Download", "Support", "Forum", "About Us", "Terms of Service", "Privacy", "News", "Blog", "Jobs", "Affiliates", "Pricing", "Gift Certificates", "Schools and Non-Profits", and "Learn More".

Phanfare keeps a high-resolution copy of your photos, unlike most photo-storage sites.



A woman with long dark hair is driving a convertible. Her hair is blowing in the wind. The interior of the car is visible, showing the steering wheel and dashboard. The background shows a bright sky.

# OPEN ROAD OPEN AIR

You can argue “hardtop convertible” is an oxymoron, but there’s no disputing that it’s a hot trend for sunny days

By BETH STEIN

**Best**

AUTO



The concept has been around since the 1950s, when America stood in awe, watching the Ford Skyliner's massive flat hardtop tilt back to retract beneath the jaws of a forward-opening rear decklid. Unfortunately, the mechanism was cumbersome and the model was short-lived. There have been a few minor resurgences since then—the Mitsubishi 3000GT comes to mind—but Lexus turned the tide in 2002 with a model that made the retractable hardtop work. The SC430 may have looked rather tortoise-like, but the pace of sales resembled that of the proverbial hare. The seamless quiet of its cabin with the hardtop up, its luxurious driving dynamics with the top down, and the mere seconds it takes to transition between the two states, made the SC430 a winner right off the starting line.

Mercedes-Benz followed quickly in '03 with a redesign of its SL, replacing the convertible ragtop with a hardtop. Next

in the hardtop convertible class was Cadillac's XLR, based on the Corvette platform. The race was on.

As is often the case, great ideas pioneered by the high-dollar set trickle down to more affordable realms. The hardtop convertible fits that profile. It is becoming to this decade what SUVs were to the '90s: every automaker wants one in the lineup. Consumers love having the best of both worlds: top-up, coupe-like quiet and solid ride, combined with quick, top-down fun.

That brings us to the current lineup. The hardtop convertibles assembled here represent the more affordable generation. The selection, while not comprehensive, includes a variety of accommodations, driving experiences, and prices. But what every one of them does—besides retract that hard roof—is celebrate open-air driving and declare that sunny weather lies ahead.



**N**amed for the Greek goddess of dawn, the Eos is based largely on the Golf, with a little help from the Passat. This front-wheel-drive hardtop convertible is just shy of a Jetta in length and seats four people, provided the two in back are less than six feet tall and are extremely good-natured.

What makes the Eos unique in this pack is its sunroof, something few designers of convertibles stop to consider: The entire forwardmost panel of its five-section folding roof is glass. This is so cool because, with top up, it allows more light into the cabin than even a traditional inset sunroof, and alleviates the cave-like interiors of most convertible tops. The glass panel slides up and over the second panel to provide open-sunroof driving.

If you want the full open-air treatment, push one button and hold. Twenty-seven seconds later, the sky is your canopy.

### Volkswagen Eos *Base prices: \$28,110*

In a dance of engineering, the roof panels separate and stack as the front edge of the trunk lid opens to swallow. But beware—to effect this waltz, this particular trunk lid backs out two feet beyond the rear bumper. If you don't have the optional parking-distance sensor alerts to warn you when something is too close, it could be ugly—and expensive. The warning system is well worth the extra cash.

Retaining usable trunk space with the top stowed is one of any hardtop convertible's biggest challenges. The Eos's folding top gets a gold star here: it takes up only four of the trunk's 11 cubic feet.

As for performance, the Eos offers its target audience plenty. Its German heritage instills good reflexes, solid ride, and an overall level of responsiveness most drivers will embrace. That said, it impresses me as too remote, heavy-feeling, and generally sedate to suit the enthusiast. But those characteristics become assets for the everyday driver and traveler. With a choice of a 2.2-liter turbocharged inline four-cylinder with 200 horses or a 3.2-liter six with 250hp, power is ample—even startling in the case of the six-cylinder, which accelerates like an eager puppy if you're not careful. Fuel economy for the 3.2L is 22mpg city, 29mpg highway. Not bad at all.

All around, the Eos has a lot going for it at a price that undercuts the other Europeans.



## Pontiac G6 Base prices: \$29,400

Imports may account for the bulk of affordable hardtop convertibles, but the good ol' US of A has a horse in this race. Pontiac's G6 was the first in this class to come in under \$30,000, where the VW Eos and Mazda MX-5 Miata (reviewed in this article) now keep it company. Still, if you're strictly shopping price, you want this one on your list.

Just as Volvo went to Pininfarina for help with the C70, GM partnered with the equally experienced Karmann USA to develop the G6. Like the C70, the result is a handsome car whose profile doesn't suffer with the top down. Unfortunately, cargo space does: The G6's measly 5.8 cubic feet of total trunk space shrinks to just 2.2 with the top stowed. Stuff a change of shoes back there and you're off for the weekend.

Interior space fares much better, especially the back seat. Like the G6 coupe, the convertible edition makes sure your friends want to come along, too. Rear dimensions allow seating for adults without previous yoga training, a refreshing

notion in the four-seater coupe/convertible class. Taking advantage of its 112-inch wheelbase, the G6 maintains comfortable dimensions throughout.

There are two models from which to choose: the GT, outfitted with a 3.5-liter, 201-horse V6; and the GTP, with a 3.9-liter, 227hp V6. Each has a four-speed automatic transmission, and both offer power and usable torque over a broad powerband to optimize starting acceleration and passing. If you've got the cash, go for the GTP: more power, more fun.

The G6's roof separates into just two pieces before being eaten by the reverse-opening trunk. The whole operation happens with the press of one button and takes about 30 seconds.

Although the G6 has been saddled with criticisms of dull performance and soft structure compared with the competition, it still scores on affordability and interior room. The popularity of the Chrysler Sebring proves that Americans love their four-seater convertibles. The top-up quiet of the G6 should take that love affair to the next level.

## BMW 328i/335i Base prices: 328i, \$43,200; 335i, \$49,100

BMW is the latest comer to the hardtop convertible class, having debuted in January at Detroit's North American International Auto Show. The arrival had been much anticipated and much feared. True to BMW form, the 3-series entry was expected to turn lots of heads—never a comfortable feeling for those already dressed and standing at the dance.

BMW offers two models with retractable hardtop, the 328i and 335i. Both take advantage of BMW's new, more fuel-efficient six-cylinder engines. The more economical 328i comes equipped with a normally aspirated 3.0-liter twin-cam inline six producing 230hp and 200 foot-pounds of torque. The 335i ups the ante with twin turbo-charging, resulting in 300hp and 300 foot-pounds. Both offer a choice of six-speed manual, or six-speed automatic with manual mode. With automatic, BMW rates the 328i at 7.2 seconds from 0 to 60, the 335i at 5.7 seconds. Enough said.

The biggest challenge BMW has faced with its soft-top convertibles is not compromising the marque's top-notch athleticism, despite weight and structural drawbacks. The latter is addressed by the retractable hardtop, the former by increases in power via these new six-cylinder engines. The German automaker has gone to great lengths to engineer a

four-seater that delivers the level of stiffness, settled ride, cabin insulation, and handling response that BMW drivers expect. No small feat.



And, of course, they had to make sure their retractable hardtop was faster than the rest. It can't beat the Miata (that would be unrealistic, given the size difference), but at just 22 seconds from top up to top down, the 328i/335i takes the prize over the rest of the class. Trunk volume is 12.25 cubic feet, 7.35 with top stowed. And while I'm handing out superlatives, the BMW 328i/335i convertible also gets the nod for "Best Looking Hardtop."

All this glory comes with a price, however. The greatest consolation to competitors may be that the 328i and 335i are significantly more expensive than all but the Volvo, which hits that \$40,000 mark out the showroom door. Otherwise, it's just as all those other marques anticipated and feared: The BMW 328i/335i will be the four-seat convertible all the rest will chase.

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### **Volvo C70** Base price: \$39,090

Like the Volkswagen Eos, the Volvo C70 hails from across the ocean and seats four. It also does an equally good job of preserving trunk space, in this case with a top that breaks into three stackable panels. Unlike the Eos, it doesn't take an extra two feet beyond the rear bumper to do it.

Although the C70 costs thousands more than the Eos (how many depends on the choice of engine and options), many critics and consumers deem it worth the difference. Its handy top, trunk space, interior comfort, style, and performance have made it Volvo's best-seller.

The C70 arises from the S40 sedan platform, which doesn't exactly say "sex appeal." But the name Pininfarina does. The Italian design firm weighed in on the transformation that turned the S40 into the C70. The car is equally pretty with its top up or down, pretty being a compliment applied to few convertibles and even fewer Volvos. What's more, the design

affords headroom and legroom all around, factors that distinguish it in the hardtop convertible class.

Any experience with the Volvo's C70 soft top should be dismissed as you consider this new hardtop version. It's a better car in every way. Most notable is its structural stiffness and subsequent better driving dynamics. With the top down, it demonstrates a calm stability that bears comparison to the luxury class, and front-wheel-drive handling that responds obediently.

The C70 comes in only one model: the turbocharged, 2.5-liter T5, rated at 220hp and 236 foot-pounds of torque. The power from this five-cylinder engine drives the front wheels through either a five-speed automatic transmission or a six-speed manual. Given the C70's mass and the fact that most convertible buyers expect a reasonable level of sporty performance, the T5 power train is optimal, especially with the six-speed manual. And at 21mpg city and 29mpg highway, it's greener than you might expect.

I would be remiss if I talked Volvo and didn't mention safety. The C70 carries on Volvo's revered traditions, with front, side, and—for the first time ever in a convertible—curtain airbags mounted in the front doors. When the stability control senses impending rollover, roll bars pop up automatically from behind the rear seats. Anti-whiplash, anti-submarining seats...the list goes on. And it's all standard.

If you're delighted by spectacle—and what convertible owner doesn't like a little of that?—you'll want to make of habit of lowering the C70's top in public places. The three-paneled roof is nothing short of magic as it cracks open and gracefully stacks itself like a trio of parachutists lining up for a landing. The panels are then lowered into the trunk behind the rear seat, where they are concealed. It's slick. With the top stowed, the trunk retains six of its total 12.8 cubic feet, which still rates as good cargo room in this class.

It's no surprise the C70 has become such a hot seller. From looks to conveniences to safety to performance, this time Volvo's convertible gets it right.





## Mazda MX-5 Miata *Base price: \$21,030*

The Mazda MX-5 Miata is a standout in this lineup for several reasons. First, it is by definition the only true sportscar here: a rear-drive two-seater much smaller than the rest, with no pretense to luxury. Next, even fully equipped, it's the least expensive of the pack. Finally, its hardtop disappears in a mere 12 seconds, and the top doesn't compromise the trunk space.

Most of all, what this Miata hardtop has going for it is the fact that it has been long beloved as a convertible, a darling among those who revel in the delights of driving over more sensible considerations. It's a guilty pleasure. Those who fancy themselves car people will sheepishly say, "You know, I have to say I love a Miata..." at which point all the other car people will chime in with the same happy confession.

The hardtop changes none of that. It just makes this tiny two-seater more solid and winter-worthy with the top up, more upscale with a glass rear window. Unlike any of the other hardtop convertibles, the Miata's does require one manual step: the releasing of a latch. After that, a power button does it all, rapidly tucking the panels behind the seat. The trunk retains its cavernous 5.3 cubic feet—almost as much as the Volvo C70, and way more than the Pontiac G6.

Beyond the top mechanism itself, no special concessions have been made for the retractable hardtop. The MX-5 comes with the same new all-aluminum, 2-liter, twin-cam, 16-valve, inline four-cylinder engine shared by the ragtops, and a choice of six-speed manual or automatic. Gas mileage averages 30 mpg highway and from 22 to 26 mpg city, those equipped with manual transmission being slightly more efficient.

Three trim levels—Sport, Touring, and Grand Touring—dictate the list of extras, including the addition of a rear limited-slip differential to the Touring and Grand Touring models. Packages add better audio and the usual doodads. When you're this compact and deliberately simple, there's not a lot of room—or need—for fuss.

Mazda is to be congratulated for adding a hardtop that preserves the Miata tradition of sportscar joy and affordability. Its legions of fans will no doubt grow as those hesitant to embrace the soft-top experience find themselves fresh out of excuses. •



**Best**

DVD

# PRIMETIME ON YOUR TIME

Enjoy great TV without the commercials

By ADRIENNE MAXWELL

**A**s spring passes, so does another television season. If three months of reruns and reality shows doesn't appeal to you, we have good news. Thanks to DVD, you can bid adieu to prime time and still enjoy the best television has to offer, past and present. Say good-bye to commercial interruptions and hello to bonus content as you explore these excellent DVD boxed sets.



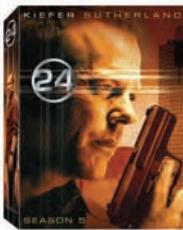
### **Lost 1: The Complete First Season**

> If you missed the boat (or, more appropriately, the plane) when *Lost* first aired in 2004, now is your chance to meet the survivors of Oceanic Flight 815. Season Two is also available on DVD, but we suggest you start here, at the very beginning. The *Lost 1* package presents all 24 episodes on six discs, plus a seventh disc of bonus content that includes a fascinating and thorough look at the show's creation and casting process, plus audio commentaries, deleted scenes, audition tapes, and more. \$60, Buena Vista Home Entertainment



### **Battlestar Galactica: Season One**

> What began as a miniseries remake of the classic '70s show has become a bona-fide hit for the SciFi Channel and spawned a fan base as devoted as those of *Star Trek* and *Firefly*. This is another show you should watch from the beginning. Season One includes the original miniseries and 13 episodes on five discs—plus 10 audio commentaries, multiple featurettes, deleted scenes, and an art gallery. \$60, Universal Home Video

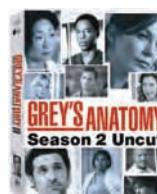


**24: Season 5 >** For their fifth season, both *24* and its star, Kiefer Sutherland, finally earned Emmy Awards for this real-time suspense drama about a federal agent who spends his busy days—one per season, each hour of each episode unfolding in real time—thwarting terrorists and other criminal masterminds. All 24 episodes are here, and the great extras package includes 12 audio commentaries, many deleted scenes, four well-done featurettes, and more. Enjoy this self-contained season if you like, or get invaluable background info from the DVD sets of seasons 1–4. \$60, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment



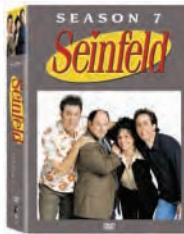
### **The Office: Season Two >**

This faux documentary exploring the lives of employees at Dunder Mifflin Paper Company hit its creative stride in its sophomore season. No need to go back to *Season One*; you can dive right into this four-disc set, which features 22 episodes. Enjoy over two hours of deleted scenes, a blooper reel, all of NBC's mini Webisodes and fake public service announcements, as well as 10 audio commentaries by the cast and crew—but, sadly, no Steve Carell. A minor flaw in an otherwise great package. \$50, Universal Home Video



### **Grey's Anatomy: Season 2 Uncut**

Another show that came into its own in its second season is *Grey's Anatomy*, ABC's inexplicably addictive drama about the love lives and life lessons of the doctors who practice at Seattle's Grace Hospital. The "Uncut" refers to four extended episodes that include scenes deleted from the broadcasts. More deleted scenes, five audio commentaries, an on-set tour, cast interviews, and other extras flesh out this six-disc, 27-episode set. \$60, Buena Vista Home Entertainment



**Seinfeld: Season 7** > Sony is up to the seventh season of *Seinfeld*'s nine-year run, and if there's one season you must own on DVD, this is it. Here we meet the Soup Nazi and the Maestro, explore sponge-worthiness, and learn the dangers of cheap wedding invitations. The package includes 24 episodes on four discs, complemented by 10 audio commentaries, 11 deleted scenes, factoids, bloopers, and multiple featurettes—including two animated shorts that reimagine classic scenes. Definitely purchase-worthy. Stay tuned for Season 8, which will be released on DVD on June 5, 2007. \$50, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment



**The Simpsons: The Complete Ninth Season** > Our favorite animated family will be hitting the big screen this July, and you can prepare for the event by checking out the latest season to arrive on DVD. Fox consistently gives *The Simpsons* the royal DVD treatment, and this four-disc package is no exception, including audio commentaries for all 25 episodes, deleted scenes, an animation showcase, collector cards, a sneak preview of the feature film, and more. \$50, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment



**CSI: Crime Scene Investigation: The Complete Sixth Season** > Its many spin-offs and imitations have yet to capture the chemistry of the original *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Why spend the summer watching knockoffs when you can catch up with Gil Grissom and his not-so-merry band of crime-fighting forensic scientists? The first five seasons are all available on DVD; this sixth and latest seven-disc set features 24 episodes, plus seven audio commentaries and six interesting behind-the-scenes featurettes. \$90, Paramount Home Entertainment

## Hot Off the Press: New Titles We Want You to See

**C**heck out these new titles that came out after press time, but that we're excited to get our hands on.

**Twin Peaks: The Second Season** A mere five years after the release of *The First Season*, David Lynch's cult masterpiece is finally made complete on DVD. (Paramount Home Video)

### WKRP in Cincinnati: The Complete First Season

This iconic '70s series almost never made it to DVD, due to licensing issues surrounding the music. We're anxious to see—and hear—how Fox solved that dilemma. (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment)

**Bosom Buddies: The First Season** Remember when Tom Hanks did comedy? Revisit the show that launched his career. (Paramount Home Video)



### Arrested Development: Seasons One–Three

One of the greatest shows that nobody watched, *Arrested Development* defied sitcom conventions in style and substance. The show met its demise after only three seasons, but you can enjoy its quirky brilliance in this eight-disc set, a straightforward repackaging of the three individual seasons with audio commentaries, deleted and extended scenes, bloopers, and featurettes. The dysfunctional Bluth family may be gone, but the DVD format ensures they won't be forgotten. \$110, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment



### The West Wing: The Complete Series Collection

*The West Wing* has all the hallmarks of an Aaron Sorkin production: great dialogue, meaningful storylines, and an outstanding ensemble cast. The show slumped a bit with Sorkin's departure, but regained its pep in its seventh and final season. Now you can follow the complete tenure of President Josiah Bartlet on a mere 45 discs, with each season's original extras, plus an episode guide and the script of the pilot episode, with a foreword by Sorkin—all packaged in a clever, dossier-style keepsake box. \$300, Warner Home Video •



### Not Just the Best of The Larry Sanders Show

This four-disc set includes 23 episodes of HBO's Emmy Award-winning show, plus more than eight hours of new documentaries, interviews, and more. (Sony Picture Home Entertainment)

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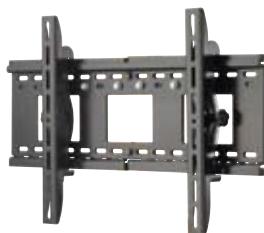


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