CRESTRON INTEGRATION AWARDS 2006 **WINNER**

HI-RISE LIVING

BAUMEISTER ELECTRONIC ARCHITECTS, NILES, ILLINOIS

After 30 years in the suburbs raising children, Baby Boomers are moving back to the excitement of an urban setting. But instead of returning to the smaller, older apartments they started out in, they're treating themselves to luxury condominiums and town houses. And often they want their new homes to feature first-rate AV and whole home control systems.

As a result, integrator Baumeister Electronic Architects (BEA) is designing and building more and more high-end systems in the central city. A case in point: a luxury condominium they completed last summer on Chicago's near south side.

Paul Baumeister, the firm's Director of Marketing, says the penthouse unit isn't huge —perhaps 3,000 square feet — but the owners wanted it to be exceptionally well appointed. "It's a solution tailored to the clients," he says. "The unit faces north, so they have a floor-to-ceiling panoramic view of the city and the lakefront. The huge veranda allows wonderful flexibility when they entertain."

As impressive as the unit is, Baumeister says, "It's also a very livable home. With their last child off at school, they're able to enjoy a more intimate type of place. It's large scale, but it allows them to feel very comfortable."

Goals of the project

Founded 16 years ago, BEA has found its niche in high-end AV systems, with about 95 percent of their work residential. "Our clients partner with us because we do outstanding work. The majority of our projects are $80,000 and above," Baumeister says. "These are people who want customization, and that lets us be creative."

John Brisk, system design consultant for this project, says the homeowners had three major concerns in designing the unit and its AV systems.

First, the husband is an avid collector of outsider art, and he wanted his new home to showcase his large collection of paintings, drawings, and 3D pieces. "For that reason lighting was a huge part of the project," Brisk says. "One of the first people he brought in was lighting designer Jill Mullen. We suggested she use

PHOTOS BY PAUL BAUMEISTER

Crestron centralized lighting, and she worked with a CLX-Series system from the get-go."

Second, the wife is very active in volunteer work, and she has an important role in the Chicago International Film Festival. So another key to the residence is a centralized media room with both plasma and projection systems, plus surround sound and a Crestron media processor. When the couple entertains, they use the room for movie and video screenings.

Third, they wanted a home that was as comfortable as it was impressive. Music, TV, and Internet had to be accessible, and controls handy and easy to use.

The biggest challenge, Brisk says, was making all of this happen in the relatively small space available. Since this would be the homeowners' only residence and they both wanted to maximize the impact of their artwork and media, wall space and rack space were at a major premium.

Designing the systems

"A big help on this project," says Brisk, "was the fact that we were able to make it top to bottom a Crestron house." BEA installed Crestron centralized lighting and Crestron thermostats, and controlled all the audio, video, and security through Crestron controls.

BEA wall-mounted six Crestron CT-1000 3.8-inch touchpanels for simple, room-by-room operation of lighting, temperature, and audio, but then gave the homeowner in-depth control from a 10-inch wireless touchscreen. "He can adjust and control all the lighting from the TPMC-10," Brisk says. "He can walk around and change the presets as he wishes. The lighting is evolving as he gets more comfortable with the system, and he's not afraid to change some of the things the lighting designer set up as he lives with it."

In the media room, where the TPMC-10 normally resides, BEA installed blackout shades controlled by the Crestron system. The homeowners use a 50-inch plasma for day-to-day TV and movie viewing, but they can also lower a motorized 16:9 screen and project HDTV images. The plasma and the screen are built into custom, floor-to-ceiling cabinetry. Brisk says he included a Crestron PVID video processor to route DVD, satellite, and other media to these and other displays in the condo.

Sound quality was very important in this project. "I wouldn't call this homeowner an audiophile, but he's really into music," Brisk says. BEA installed a Crestron BIPAD8 audio distribution processor with eight zones in the main living areas, media room, office, bedrooms, baths, and outdoors on the veranda. In the dining room, Brisk incorporated a set of Vienna Acoustics Schonberg speakers. "They give the higher quality sound he was looking for, while at the same time they have a unique visual impact that blended well with the room."

Installation challenges

Brisk says his main goal as a contractor was to provide the capabilities the homeowners asked for without infringing on space that they really wanted for artwork.

"Centralized lighting was very helpful, in that it allowed us to use the Crestron touchpanels and keypads without having to worry about extra light switches." In

the same way, integrating security and HVAC cut the need for extra "wall acne," as Brisk puts it, providing a very simple, consistent interface to all of the major systems.

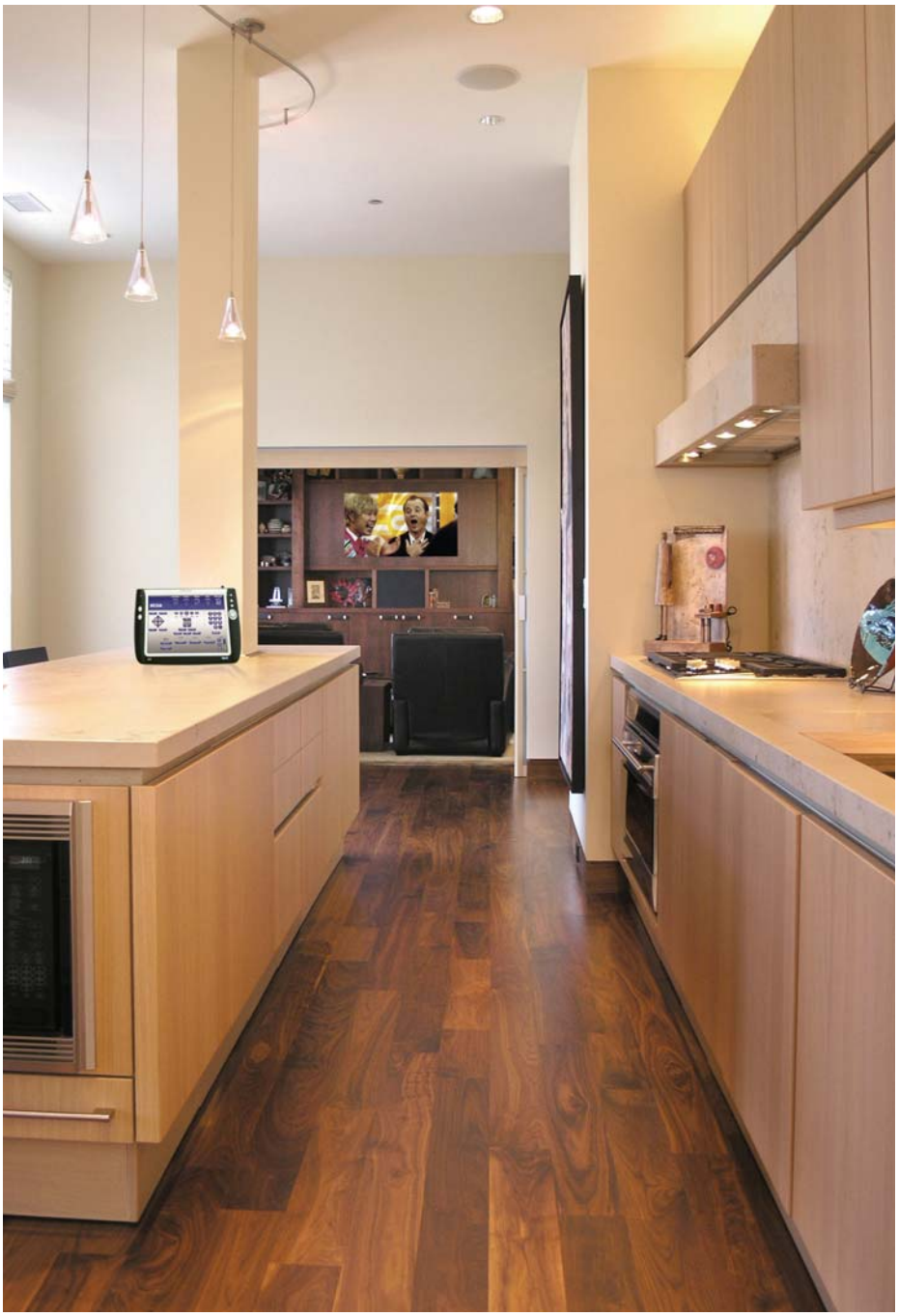
Consistency is, in Brisk's mind, the most important feature of a whole-home control system. "If you've got buttons on the left to control lights, then the buttons for the lights have to be on the left side of all the panels and remotes," he says. Of course, this task would be a lot simpler if it was possible to use the same panel everywhere in the residence, but it almost never is. For this project BEA used the TPMC-10 for system-wide controls, CT-1000s for local controls, and ML-500 remotes for handheld AV control.

Brisk says BEA normally holds a "touch-panel layout meeting" with the homeowner prior to doing any programming. "We'll do mockups of the different touchscreens and remotes and then walk them through

them to get them comfortable on how it all operates." Programmer Dave Moore finalized the layouts based on feedback from this meeting, finished the coding, and then went back 2-4 weeks after the client moved in to make minor adjustments. "We find this process helps with client satisfaction and cuts down on the amount of training we have to do," Brisk explains.

The biggest challenge in this installation was fitting racks and structured media cabinets (SMC) into the available space. "In the middle of the media room, right behind the plasma, is a large, cement support column," notes Brisk. "We had two full racks of Crestron systems that we had to break into four racks." At one point BEA considered mounting the SMCs in the ceiling, but they eventually found they could fit them in the closet of the daughter's room.

"What saved us was that we have some really creative people who worked on the project," Brisk says. He was lucky in that



other trades — electricians, HVAC, and millworkers — were all top notch. The architect, too, was flexible and able to adapt to the needs of the AV systems. "We normally invest a lot of time in construction meetings, and that allows us to catch problems and make corrections," he says. "No matter how good a plan you put together, there's always something that needs to be adapted."

In the end, BEA was able to provide a package that really pleased the homeowners. "They wanted something easy to use and bulletproof," Brisk says, "but also of very high quality with really cool technology. We were able to deliver on all aspects."

Brisk says Crestron was the obvious choice for this project. "Crestron offers one of the few product lines that does everything it says it will do. When you put something into one of these high-end homes, it's got to work. Crestron really has been reliable." ■