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THE INTEGRATION GUIDE TO OUTDOOR AV

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Recently, a rooftop terrace for a New York City penthouse in got the Cloud9 treatment, when the integration team was tasked with concealing a lot of technology in a very tight space.

BUDGET, LANDSCAPE, AND USAGE

Integrators are Facing Three Big Considerations When Installing Outdoor AV Systems

By Llanor Alleyne

In popular culture, the backyard is often a sun-drenched, bee-buzzing, flower-booming respite, with a hammock-swinging napper and an enthusiastic barbeque master with a spatula at a restaurant-size grill.

The reframing of this essentially American idyll has been underway for some time, as the introduction of outdoor speakers and televisions has expanded the use of outdoor spaces to include game night gatherings, weddings, graduation pool parties, and in some instances an entire carnival (Google it). Mother Nature, too, is exerting her influence as consumers are beginning to utilize their outdoor spaces, including balconies and terraces in more urban areas, and more often during the winter season.

When called upon to install outdoor AV systems, custom integrators are facing three big considerations: budget, landscape, and usage.

"While there are outliers that break the bell curve in all integrators' discovery meetings—clients who want the absolute bare minimum and clients who want much more than they would ever need—the average client wants to enjoy their system, inside and out with simple and seamless control," said Robert Kreatz, founder of Audio Visual Installation and Design (AVID), based in Excelsior, MN. "The fidelity found in outdoor speakers, when paired with a great display, now make it entirely possible to lose one's self and actually be immersed in a movie while sitting outdoors.

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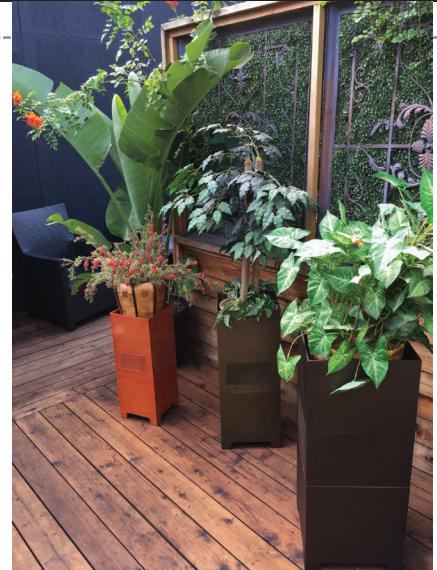
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OUTDOOR AV



Creative Concepts recently completed a pool house project for a luxury property. Part of a major remodel, the company installed marine-grade James Loudspeaker speakers, including a custom soundbar (arrows show where it blends in with the stone.)

Kreatz says that with a few simple questions, his company is able to map out what its clients' usage patterns will most likely look like, from parties, seasonal sporting games, day-to-day use, etc. "This gives us valuable insight into what the outdoor space looks like," he said. "Where is the sun going to set in relationship to the display? Are the neighbors not only able to see exactly what's on the display, but will it be bothersome? How are speakers arranged such that when the martinis flow heavily, they're less likely to be a bother to those who live in close proximity?"

IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Each integrator has his or her own way of teasing out a potential client's needs, and for Kreatz, in addition to environmental considerations, the budget plays a big role. His AVID team usually build a system and transparent proposal up to the client's figure or, in some instances, has the client explain what he or she wants, and his team builds it from there.

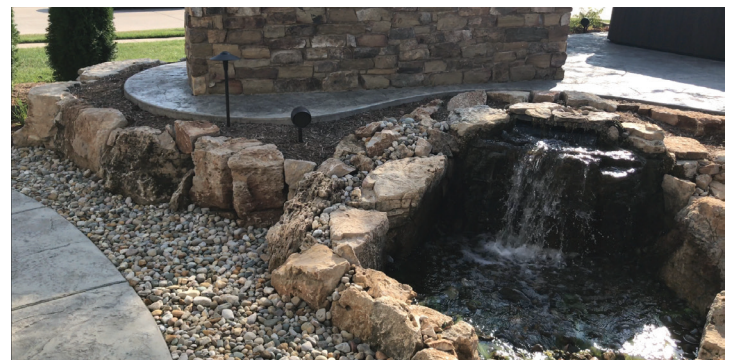
The AVID team recently designed four unique outdoor spaces for a client who wanted the ability to mix and blend audio in different zones. Starting with the courtyard, the integrator strategically located four speakers and a subwoofer to contain sound in that area. Guests are led from there past a sitting area and fireplace in the home, which has large-window views of the pool and back courtyard, which is accessed from a screened-in porch. Here, AVID installed one pair of speakers for casual listening. From there, entering the rear courtyard, the company integrated a 65-inch Séura Storm television in view of the grill, and eight Sonance LS68s speakers and one SUBV10 subwoofer configured in a four-high and four-low formation to prevent dead zones. Steps leading to the pool deliver guests to the pool area where a large fireplace is also located. Another 65-inch Séura Storm television and two zones of audio (one containing four LS48s and LV10 nearest the Séura Storm and another eight LS48s and two LV10s play TV audio or music) entertain swimmers and sunbathers.

"We wanted our client to have the ability to mix and blend audio, allowing them to both hear the commentary of the game and music, or combine services in the two zones," Kreatz said. "Prior to installation, we had some thoughts that it might be a bit counterintuitive, when two separate services were playing simultaneously, but we found that it was very similar to what you'd experience in a stadium or sports arena. The sounds of the game and music subtly playing in the background actually made it feel more like being at the game."

FIRST, ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

For Kris Gutrich, who is president of Remote Audio/Video in the Greater Chicago area, the first consideration in taking on a project is asking the right questions to achieve the client's goals. Gutrich has formed deep business partnerships with landscape architects, designers, and installers to better help his team map out projects beforehand.

This past summer, Remote Audio/Video worked on a new construction home that had a packed backyard, including a covered porch area, an outdoor kitchen with outdoor seating for eight, a



This backyard project from Premier Audio Video in St. Louis includes a large landscaped area with waterfalls, an outdoor kitchen, eight Triad Garden Array speakers, and two underground subwoofers.

pool, and a fire pit. The client requested a TV and an in-ceiling surround sound setup, with greater consideration for the dining area, which was the most heavily used zone. Using Control4 for lighting, system control of 14 zones of audio and five zones of video, and HVAC and radiant climate control, Remote Audio/Video added Sony XBR televisions with IP control and Pakedge RK-1 and two WK-2 in-ceiling WAPs for networking and Wi-Fi coverage throughout the house and the backyard.

For a dirt path between the house and the paved patio, the team turned to The DiVinci Group for outdoor speakers—burying a subwoofer in a corner of the yard closest to the house and four 8-inch rock speakers around the pool area.

“We zoned the speakers and subwoofer separately, giving the subwoofer its own zone for control and volume,” Gutrich explained. “This turned out to be one of the features the client liked most. For instance, if it was later at night and the pool was not being used, we could add the subwoofer to the dining table zone that had two 8-inch TDG rock speakers—giving them that bass that they wanted at all levels.

Remote Audio/Video used Vanguard DA-2125 amplifiers for the pool zone, dining table zone, and fire pit zone. “We wanted more power for these areas than what a typical multi-zone amplifier could provide,” Gutrich said. “For the covered patio surround area,

OUTDOOR AV VIEWPOINT

WHAT NEW TECH OR PRODUCT INNOVATIONS HAVE HAD THE BIGGEST EFFECT ON THE DESIGN AND FUNCTIONALITY OF PEERLESS-AV'S OUTDOOR AV PRODUCTS?

TODD MARES, DIRECTOR OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, PEERLESS-AV

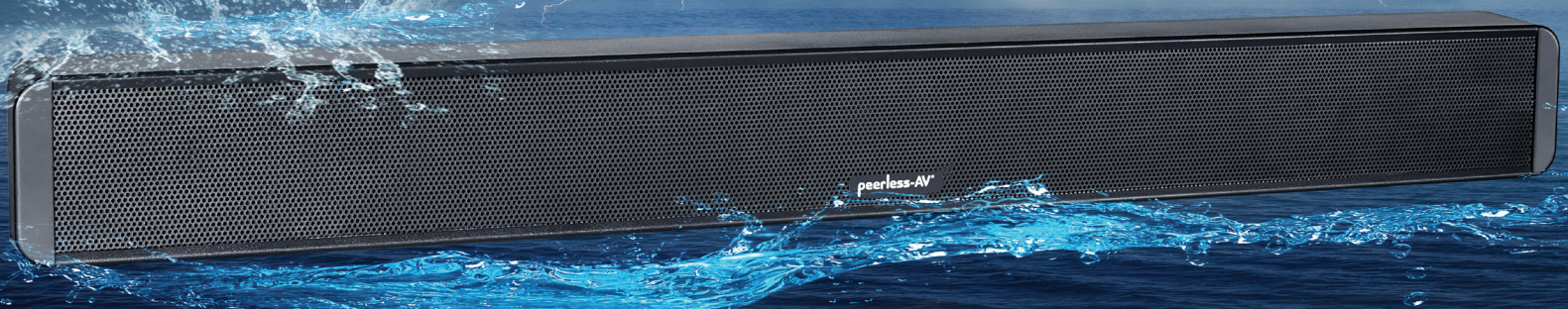


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OUTDOOR AV

we used 8-inch TDG speakers for the six channels, and we used a SnapAV Episode Hardscape 10-inch subwoofer that we placed under an end table to hide it."

THE INTEROPERABILITY OF COMPONENTS

Beyond environment and budget, Chris Smith of New York's Cloud9 Smart, focuses on the interoperability of components and robust networking, features that fall under his design-and-engineering process that underscores Cloud9 Smart's commitment to service.

"When considering a project, we need to know we can implement it well and service it well," he said. "We refuse to dive into the unknown and hope for the best; it would be the fastest way to an unhappy client."

Because Cloud9 Smart is a New York City-based integration company, its outdoor AV clients are often MDU dwellers fortunate enough to have outdoor space, such as a terrace. Recently, a West 20th Street rooftop terrace for a penthouse got the Cloud9 treatment, when the team was tasked with concealing a lot of technology in a very tight space. For video, Smith's team integrated a Séura UltraBright outdoor television, which automatically adjusts for brightness based on ambient lighting conditions. For the audio, the team utilized Sonance's SLS line of speakers, which have the



Cloud9 Smart's Chris Smith says that when considering a project, his company needs to know that they can implement technology well and service it well.

look of landscape lighting, and integrated them into planter boxes specifically sized to conceal the speaker heads and the subwoofer inside them.

On a Connecticut estate, Cloud9 had an audio request around a pool that required 20 speakers and four subwoofers to reproduce the proper quality and consistency of sound. "Again, we used Sonance SLS," Smith said. "We actually brought a full demo system onto the client's property to demonstrate the experience firsthand. Once we won the project we hid the heads among the shrubbery to keep the architect, landscape designer, and client happy."

HOW ABOUT A BOAT DOCK PROJECT?

Orlando, FL is humid. It also boasts extensive marine culture, which is right in Creative Concepts' wheelhouse. Led by David Athey, the integration company takes into consideration landscape coverage not just for sound but also wireless networking, especially when a boat dock is the integration site.

"I always recommend enough speakers and subwoofers to

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prevent any dead spots in the entertainment system, and I always try and locate Wi-Fi access points to achieve the desired coverage for the client," Athey said. "Another vital consideration is how to keep the speakers and related wiring safe from landscapers and their destructive cutting and trimming tools."

Creative Concepts recently completed a pool house project for a luxury property. Part of a major remodel, the company installed marine-grade James Loudspeaker architectural speakers flush-mounted in the eaves of the outdoor bar. With a client request to provide great audio with a discreet appearance, Athey's team also integrated six James pendant speakers and an outdoor subterranean subwoofer for the pool area while providing outdoor Wi-Fi along with iPad-based RTI control for the entertainment system.



David Athey, owner of Orlando's Creative Concepts, always recommends enough speakers and subwoofers to prevent dead spots in the outdoor entertainment system.

DISPERSING SOUND EVENLY

Tim Root of Premier Audio Video in St. Louis, MO is used to clients having a bit of sticker shock when he quotes larger outdoor systems, but they often come around once he explains the benefits of dispersing sound evenly throughout the outdoor space and gives them a demo. A recent installation that his company did had two installation phases.

"The backyard included a large landscaped area with waterfalls, and there was an outdoor kitchen, where we installed eight Triad Garden Array speakers and two underground subwoofers throughout the yard," Root explained. "Later, when the homeowner decided to put in a pool, we reconfigured the layout and moved some of the speakers, as well as added eight speakers and two more underground subs. It was an easy upgrade because the customer had already loved the sound quality from their original installation. It took a little convincing, but the client changed his mind after listening to the full system."

The Sound Guys owner and president Jeff Bradford, who is based in Canandaigua, NY, focuses on leveraging expectations,

"We zoned the speakers and subwoofer separately, giving the subwoofer its own zone for control and volume. This turned out to be one of the features the client liked most."

—Kris Gutrich, Remote Audio/Video

with a clear motto for outdoor AV product selection that cheaper isn't better, especially in the harsh Northeast climate. He tells his clients that cheaper products mean downtime and/or replacements, which lessen the experience.

"We installed a rather large outdoor space with Rockustics rock speakers," Bradford said of a recent installation project. "They wanted great coverage, but realistic-looking rocks. They also had a bad taste from a cheaper manufacturer where the weed-wacker chipped them, and they looked like plastic speakers, with a bad paint job. Rockustics are root-molded to keep their color throughout the entire density of the cabinet that looks like a rock. They also use real rock and marble dust to add not just realism, but strength. The client was amazed not just by their looks, but by their performance as well."

THE FUTURE OF OUTER SPACES

Having nailed the delivery of epic indoor entertainment experiences, the next great frontier for custom home integration is to bring an equally mind-blowing experience to the outdoor entertainment space. For the integrators in this article, voice control is a good starting point to further evolve the category.

"Voice control is the next big thing," Gutrich said. "Every day we have requests for more of that tech. If Control4 could integrate voice commands in their remote controls like Xfinity has, that could be a game changer. If Amazon Alexa or Google Home could come up with an outdoor-rated product, that too could be a game changer."

Root echoed Gutrich when he said, "We've found that voice control is really popular, and our customers want it both inside and outside their homes. It's a little trickier to integrate voice control outside because of ambient noise, so there is room for improvement in that space. It would be nice to see a product with less microphone sensitivity that can get past the ambient noise of the outdoors."

Also on our integrators' wish lists are even greater improvements to outdoor television affordability, durability, and technology. Smith thinks Séura and Coastal Source have come closest to delivering on all three points, but Gutrich added that "outdoor TVs are still not where they should be. Picture quality alone needs to be much better." He also expressed disappointment that the leading consumer TV manufacturers haven't created outdoor-specific models, despite what he sees as strong demand.

In addition to smaller tweaks like more wireless access points in landscape speakers, our integrators look forward to the creation of viable in-pool speakers, integration of drone technology for home emergencies, and better Bluetooth coverage for outdoor gaming.

"I would also like to see some additional options for outdoor control with weatherproof user-interface solutions," Athey said. "These are all things that could expand interest among consumers and drive additional business for AV integrators."

Llanor Alleyne is a contributing writer for *Residential Systems*.