

Robb Report

HOME ENTERTAINMENT

THE FINEST IN AUDIO/VIDEO TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

indoor
outdoor
theater
Nippura's 84"
all-weather screen



windows
media
server:
*heaven or
headache?*



OPEN HOUSE: 3 Beautiful High-Technology Homes
STRANGE NEW SUBWOOFERS: 5 Innovative Design
TUNES AT A TOUCH: Qsonix's Irresistible Music Se

When I was involved in rear-projection TV development 10 years ago, my company's sets featured industry-standard screens designed to maximize picture brightness, even though they created optical distortions. A screen vendor sent a prototype rear-projection screen that promised better picture quality; it consisted of an acrylic back layer coated with a translucent matte material and a glass layer in front. It dramatically improved our TVs' pictures, but because it cost so much and would have made production difficult, we shelved the project.

Fast-forward a decade, and I find myself in Editor in Chief Brent Butterworth's home theater looking at something remarkably similar to that screen I saw years ago: the Nippura Blue Ocean. Nippura is a specialty manufacturer whose sole other product is optical-quality acrylic for aquariums. We're not talking about your average aquarium: Nippura is the dominant player in really big aquariums, the kind sharks and orcas swim in at theme parks.

Last year, Nippura quietly launched its Blue

Don't get any ideas about parking your video projector 3 feet behind the Blue Ocean screen as we have done here. Consider this photo a dramatization; you'll probably need at least several feet of space between the two.

BEYOND *the* SEA

There is nothing fishy about Nippura's Blue Ocean rear-projection video screen.





Ocean screens, which marry optical-quality acrylic with a dual-layered approach for rear projection. The screens can be installed flush in a wall or on a free-standing optional base, and can even hang from a ceiling via thin cables to create a dramatic floating picture effect. Nippura offers the screens in standard and custom sizes; the company says it can build a seamless screen in any size you wish.

Before we get into how video looks on the Blue Ocean screen, I must warn you that rear-projection video systems demand much more from you than do front-projection systems—specifically, space. The video projector mounts behind these screens, not in front of them. Thus, most installations place the projector in a storage room behind the screen. Your installer can provide a mirror mechanism



The Blue Ocean screen has acrylic tabs that let it attach to a floor stand (above). The tabs have holes, so the screen can be hung from a ceiling with thin cables for a floating picture effect.

BACKYARD BLISS: USING THE BLUE OCEAN OUTDOORS

When your projection screen is made from the same material as commercial aquariums, the adventurous mind reels with possibilities—specifically, using the screen as the centerpiece for an outdoor home theater. But this is no whimsical notion, because Nippura does indeed tout the indoor/outdoor capabilities of its acrylic Blue Ocean screen. We knew that to appreciate this product fully, we would have to set up a backyard home theater and watch some DVDs from the comfort of our lawn chairs—adding cigars and spritz cocktails to complete the mood.

With the 90-pound Blue Ocean in place, we set up a SIM2 Domino projector, then surround ourselves with Infinity's TSS-4000 speaker system. After a little focusing of the SIM2 projector, we are ready for our first taste of serious outdoor home theater.

And what a wonderful experience it turns out to be! Even in the bright ambient light of the San Fernando Valley, the picture seems possessed of a brilliant phosphorescent glow—aided by the Blue Ocean's tendency to make images look as if they are floating in space. Your education about the finer things in life is simply incomplete until you have spent an evening watching the Blue Ocean's sharp, vivid picture as a light breeze carries away the smoke from your La Gloria Cubana Serie R Limitada.

Of course, making this installation permanent would require outdoor speakers and a waterproof projector housing. But until the next rain, at least, I probably have the only outdoor theater in the San Fernando Valley since the demise of the Van Nuys Drive-In. —*Brent Butterworth*



that cuts the space required behind the screen from about 10 feet down to four, but either way, chances are you cannot simply drop a rear-projection rig into your living room without substantial remodeling.

Nippura offers screens in three different gain ratings; gain measures how much of a projector's light the screen delivers. The higher the number, the brighter the picture. Nippura smartly recommends its 0.7 gain version for home theater use. Although this screen produces the dimmest picture of all the Nippura models, most modern projectors produce more light than you really need. Attenuating some of that light improves contrast, giving richer, deeper blacks and a more vivid picture overall.

We decide to start with some technical measurements to get a handle on what this unusual screen does. We first measure the light output from the SIM2 Domino projector Brent is using on his 1.3 gain front-projection screen, and get a figure of 20 footlamberts—a little brighter than the picture you see in a typical movie theater. With the 84-inch Blue Ocean screen, the figure falls to about 8 footlamberts, which we expected given the 0.6 difference in gain between the screens. This leaves us with a dimmer picture than we are used to, but as we adjust our viewing environment to suit the screen, we start to appreciate the Blue Ocean's aesthetic advantages.

Brent and test assistant Alex Gonzalez have placed the screen in the middle of his home theater, plopped the Domino projector on a table 10 feet behind the screen, and moved all the chairs to the other side so we can get a good look at the picture. It looks promising, but Brent improves it further with a bolt of black cloth. He and Alex divide the room in two by hanging pieces of cloth from the ceiling, surrounding the Blue Ocean with black fabric so that only the screen is visible and the amount of light reflecting around the room is cut substantially.

Prior to the draping, we had been watching clips from a prerelease DVD of *The Incredibles* ... and the picture was just OK. After the black-cloth draping, though, we sit with jaws agape. Nippura's literature promises 3-D-like depth, and there it is in spades. Sumptuous blacks and dark, textured grays. Color richness that is surely beyond what even film projectors can provide. Detail like I have never seen before from a DVD. Had I not known what format I was watching, I would have bet that it was high-definition video and wondered how Alex scored a D-VHS copy of a movie that at the time was not even available on home video.

Even with the room lights raised so that we can read comfortably, the picture is still eminently watchable—an inherent benefit of rear projection, because the



The Blue Ocean screen's floor stand (above) comes with a black acrylic bottom shelf that can hold a center speaker or some DVDs, but it's not shown in this photo because our photographer didn't consider it adequately stylish.

projector's light shines onto the back of the screen where the room light cannot reach.

I have come to love front-projection video in the 20 years I have lived with it. But as far as I am concerned, Nippura's Blue Ocean rear-projection screen turns the

front projection reference standard upside-down—or should I say front-to-back? You simply have to see the Blue Ocean for yourself to appreciate what it can do for your projector's picture. [HE]

■ DESCRIPTION

Dual-layer acrylic rear-projection screen. May be wall-mounted, hung from a ceiling, or used on a stand

■ GAIN

0.7

■ DIMENSIONS

41 x 73 x 1 inches (hwd)

■ PRICE/CONTACT

PRICE: \$8,600

CONTACT: 704.370.7720, usnippura.com



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OR VISIT WWW.USNIPPURA.COM