

On the frontline of automation

Some custom installations are rife with problems and drama at the best of times, but what happens when it's in the middle of a war zone?

On 12 July 2006, rising tension between the Lebanese-based Hezbollah paramilitary force and the Israeli military escalated into a violent conflict after missiles were first launched toward the Israeli border.

For the following 33 days air and ground strikes ensued, destroying civilian infrastructure, displacing more than a million people, and killing thousands more.

In the immediate lead-up to the conflict, French custom integrator Dominique Rigolet was installing a high-end home cinema in the city of Beirut, Lebanon – just a few short kilometres away from what was to become the frontline.

The project was to install a high-end home cinema in a large villa that formerly housed the British Embassy.

Despite the impending hostilities, Dominique says, “I had to complete the installation because in the Latin, or Mediterranean, culture keeping promises and being true to your word is the key to being successful.”

After the initial meeting with his industrialist client, Dominique returned to Paris to design a system. Within three weeks, the contract was signed and Dominique's war zone installation began.

Work on the project began in June. But when it became obvious that tension between

Israel and Lebanon was increasing, Dominique headed back to Paris.

“Without realising, I took the last plane that flew out from Beirut to Paris. The next morning I looked at my TV and saw smoke rising from the Beirut airport.”

The delay created by the conflict caused major scheduling problems; the client had demanded the project be completed by Christmas. Losing a month made everybody anxious.

On 1 October 2006, Israeli troops withdrew from Lebanon and work on the project resumed.

“During the war, only certain parts of Beirut were destroyed; when I now travel from the airport to the villa, which is on a top of the hill with a beautiful view overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, everything appears to be the same.

“When the installation restarted we were lucky to find the town intact. The southern suburbs, however, which have a different population, were indeed like what you see on TV.

“In regards to the installation, a major problem came in the form of a poor quality power supply. We had to import and install 12,000L of fuel, plus a private generator and regulator.”

Dominique notes he was awarded the project on the condition that he adhered to the

client's and decorator's design requirements. The technical component, however, was left up to him, but he had little room to manoeuvre.

The owner simply wanted to have a cinema-like Full-HD image and multi-channel distributed audio. He also wanted the majority of the elements to be hidden.

“The only time we had any significant difference of opinion was in regard to the size of the projector screen. I wanted to use one with a 3.5m base, while my client wanted a 4m base. We had a discussion and he agreed to go with the size I suggested.”

Dominique, who founded the Paris-based design and installation company Audire, was the first European to receive Level II Certification from HAA, an association of nearly 2,000 acousticians specialising in the design and deployment of private auditoriums and cinemas.

Further, in September 2006, Dominique was voted Best Worldwide Acoustician by the HAA at a ceremony at the CEDIA US expo in Denver, Colorado.

In regards to the Lebanese project, he says the main problem, from an installation perspective, was that decorative constraints left him only about 15cm to integrate all of the audio enclosures.

The space limitations led Dominique to embark on extensive acoustical engineering



The installation of a home cinema in the former British Embassy in Lebanon was delayed by over a month when a violent war erupted just kilometres away.



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1. “When the installation restarted we were lucky to find the town intact. But, a major problem came in the form of a poor quality power supply. We had to import and install 12,000L of fuel, plus a private generator and regulator,” says French custom installer Dominique Rigolet.

2. The space limitations led Dominique to embark on extensive acoustical engineering studies to determine which surfaces needed to be treated and the number of speakers and subwoofers required to adequately fit-out the home cinema.

3. The installation included four 38cm Triad Platinum Sub15 subwoofers, a JVC HD 10K D-ILA projector, a Screen Research XMASK Ultimate 16:9 screen with a 3.5 metre base, and a fully customised control system including a Creston AV2 controller.

studies of the room to determine which surfaces needed to be treated, and the number of speakers and subwoofers required to adequately fit-out the 80m², 6m-high home cinema that incorporated four levels of seating organised in semi-circles.

As a result four 38cm Triad Platinum Sub15 subwoofers were installed – two at the front and the other two on the sides, behind acoustically transparent masks. 11 Cabasse Baltic speakers and 11 B&W in-wall satellites were also included in the seven-channel sound system

The video system consisted of a JVC HD 10K D-ILA projector and a Screen Research XMASK Ultimate 16:9 screen with a 3.5 metre base. A fully customised control system including a Creston AV2 controller was developed to control all devices and the lighting system via an EIB network.

Ultimately, Dominique says, the cultural differences between the French and Lebanese

were overcome to deliver a fully functional home cinema by the Christmas deadline.

“Lebanese people are very warm, but it takes time in order to be accepted. You have to be modest and you have to be sensitive.

“We knew that certain things had to be made locally and we wanted to use a mix of our people and local people.

“After we were accepted, there were times when 28 people were working on the home theatre installation just to get it done on time.”

A lot of time was devoted to getting the acoustics right and the result is a crystal clear sound-field accessible at every seat, and a linear bass response that is powerful, fast and articulate, he says. ■

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