

Widescreen Review
The Essential Home Theatre Resource™
CINERAMA ARRIVES ON BLU-RAY
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NEWSLETTER

WELCOME!

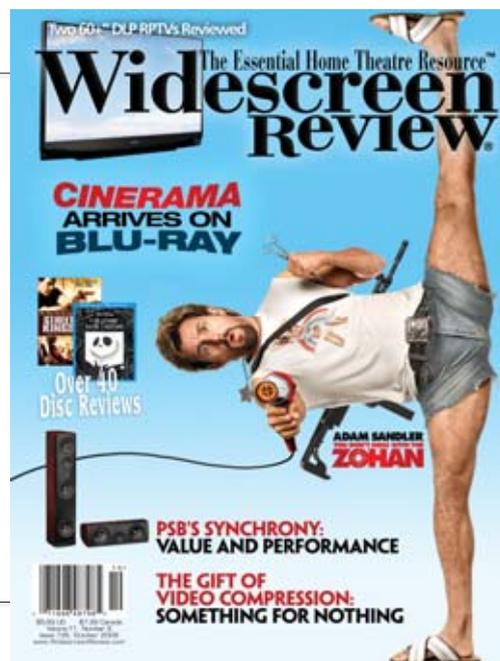
If you haven't visited www.widescreenreview.com lately, you've been missing out. We still update the news, DVD and Blu-ray Disc™ reviews, and magazine content on our Web site, but we are also constantly adding contests and have also introduced a new Blog section. The Studio Scoop is a favorite among our readers and now you can get mini versions of the Scoop on a daily basis. Stacey Pendry does her best to put up at least one piece of late-breaking Studio News on her blog each day. Danny Richelieu blogs on equipment news in the Coming Soon... Section, and I will bring you Editor Couch-type information as often as I can. Our new contest is in conjunction with a short Reader Survey, and with eight different Blu-ray Discs up for grabs, as well as a Sony BDP-S350 Blu-ray Disc™ player, this is something you won't want to miss out on. Give us your feedback on your feelings on Blu-ray and how you would like us to proceed with our disc reviews in the future. This contest ends on October 7th, so don't delay! Lastly, our archived article this month is *Anamorphic Widescreen Lovin', Touchin', Squeezin' DVDs* from Issue #33. I hope you enjoy it.

Gary Reber
Editor-In-Chief, *Widescreen Review*

NOW AVAILABLE ON NEWSSTANDS

Issue 135, October 2008 of *Widescreen Review*:

- "Samsung HL61A750AF 61-inch 1080p LED-Based DLP® HDTV" By Mike Marks
- "PSB Synchrony Loudspeaker System: Synchrony One, One C, S, and HD10 Subwoofer" By John Kotchis
- "Mitsubishi WD-65736 65-inch DLP® Rear-Projection Television" By Danny Richelieu
- "A Cinerama Adventure: Director David Strohmaier" By Danny Richelieu
- "Connecting Dots...Getting Something For Nothing" By Amir Majidimehr
- Plus "The Observer," "New Equipment," "Your Letters," "One Installer's Opinion," Blu-ray Disc and DVD picture and sound quality reviews, and more...



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By Jim Taylor

Widescreen Review's **HD Holiday Contest.** **Enter to win** a Panasonic VIERA 46" 1080p plasma and Blu-ray™ home theatre system.



The Panasonic Viera 1080p TH-46PZ80 plasma boasts a 20,000:1 contrast ratio for deep black levels and high brightness, and its ability to accept the native 1080p24 signal from the SC-BT100's Blu-ray Disc™ player over any of its three HDMI inputs helps create a truly cinematic experience. In addition, the system is completely backwards-compatible with DVD.

As the first Blu-ray Disc home theater system to include wireless connections to the surround loudspeakers, the 5.1 channel SC-BT100 can be installed in any room, and the included iPod® dock and SD memory card for viewing HD video in the AVCHD format allows you to experience a broad range of entertainment options. Panasonic's Viera Link allows the entire system to be controlled using a single remote.

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A winner will be drawn at random on December 22, 2008. Entries must be received by December 19, 2008. Only one entry per physical address. Sorry, open only to U.S. Residents 18 years of age or older. Complete rules and details available at <http://WidescreenReview.com/Sweepstakes>.

Recent News

Here are some of the recent headlines that have made it to the News section of WidescreenReview.com, which is now updated daily as our Web staff finds worthy home theatre-related stories and press releases. Visit WidescreenReview.com throughout the day to find out what's going on in the world of Home Theatre.

Sony: Blu-ray™ Format Can't Be Improved (Electricpig)

"Blu-ray™'s conquered the HD format war, but its design and technical limitations mean the current format is as good as it'll get. Sony says it'll be the last optical format, after which, we'll move away from shiny discs altogether..."

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<http://www.electricpig.co.uk/2008/09/01/sony-blu-ray-format-can%E2%80%99t-be-improved/>

Plasma Nearing Extinction As LCD TVs Advance (Tech Radar)

"As consumer electronics brands go, Pioneer's KURO plasma TVs have been a shining beacon of hope over the last few years. It's a fairly established fact that Pioneer's KURO TVs are by far the best in the business.

However, plasma TVs only make up 10 percent of flat screen sales. And with LCD panels improving exponentially year-on-year, and with OLED emerging as a viable future option, some people are predicting the imminent death of plasma as a mass-market technology..."

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http://www.symplification.com/2008/canon_wins_sed_case_in_the_fifth_circuit

City Tests Switch To Digital TV (Wall Street Journal)

"Next Monday, a group of public officials and broadcasters will gather in Wilmington, N.C., with little more to do than wait for the phones to ring.

At noon that day, Wilmington stations will shut off their old television signals and broadcast only in digital, potentially leaving thousands of older televisions unusable. Wilmington is the first U.S. city to switch to digital-only television broadcasts and is doing it five months early..."

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117130939784306203.html>

Anchor Bay Offers New Low-Cost HDMI 1.3 Deep Color Video-Processing IC For Blu-ray Players, AV Receivers

Anchor Bay announced the release of the ABT1030, a new video-processing IC designed for low-cost format-conversion applications in STB, DVD, AVR, and Blu-ray player/recorders. In addition to featuring Video Reference Series™ (VRS™) Precision Video Scaling™ and Precision Deinterlacing™, the ABT1030 includes the patented Progressive Re-Processing™ (PRP™) technology. PRP is a breakthrough technology that improves the picture quality caused by other deinterlacers..."

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http://www.widescreenreview.com/news_detail.php?id=16869

Media Center Integrator Alliance Debuts At CEDIA Expo 2008

"The Media Center Integrator Alliance (MCIA) announces its entrance into the custom install channel to drive adoption and raise awareness of the Media Center ecosystem. Comprised of some of the industry's top companies, MCIA was founded to provide both integrators and manufacturers with best practices and training for technology using Media Center..."

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LCD TV Installation, Plasma TV Installation, And Recycling By HD Installers

"HD Installers, the recent winner of the 2008 LCD TV Installation Company of the Year Award and the leader in big screen TV installation, is launching a television recycling service. The television recycling service is an industry first by a nationwide provider of LCD TV Installation, Plasma TV Installation, and Home Theater Installation..."

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Coming Soon... To A Retailer Near You

Tricia Spears



PSB Imagine S

Imagine if **PSB Speakers** came out with four new loudspeakers that they considered to be the company's finest in visual presentation for proportion, sculptural form, and visual detail. Well, that's what they have done with the introduction of the **Imagine T**, **Imagine B**, **Imagine C**, and **Imagine S** loudspeakers. All models share a common driver family, with an all-new, high-output 5.25-inch woofer and titanium-dome 1-inch tweeter, and the enclosures feature smooth, seamless, unbroken surfaces. The baffles in the line are 1.5 inches thick, with the

sides, tops, and bottoms being constructed of seven layers of 3-mm MDF laminated together with strategically placed internal braces.

The Imagine woofers incorporate injection-molded diaphragms of a proprietary, ceramic-filled polypropylene. The Imagine T (\$2,000 per pair) is a three-driver, two-and-a-half-way tower full-range floorstanding design, the Imagine B (\$1,000 per pair) is a two-way stand/bookshelf mount, the Imagine C (\$800 each) is a dual-woofer, horizontal two-way center-channel loudspeaker, and the Imagine S (\$1,200 per pair) is a dual-two-way, selectable dipole/bipole/dual-channel monopole surround loudspeaker that may be connected as two discrete (side/rear) two-way pairs in compatible systems.

PSB Speakers 905 831 6555 www.psbSpeakers.com

Zero Surge® has introduced a new series of Power Quality Filters to complement their line of rack-mount and stand-alone products. The

Room Alleviator is designed to protect an entire room or home theatre installation and features WVR-TSC®—Wide Voltage Range-Total Surge Cancellation—which entirely eliminates the danger of surge energy to protected equipment.

The Room Alleviator is available in 20-amp, 120-volt (\$490) and 20-amp 240/208-volt (\$875) models. The **Outdoor Alleviator** is an outdoor-use Power Quality Filter with a NEMA 4 weather-resistant enclosure, designed for installation on a branch circuit. With WVR-TSC, RFI, and EMI filtering, the Outdoor Alleviator is available in 20-amp, 120-volt (\$849) and 20-amp 240/208-volt (\$1,190) models. Custom order units with up to 40-amp capacity are also available. And the **Video Alleviator** is designed to protect and enhance all video displays and includes the usual Zero Surge features. Measuring 1.7 inches deep by 4.2 inches wide and 9 inches in length, the compact Video Alleviator offers a flush-mount design. With an IEC removable power connection and shipping with two power cords—a 3-foot for flat displays and a 6-foot for RPTV and projection installations—the price of the Video Alleviator is \$300.

Zero Surge® 800 996 6696 www.zerosurge.com



Zero Surge Video Alleviator

Bowers & Wilkins has added a new subwoofer to its 600 Series, the **ASW 610XP**.

Utilizing a single 10-inch driver in a sealed enclosure, the results are a flat response to 25 Hz (-3 dB) with useful bass extension to 18 Hz (-6 dB). The subwoofer's driver is a very long-throw ten-inch driver with dual, high-current voice coils and a strong paper/Kevlar™ cone. The audiophile-grade Class D design of the amplifier delivers a true 500 watts to the sub's operating band. Also included is three-position EQ switching, line-in level, low-pass frequency with bypass, bass roll off alignment, and phase, plus auto-on/off/standby. The ASW 610XP also includes both line-level (RCA) and speaker-level (binding posts) inputs, and a 12-volt on/off trigger. Measuring 13 x 13 x 15 and available in Black Ash, Red Cherry, or Wenge vinyl wood grain finishes, the ASW 610XP can be yours for \$1,200.

B & W Group 978 664 2870 www.bowers-wilkins.com



Bowers & Wilkins ASW 610XP

The newly developed **T2™** automated tilt mount from **CLO Systems** offers both flush and tilt in one simple application. When the television is turned on, the T2 automatically tilts the TV down for reflection-free and on-axis viewing, and when it is turned off the TV retracts to its upright position, which resides about 3 inches from the wall. The need for the provided remote control is eliminated when the "Auto-Mode" is selected. Suitable for flat panel displays in 40 to 60-inch sizes and up to 150 pounds, T2 is installed in the same manner as any conventional manual wall-mounting unit, and a universal mounting attachment kit is also provided. The T2 automated tilt mount is available for \$300.

CLO Systems 877 425 6797 www.cloSystems.com



CLO Systems T2



Cool Components Cabinet Duct

Some cool new products have been introduced by **Cool Components**, one of which is their **Cabinet Duct System**. Designed to vent cabinets by defying the natural convection process, heat is pulled into tubing and then vented down and out the toe kick of the cabinet. Ideal for venting built-in cabinetry, cabinetry where side or top holes are not desirable, or in venting-challenged cabinetry, the system is said to be easily installed and fully customizable. Other new products from Cool Components include **In-Wall**

and **In-Ceiling Ducting Products**, a **Return Vent System**, **Rack Side Cooling Units**, a **Universal Cooler**, **Temperature Displays**, **Game Box Coolers**, and **Temperature Based Speed Controls**. Additionally, the company has introduced a full line of wood grills to go along with their HiFlo, HiFlo Lite, and Toe Kick systems. Custom manufactured to perfectly match their fan units, the grills are available in maple, oak, and teak and also come unfinished.

Cool Components, Inc. 813 322 3814 www.coolcomponents.com



Artison Masterpiece In-Wall LCR

Artison has announced that their attachable LCRs—Masterpiece, Portrait, and Sketch—are now available in In-Wall versions. The company's DualMono® Center Channel technology integrates the center channels into the upper portion of both the right and left loudspeaker housing, producing dialogue in the center of the screen, rather than above or below, eliminating the need for a separate center channel enclosure. The flagship **Masterpiece In-Wall LCR** loudspeakers (\$2,800 per pair) are 31 inches high x 6.8 inches wide x 3.75 inches deep and have 5.25 inches Kevlar Long Throw Midrange drivers and forward-firing Adjustable Super Audio Tweeters. The **Portrait In-Wall LCRs** (\$2,000 per pair) are 27 inches high x 6.8 inches wide x 3.75 inches deep and have 4.5 inches Kevlar Long Throw Midrange drivers

that use a fixed-phase plug, and two 25mm Super Audio Tweeters. And the **Sketch In-Wall LCR** loudspeakers (\$1,350 per pair) are the same size as the Portrait In-Wall LCRs and incorporate two Polypropylene 4.5-inch woofers and 1-inch Silk Dome tweeters.

Artison 775 833 4344 www.artisonusa.com

The new **LT25** wall mount from **Sanus Systems** is a lightweight aluminum and ABS wall-plate design, with a strength-to-weight ratio and corrosion resistance greater than steel. Weighing only 3.5 pounds, it is said that the mount can be balanced and installed by one person. The plate's open architecture provides ample space for cable management and electrical boxes. Sanus claims that the ProSet™ post-installation height and leveling adjustment will ensure that the television is perfectly positioned, and Virtual Axis™ fingertip tilt technology offers effortless viewing angle adjustment without the use of tools. The LT25 can support flat panel televisions from 30 to 60 inches and up to 175 pounds and is available in black and silver for \$220.



Sanus Systems LT25

Sanus Systems 651-484-7988 www.sanus.com



Tributaries HXMini5

Tributaries® Cable's HXMini5 is a new HDMI-extending solution that is reported to be able to send full high-definition 1080p HDMI video with audio more than 300 feet with no loss of video quality or audio/video reliability, while retaining full compatibility with HDMI v1.3. The two-piece HXMini5 consists of a compact powered transmitter, with an included 6-volt power supply, and a compact receiver module. Each has a single HDMI port for connection to a source and destination. The new extender is fully HDCP-compliant and user transparent with all HDMI-equipped components. The HXMini5's self-calibrating active amplification and equalization, and buffered output circuitry, automatically adapt to cable length and signal rate, eliminating signal losses. Tributaries' HXMini5 is available for \$450.

Tributaries@ 800 521 1596 www.tributariescable.com

Bryston, Ltd. has announced the introduction of its D-Series eight-channel zone amplifiers. The lightweight, energy-efficient, and cost-competitive amplifiers are termed "Hybrid" because of the combination of Class D amplifier technology and the Bryston-engineered linear power supply design. The **D-130Z Hybrid** (\$4,400) features dual 650-watt linear power supplies, eight independent channels at 130 watts each into 4 ohms and 90 watts at 8 ohms, four stereo zones at 130 watts per channel into 4 ohms, and each individual zone is bridgeable to 400 watts into 8 ohms. The **D-250Z Hybrid** (\$5,700) features dual 850-watt linear power supplies, eight independent channels at 250 watts each into 4 ohms and 150 watts at 8 ohms, four stereo zones at 250 watts per channel into 4 ohms, and each individual zone is bridgeable to 800 watts into 8 ohms.

Bryston, Ltd. 705 742 5325 www.bryston.com

New from **Yamaha Electronics** is the **YAS-71 AIR SURROUND XTREME** front surround system. Consisting of a slim front surround module and a powered subwoofer, the system comes in a glossy black finish and is available for \$600. The YAS-71 is fully compatible with Dolby Digital®, DTS®, and Dolby Pro Logic II and delivers a full 210 watts of power, including 70 watts from right and left channels and 70 watts from the subwoofer. Users can choose from four surround listening modes—music, movie, sports, and game—and between "narrow" and "wide" listening zone modes. The YAS-71 is iPod®-compatible via the optional Yamaha YDS-11 dock (\$100) and is also compatible with wireless Bluetooth devices via the optional Yamaha YBA-10 Bluetooth wireless audio receiver (\$130). The system also includes a built-in FM tuner.



Yamaha YAS-71

Yamaha Electronics 800 4 YAMAHA www.yamaha.com

The **InFocus IN83** 1080p projector is a new addition to their Play Big home theatre projection line. Featuring DLP® DarkChip4™ technology with BrilliantColor™ from Texas Instruments, the Play Big IN83 offers a native 5000:1 contrast ratio, with a maximum contrast of 15,000:1. With video-optimized brightness of 1,600 ANSI lumens, the IN83 is said to deliver film-standard, D65K color accuracy, even in ambient light. Using the InFocus Color Gamut Calibrator with ISF Day and Night presets, integrated Pixelworks™ DNX™ 10-bit video-processing technology, and HDMI 1.3 with Deep Color™ support, the Play Big IN83 is available for \$6,000.



InFocus IN83

InFocus 800 294 6400 www.infocus.com

The Studio Scoop

Rumors, Reports, & Ramblings

Stacey Pendry

New Studio Scoop Blog

I wanted to thank all the fans of this column who've been so kind to send e-mails and letters of praise—I am truly touched! I've read each and every comment that has come my way and have taken note that one request that seems to permeate your e-mails is that you wish that Studio Scoop was published more frequently than once a month.

Well, your wish is my command: you can now keep on top of the studios' inside scoop, as well as newly announced DVD and Blu-ray™ releases, in my Studio Scoop blog. Nearly every day I will be updating my blog with all the latest industry news and release announcements, so be sure to check it out.

DVD & Blu-ray Titles Up For Grabs

In keeping with my compulsion to please everyone all the time, I've arranged for some stellar titles to be given away to our much-loved readers this month. Be sure to enter to win one of these A-list titles detailed below.

From the producers of *The 40 Year Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up* comes the first romantic disaster comedy, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. Starring Jason Segel, Kristen Bell, Mila Kunis, and the hilarious Russell Brand, this comedy is perfect for everyone who has loved and lost their dream mate and would prefer to forget the whole affair. You have until October 7th to enter to win the comedy that led Richard Roeper (*At The Movies With Ebert & Roeper*) to exclaim, "this movie is one of the funniest movies I've ever seen!"

Be the first to own *Dr. No* on Blu-ray Disc™. *Dr. No* has been recently restored and re-mastered via the state-of-the-art Lowry process digital frame-by-frame restoration for the highest quality picture and sound quality. The disc is brimming with all new special features, including several in-depth featurettes that chronicle the restoration process. Be sure to enter prior to the October 22nd deadline to be one of the first to enjoy Bond—James Bond in high-def.

Get ready to take a *Journey To The*



Center Of The Earth when you enter to win the action-packed remake of the Jules Verne classic starring Brendan Fraser. Fresh out of a Cineplex near you, this family oriented adventure flick will surely please young and old movie fans alike. This title will make a great addition to anybody's DVD collection.

Paramount/DreamWorks

Paramount is set to re-team with *The Spiderwick Chronicles* producers Mark Canton and Ellen Goldsmith-Vein to bring *Spanking Shakespeare* to the big screen. The project is being adapted from the freshman novel by the same name, written by Jake Wizner, an eighth-grade teacher based in New York.

The story centers on a teenaged character, Shakespeare Shapiro, who is required to complete a writing project about his time in high school before he graduates.

Shakespeare's paper chronicles every mortifying detail of his angst-filled high school experience—from his quest to get accepted in a college, to his hopes of finding a girlfriend; nothing is left to the imagination.

Paramount will release the film under its MTV Films label, with Shawn Levy to direct.

No Country For Old Men star Tommy Lee Jones is suing Paramount for more than \$10 million that the Oscar®-winning actor claims the studio owes him for the 2007 Academy Award® winning film.

The lawsuit, filed in Bexar County, Texas the first week of September, claims the studio did not pay the Oscar-winning actor promised bonuses, had expenses wrongly deducted, and that his contract had known errors that were not corrected prior to the movie being made.

The movie, based upon the critically acclaimed novel by Cormac McCarthy, was

set in Texas and garnered four Academy Awards, including Best Picture for 2007, and made \$160 million in worldwide box office receipts.

Jones is asking an auditor be named to review the financial records to determine what amount he should be awarded, should the lawsuit prevail.

Paramount declined to comment on the matter.

Johnny Depp is re-teaming with *Pirates Of The Caribbean* Director Gore Verbinski in a new animated feature film that will be financed and distributed by Paramount.

John Logan, who wrote the screenplay for *The Aviator*, has penned the script for *Rango*, based on an original idea of Verbinski's. Verbinski will work with Industrial Light & Magic on the animation, and his Blind Wink Productions company is set to produce, along with Paramount-based Nickelodeon Films.

Depp will voice the lead character Rango, a household pet that goes on an adventure of self-discovery in Paramount's most star-driven feature-length animation project to date.

Rango will use cutting-edge CG animation techniques that "will allow us to capture and translate every aspect of Johnny's performance, using it to drive the computer-generated character in a way that has yet to be seen in an animated feature," Verbinski said.

Sony

Dutch-born Paul Verhoeven is contemplating a return to the world of erotic thrillers. The *Basic Instinct* director is in talks to direct the yet-to-be-titled thriller by Wendy Miller for Relativity Media.

The story centers on a college intern who finds himself trapped in a dangerous affair with his boss's wife. The project has been described as *Risky Business* meets *Fatal Attraction*.

The script was picked up by Relativity in May and has since been fast-tracked for a start date in the first quarter of 2009.

Michael De Luca is producing via his Sony-based De Luca Productions banner, along with Relativity's Ryan Kavanaugh and Tucker Tooley.

Verhoeven's most recently directed WWII spy thriller, *Black Book*, is currently attached

to several projects, including a *Thomas Crown Affair* sequel for MGM, with Pierce Brosnan attached to star.

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment has announced they intend to close their Korean office later this month, citing the country's sluggish DVD market.

According to the Korean Film Council, piracy has cut the value of Korea's home entertainment market this year to an estimated \$289 million, which is roughly half the value of the market in 2002.

Sony has been trying to develop the market in Korea since 1999, when it first released *Fly Away Home*, and later by distributing Blu-ray titles.

Sony was one of the last U.S.-based video distributors left in Korea. Paramount, Buena Vista, 20th Century Fox, and Universal withdrew their distribution arms from the country in 2006. Warner Home Video still has their office open in the country.

What's left for Will Smith to conquer? He has been a whale-chucking superhero, a Man in Black, he was *Legend*, a *Bad Boy*,

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boxing legend *Ali*—now it seems he may next morph into a god.

Randall Wallace, who penned *Braveheart*, has been slated to write *The Last Pharaoh*, a Columbia drama crafted as a vehicle for Smith to play the pharaoh Taharqa, who battled Assyrian invaders in ancient Egypt.

Smith, who has been keen to play the pharaoh for quite some time, brought Wallace the Taharqa story.

Now, there's a man who is clearly in *The Pursuit of Happiness*.

Universal

Talk about job security—Guillermo del Toro has his work cut out for him through the year 2017, and perhaps beyond.

Universal, which has a three-year first-look deal with the successful director, is marking a long-term commitment by setting up four separate projects, including remakes of the sci-fi classics *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde*, along with a remake of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The fourth project in the works is an adaptation of the Dan Simmons' novel, *Dread*.

While del Toro is currently focused on writing the script for *The Hobbit*, with Peter Jackson, if both Universal and del Toro have their way, the director will belong to Universal after *The Hobbit* is completed.

In addition to the four films mentioned above, Universal has its sights on del Toro's pet project—an adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains Of Madness*.

This man must be a compulsive workaholic, as he also has in mind to direct an adaptation of David Moody's novel, *Hater* as well as produce a gothic romance flick entitled *Crimson Peak*.

Quentin Tarantino, writer-director of the Weinstein/Universal pic *Inglorious Bastards*, has signed on Diane Kruger, Christoph Waltz and Paul Rust. The trio joins the already stellar cast of Brad Pitt, Eli Roth, Mike Myers, Michael Fassbender, B.J. Novak, and Samm Levine.

Waltz, best known in Germany for his work as a television actor, has landed the role of Col. Hans Landa, who is the primary antagonist in the drama. Kruger is known for her role as Abigail Chase in Disney's *National Treasure*.

The flick is set to begin production on October 13th in Germany.

20th Century Fox

Ashley Judd has signed the dotted line to star alongside Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson in Fox's upcoming comedy *Tooth Fairy*.

Johnson plays a minor-league hockey player nicknamed The Tooth Fairy, whose bad deed results in an unusual sentence: He must serve one week as a real-life tooth fairy.

Judd will play the hockey player's girlfriend, a single mother of two children.

Also starring in the family-friendly comedy is none other than Mary Poppins herself, Julie Andrews.

The project is currently in pre-production and is scheduled to begin shooting in Vancouver next month.

After receiving less-than-rosy reviews, *Babylon A.D.* Director Mathieu Kassovitz is seeking to distance himself from the sci-fi thriller, which opened on August 29th.

In an interview Kassovitz called his own picture "pure violence and stupidity" and failed to make many of the press events that were scheduled, instead retreating to an island in the Caribbean, causing much consternation at the Fox studios. Kassovitz claimed that Fox made the experience of filming miserable by "sending lawyers who were looking at all the commas and dots. They made everything difficult from A to Z."

Sources close to Kassovitz have reported he has fired his reps at Endeavor—the agency refused to comment on anything involving the sometime-actor and director.

Fox declined comment on the subject of Kassovitz and his descent, instead moving full steam ahead on promoting the film, noting that the films' star, Vin Diesel, is out fully supporting the film.

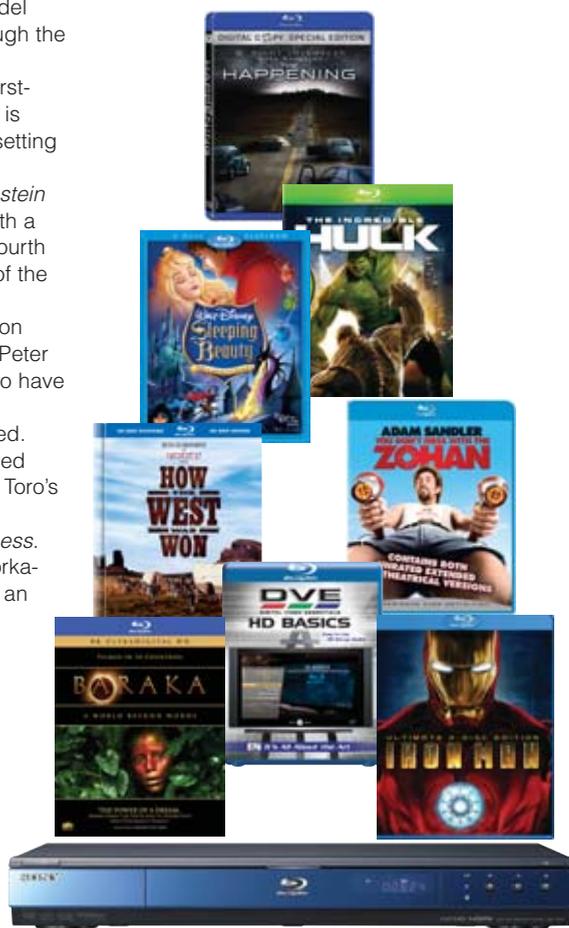
Needless to say, I doubt if we see a Fox/Kassovitz collaboration anytime in the foreseeable future.

Fox's lawsuit over Warner's right to make a film based on the graphic novel *Watchmen*, has a trial date set for January 6th.

Fox, who has spent over a million dollars to develop the film, asserts they have the rights to any projects based on the graphic novel through a 1994 turnaround agreement. The studio maintains that Producer Larry Gordon failed to exercise his right to acquire Fox's remaining interest in *Watchman*, thereby leaving Fox with sole rights.

Judge Gary Allen Fees, who set the trial date, has indicated he wants the case to move quickly, previously asking the two parties for expedited discovery.

Warner Bros., in the meantime, has refused to change *Watchmen's* March 6, 2009 opening date that was announced earlier in the year. *Watchmen* is directed by Zack Snyder and stars Patrick Wilson and Jackie Earle Haley. **WSR**



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Blu-ray player or one of
these great Blu-ray
movies!**

Anamorphic Widescreen Lovin', Touchin', Squeezin' DVDs

JIM TAYLOR

Anamorphic Widescreen

By now, any true videophile is familiar with DVD and its built-in support for widescreen video. And with the demise of Divx (Digital Video Express), which had been the number one target for the slings and arrows of outrageous DVD Web sites, anamorphic widescreen has become the new cause célèbre, with a growing campaign aimed at convincing movie studios to release more discs in the anamorphic widescreen format. But how exactly does anamorphic widescreen work, and why is it such a big deal?

This article assumes an understanding of terms such as aspect ratio, letterbox, widescreen, etc. For an excellent primer on aspect ratios, see Richard Travis' article in Issue 31. We'll focus on anamorphic, a concept that has been around for decades but has been revitalized with digital technology. The word is formed from Greek roots: ana- (up, back) + morph- (shape) + -ic (characterized by), and refers to magnifying or reducing images to dissimilar degrees along different axes. Or, in other words, to stretch or squeeze an image in mostly one direction—horizontally, in this case. Anamorphosis was possibly first applied to film by Zeiss Optical in Germany in 1898. Two French inventors, Ernst Abbe and Henri Chrétien, pioneered anamorphic lenses in the early 1900's. Chrétien used his lens for tank periscopes in World War I, then later patented it under the name Hypergonar. The Hypergonar lens was used for a huge panoramic projection system at the Palace of Light in the Paris Exposition of 1937, and it was later adopted for the CinemaScope widescreen theatrical projection process, beginning with 20th Century Fox's biblical epic, *The Robe*, in 1953. Today, most 2.4:1 widescreen features are filmed with anamorphic (Panavision) lenses that optically squeeze the image during filming, then unsqueeze it when it's projected in the theatre.

Digital Anamorphic

DVD, the ultimate digital convergence medium, has brought anamorphic video into the digital age. As we slowly switch from 1.33:1 (4:3) standard TV to 1.78:1 (16:9) widescreen TV, DVD is there to bridge the

gap. The anamorphic video feature of DVD is specially designed to support 1.78:1 widescreen displays while being compatible with existing 1.33:1 displays.¹

An important underlying fact is that DVD has a restricted set of digital picture resolutions. The DVD-Video specification states that the largest size an MPEG-2 encoded picture can be is 720 horizontal pixels by 480 vertical pixels (for NTSC video; PAL video is encoded at 720x576). This is a 1.33:1 rectangle, given the not-quite-square pixels of NTSC video. The MPEG-2 standard actually defines a 16:9 storage format (1144x572 for NTSC, 1152x576 for PAL) and a 2.21:1 display format, but neither of these is allowed by the DVD-Video specification. Sticking with a common subset of MPEG-2 makes for simpler and cheaper implementation.

Since DVD is limited to a 720x480 resolution designed to hold video shaped for a 1.33:1 rectangle, the trick is to fit a 1.78:1 rectangle into the same space. This problem, of course, has been faced for years by anyone attempting to fit a movie-shaped peg

into a TV-shaped hole. The most common solution, apart from hacking off parts of the picture, is to letterbox. That is, make the two shapes equal in the horizontal dimension, then matte over the gap left at the top and bottom. The problem with this approach is that a large portion of the picture area is wasted in storing nothing but black. This doesn't matter when the picture is displayed unchanged on a standard 1.33:1 TV, but when expanded to fit a 1.78:1 widescreen TV there's a loss of resolution. When a 1.78:1 picture is letterboxed before being digitized for MPEG-2 encoding, only 259,200 pixels are active out of 345,600; the remaining 86,400 pixels—25 percent of the total—are wasted on black (see Figure 1). An excellent solution to this problem is anamorphic processing of the video before encoding. Instead of matching the width and blacking out the gap, anamorphic deformation matches the height and squeezes horizontally to also fit the width. Because the picture fills the available space, 33 percent more pixels can be used to store active picture.

In a sense, the anamorphic format is just a variation of pixel shape, with extra-fat pixels. If you've seen "raw" anamorphic video, you might be thinking "Wait a minute... the pixels are tall and skinny." It's true that they look tall in an anamorphically compressed form, but when expanded out to their proper

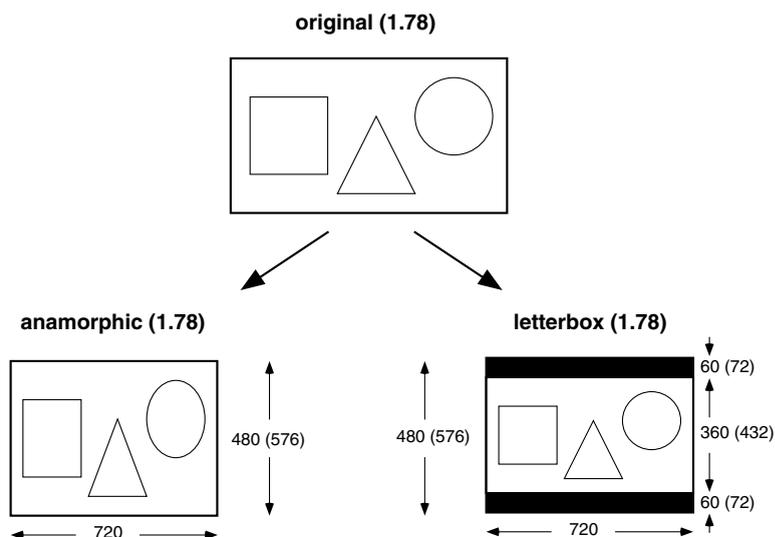


Figure 1

1. Anamorphic video has been used on Laser Discs and even VHS tapes, but the problem is that they only work when shown on widescreen equipment, since unlike DVD players, LaserDisc players and VCRs don't know how to reformat the video for a standard TV.

shape they are short and wide. Unlike computer pixels, which are square, NTSC and PAL video pixels (which don't actually exist on analog displays, but are a useful abstraction) are slightly rectangular. Because of the high horizontal resolution of DVD, the widescreen pixels that result from unsqueezing an anamorphic picture are not objectionable. The 720-pixel native horizontal resolution of DVD equates to 540 lines of horizontal resolution on a standard TV (720/1.33:1), or 405 lines of horizontal resolution on a widescreen TV (720/1.78:1).² Anamorphosis causes no problems with line doublers and other video scalers, which simply replicate the scan lines before they are stretched out by the widescreen display.

Aspect Ratios Redux

Obviously, DVD's anamorphic feature doesn't make everything a perfect fit, since movies don't come nicely packaged at the 1.78:1 aspect ratio. Aspect ratios in common use today in filmmaking and exhibition are 1.66:1, 1.85:1 ("flat"), and 2.4:1 ("scope"). It would have been possible for the designers of DVD to support anamorphosis at additional aspect ratios such as 2.4:1, or even to allow variable formatting between 1.33:1 and 2.7:1, but it was much simpler to go with the standard HDTV shape of 1.78:1, which was designed to be the square of the 1.33:1 ratio and is very close to the midpoint of 1.33:1 and 2.4:1. This ratio makes automatic letterbox conversion happen in exact multiples, as we'll see shortly. Simple math and clean multiples makes for easier and cheaper implementation of players, and for a cleaner picture after digital scaling. On top of all this, the point of using anamorphosis is to improve storage within a format that doesn't match a specific display size. Since there are so few displays that go beyond 1.78:1, there's little reason to complicate the DVD format to accommodate them. In other words, a 2.4:1 movie has to be letterboxed to fit on a 1.78:1 widescreen TV, so it doesn't matter if it's letterboxed to 1.78:1 before or after being stored on DVD—the resulting matte size and resolution are the same.

The upshot is that there are two display aspect ratios supported by DVD: 1.33:1 for standard TVs, and 1.78:1 for widescreen TVs. Since most movies are different shapes, two processes are employed to make various movie-shaped pegs fit TV-shaped holes: letterbox and pan-and-scan. Pan-and-scan

2. The common yardstick of television lines of horizontal resolution is measured per picture height, that is, in a square window that's only as wide as the display is tall. On a wider display fed by the same source, there are fewer horizontal lines within the square window.

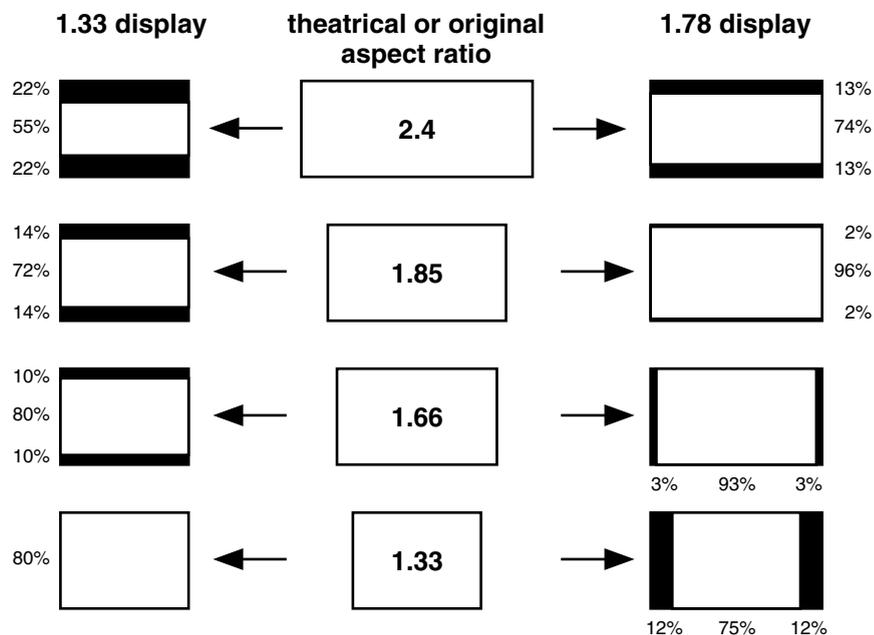


Figure 2

formatting is almost exclusively used to adapt movies for a 1.33:1 display, while letterboxing is used for both 1.33:1 and 1.78:1 display.

A 1.85:1 movie that has been letterboxed for 1.33:1 display has thinner mattes than a 2.4:1 movie letterboxed to 1.33:1 (28 percent of display height vs. 44 percent), although the former are about the same thickness as those of a 2.4:1 movie letterboxed to 1.78:1 (26 percent of display height). (See Figure 2.) The mattes used to letterbox a 1.85:1 movie for 1.78:1 display are so thin (2 percent) that they're hidden by the overscan of most widescreen TVs. Alternately, a small amount of extra picture from the "protected" area of the full-frame film can be included. Some movies, especially animated features and European films, have an aspect ratio of 1.66:1, which can be letterboxed for 1.33:1 display or sideboxed for 1.78:1 display.

The Proof Is In The Projection

Once the video is formatted to 1.33:1 or 1.78:1 form, it's encoded and stored on the disc. DVD players have four playback modes, one for 1.33:1 video and three for anamorphic 1.78:1 video:

- full frame (1.33:1 video for 1.33:1 display)
- auto letterbox (1.78:1 video for 1.33:1 display)
- auto pan-and-scan (1.78:1 video for 1.33:1 display)
- widescreen (1.78:1 video for 1.78:1 display)

Video stored in 1.33:1 format is not changed by the player. It will appear normally on a standard 1.33:1 display. Widescreen systems will either enlarge it or add mattes to

the sides. Video that is 1.33:1 may have been formatted with letterboxing or panned-and-scanned before being transferred to DVD. All formatting done to the video prior to it being stored on the disc is transparent to the player, which merely reproduces it as a standard 1.33:1 TV picture.

Anamorphic video is best displayed on widescreen equipment, which stretches the video back out to its original width. Alternatively, many new 1.33:1 TVs—especially those available in Europe—can reduce the vertical scanning range to restore the proper 1.78:1 aspect ratio without losing resolution (an automatic trigger signal is sent by the DVD player on pin 8 of the SCART connector). Anamorphic widescreen also works well on computers. Even though almost all computers have 1.33:1 monitors, they have higher resolution than TVs so they can display the full widescreen picture in a window (854x480 pixels or bigger for NTSC; 1024x576 or bigger for PAL).

The setup options of DVD players allow the viewer to indicate whether they have a 1.78:1 or 1.33:1 TV. In the case of a 1.33:1 TV, a second option lets the viewer specify a preference for how the player will reformat anamorphic video: auto letterbox or auto pan-and-scan. These settings give viewers without a widescreen TV three options when viewing anamorphic video from a DVD. However, no movies released to date on DVD provide the information needed for auto pan-and-scan (which is, in any case, unacceptable to readers of this magazine), so in reality there are only two choices.

The first choice is to lie to the player and tell it you have a widescreen TV when you

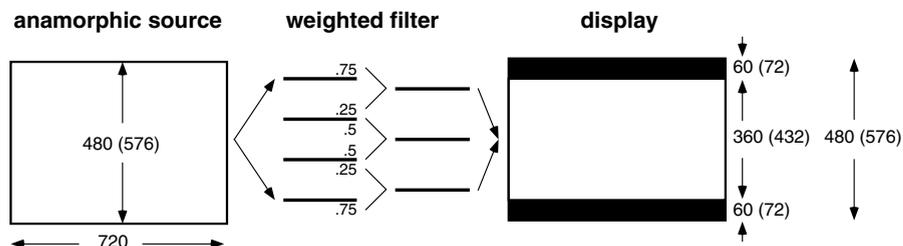


Figure 3

don't. The anamorphic video is then shown unchanged, causing everything and everyone in the picture to look tall and skinny. Some people claim they have gotten used to watching widescreen movies this way, and it does allow standard TV owners to take advantage of full anamorphic resolution, but a major drawback is that it can distort your perception of reality and cause you to ask your friends and family if they've been putting on weight. That leaves the second option, auto letterbox.

In automatic letterbox mode, the player generates black bars at the top and the bottom of the display picture (60 lines each for NTSC, 72 for PAL). This leaves 3/4 of the height remaining, creating a shorter but wider rectangle, which just happens to be 1.78:1. In order to fit this shorter rectangle, the anamorphic picture is squeezed vertically using a letterbox filter that combines every 4 lines into 3, reducing the vertical resolution from 480 scan lines to 360 (see Figure 3). In cases where wider film content was letterboxed to 1.78:1 before being encoded for DVD, the mattes generated by the player sit above and below the "burned in" mattes to seamlessly create thicker mattes that are the same size as if the video had been letterboxed directly for 1.33:1. The vertical squeezing of the letterbox filter in the player exactly compensates for the original horizontal squeezing of the anamorphic process so that the movie is shown in its proper proportions and in its full width. Some DVD players have better letterbox filters than others, using weighted averaging to combine lines (scaling 4 lines into 3 or merging the boundary lines) rather than simply dropping one out of every four lines.

Playback of widescreen material can be restricted by the producer of the disc. Programs can be marked for the following display modes:

- 1.33:1 full frame
- 1.33:1 LBX (for sending letterbox expanded signal to widescreen TV)
- 1.78:1 LBX only (player not allowed to pan-and-scan on 1.33:1 TV)
- 1.78:1 PS only (player not allowed to letterbox on 1.33:1 TV)
- 1.78:1 LBX or PS (viewer can select pan-and-scan or letterbox on 1.33:1 TV)

Talking To The TV

For improved performance in a widescreen home theatre environment, the player can send a special signal to tell the widescreen display that the incoming video is in anamorphic form and should be stretched horizontally. The signal is embedded in the video blanking area (European WSS standard), carried on SCART pin 8, or added as a 5V DC component on the chroma line of the Y/C (S-video) connection. In order for automatic widescreen switching to work, everything must be set up properly:

1. Connect the DVD player to the widescreen TV with an S-video or SCART cable, switch the TV to show the S-video input
2. Set the TV to automatic or normal (not theatre, expand, or similar modes)
3. Set the DVD player to 16:9 output (using the on-screen setup feature or a switch on the back of the player).

If everything is working right, and the TV is equipped to recognize widescreen signaling, it will automatically switch modes to match the format of the video.

Anamorphic DVD Today And Tomorrow

As of mid-1999, Columbia TriStar and DreamWorks SKG are the only major studios to commit to anamorphic enhancement whenever possible. New Line, Warner, and Paramount do the next best job of providing anamorphic titles, but Paramount made a major misstep by not releasing an anamorphic version of *Titanic*. Universal, MGM, and 20th Century Fox sporadically recognize the importance of anamorphic, while Disney (Buena Vista) seems shamefully oblivious of the entire concept. In a very strange twist, Criterion, the original champion of widescreen letterboxed LaserDiscs, has not yet released an anamorphic DVD, although the company has promised that it soon will.

You can usually tell that a DVD contains anamorphic video if the packaging says "enhanced for 16:9 widescreen," "anamorphic widescreen," or something similar. If all it says is "widescreen," it may be letterboxed to 1.33:1, not 1.78:1. Check the DVDDiscography section in *Widescreen Review* or the DVDDiscography on the "Find

It Movies" "Oographies" section of the Webzine at www.widescreenreview.com to be sure.

It's worth noting that a widescreen movie can either be letterboxed to 1.33:1 on expensive studio equipment before it's stored on the disc, or it can be stored in anamorphic form and letterboxed to 1.33:1 by the player. If you compared the two, the letterbox mattes would be identical in size, but the picture quality of the studio version might be slightly better. This is not a defect of the DVD format, but rather a deficiency of today's players. Any studio that letterboxes video to a 1.33:1 aspect ratio in order to gain a miniscule improvement in video quality is shortchanging current and future owners of widescreen equipment.

Any producer or owner of widescreen content who cares about preserving high quality on DVD needs to understand how anamorphic formatting works and how it enhances the already amazing digital picture quality of DVD. New widescreen digital television standards will eventually push old skinny TVs into the dusty museums of obsolescence. Putting anamorphic video on a disc today makes it future proof. And as *Widescreen Review* readers understand, the future has already begun. ■