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SH Acoustics

SH Acoustics



In this month's Industry Partner Profile, we interview SH Acoustics' founder and president, Steve Haas.

Please tell us who SH Acoustics is and what you do.

SH Acoustics is a team of consulting engineers and designers whose sole specialty is achieving the best quality and control of sound in residential and commercial building spaces. In a nutshell, we create practical and cost-effective solutions to quiet noise in a space, to keep unwanted sound from traveling between rooms and to "tame" uncontrolled reverberations or echoes in rooms. While we work on a wide variety of building types, we have carved out two unique specialty markets where sound is not often given enough priority—high-end residences and museums.

How did you get started in this business?

Being a pianist all my life, I wanted to do something relating to music but didn't feel that I could make it as a professional musician. So I went to college for engineering and discovered the world of acoustics, which allowed me to combine a solid engineering discipline with my passion for music. My first job was with one of the world's best commercial acoustic firms, Jaffe Acoustics, where I was fortunate to be part of the design team for prestigious projects that included Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall in NYC, the U.S. Holocaust Museum in D.C. and many other performing arts and museum-related spaces. During my 14 years there, I also ended up growing a private practice focusing on home theater and other residential spac-

es. That is when I began to realize how much homes of all types suffer from poor quality acoustics. In the beginning of 2003, I established SH Acoustics full time to combine my preferred specialties in both market sectors.

What makes your work in the residential sector unique?

We pride ourselves not just in our knowledge and experience of the process of creating and finishing high-end homes but also our practical approaches to solutions and, especially, our sensitivity and respect for maintaining the aesthetic vision of the homeowner and their designers. Early in my commercial career, I began consulting with top architects like James Polshek, Hugh Hardy and Frank Gehry; and I quickly realized that, if we didn't find solutions that achieved an excellent balance of sight and sound, it was highly likely that we wouldn't be asked back for the next project. It is this mentality that my team and I now carry into each and every high-end residential project we work on. This background also has allowed us to interface exceptionally well with both designers and builders.

What has been your biggest challenge?

It starts with getting people to recognize the need for controlled acoustics. I always remind people that God gave us an equal number of eyes, hands and ears, but somewhere along the way we have lost our balance and primarily focus on those things that we can see and touch and give relatively little regard to the quality of what we hear (or don't hear) in our private environments. I challenge anybody to spend one weekend in



their homes thinking consciously about all sound and noise around them and not be able to come up with at least one or two things that they wish they didn't have to hear or would sound better. From kids running around upstairs to dogs barking outside to toilets flushing and showers running, there are a lot more sources of noise in and around people's homes than most realize. Therefore, it is essential to get homeowners to realize that a lot can be done to influence how sound behaves in their homes and that the most practical time to do so is while their home is either being built or renovated and not after the fact when it will undoubtedly be more costly and inconvenient to solve acoustic issues.

What influenced you to join ASID?

Having interfaced with interior designers to various degrees on our projects, I realized that there was and still are misconceptions and preconceived notions of acoustic engineers being these "nerdy guys with pocket protectors running around with fancy meters who don't understand or appreciate aesthetics and just want to throw up burlap panels everywhere." While we do actually have the fancy meters, we also began to make designers quickly realize that they didn't have to sacrifice anything by embracing what we do and how we do it. We also saw that interior designers, in many cases, have a unique relationship with the clients, especially the wives (who are often the most sensitive to noise). Therefore, they could help carry our message of "acoustic awareness" to the homeowners—adding to the value that they bring to their clients.

What geographic locations do you work?

We do projects all over the world, but prefer to work on private homes and condominiums within a 100-mile radius of NYC, including Connecticut, Westchester, northern NJ and Long Island.

What are some of the unique spaces in homes you have worked on?

We have been fortunate to be involved in some magnificent and very large homes that have included such (sound-producing) indoor spaces as home theaters, live concert rooms, ballrooms, bowling alleys, shooting galleries, fencing rooms, kickboxing rooms, hibachi rooms, arcades, Turkish baths, jazz nightclubs, pizzerias, basketball courts, ice rinks, recording studios and casinos. Of course, with each specialty space comes a whole host of acoustic challenges! ■

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