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Cinema on the wall

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PROJECTORS

Cinema on the wall

The latest developments in projectors make them an excellent option for your home theatre

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Until now projectors have mostly been sold to the education industry and to enterprise buyers. But a number of factors, such as the rising average size (and, therefore, cost) of televisions and a range of affordable new projectors, are making the technology a good buy for home users today.

If you're looking to upgrade or set up a home theatre system, you should consider a projector.

A projector brings in several advantages. First, with the right lighting conditions, the black performance (contrast) is as good as any TV. Second, most projectors have a better refresh rate than LCD TVs, and are usually free from visual distortions that affect flat-panel TVs, such as motion blur and ghosting.

It is also a cost-effective option. For example, the NEC V300XG 3D projector can create a clear 72-inch screen and costs approx. ₹48,500. TVs of the same size are hard to come by, and a 32-inch LED from Sony costs approx. ₹53,950. You can get a 50-inch plasma TV from LG for approx. ₹45,300. Simply put, with a projector, you're paying approx. ₹673 per inch, while while for a plasma TV you pay approx. ₹906 , and approx. ₹1,685 for an LED TV.

There are a few downsides though. Proper lighting makes a big difference. New projectors like the V300XG perform well even with some ambient light, unlike older models. With a single tube-light on in the room, the image is still pretty watchable, but notably washed out compared with a plasma TV.

Most new projectors are also 3D-ready. But this doesn't mean you can watch *Avatar* in 3D at home with just the projector. You need to check which 3D formats work with your 3D projector. There are four basic formats—frame sequential, frame packing, side-by-side and checkerboard—and a projector needs to support any one of these.

The most common option among projectors is frame sequential, which is supported by the NEC V300 projector too. It's a technique developed by NVIDIA, the leading graphics card maker in the world today, where the image is played at 120 Hz, twice the usual frame speed, so that alternate frames are left and right, and active shutter glasses are needed for the 3D effect.

The 3D on this projector only works with computers that have NVIDIA 3D vision graphics cards. Without one of those, you're only getting a nice projector. With one though, gaming can be pretty amazing because top-rated games such as *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *Civilization V* and *Super Street Fighter IV* already support the technology.

The NEC is an excellent example of new projectors, and has a maximum display resolution of 1,600x1,200 pixels, more than full-HD. The bulb is rated at 3000 ANSI lumens, which in normal English means it's really bright. Seriously, don't look directly at the bulb when it's on.

With a growing number of HD channels becoming available gradually, the TV-watching experience can be enhanced, but the best way to make the most of the 2D capability is to connect your Blu-ray player via HDMI for movies.

The only drawback is that a projector needs around 8ft of empty space between it and the wall. Without that, you're getting a much smaller picture, and the cost-to-size ratio starts tilting in favour of LCD TVs.

If you don't have the space, then a good workaround is the short-throw projector. As the name suggests, a short-throw projector requires less distance to create a large image, using a special lens. It works just like a regular projector, but the special lens adds to the cost.

The advantage of such a projector is that there is much less likelihood of the viewer being between the projector and the screen, so shadows are less of a concern.

An excellent new short-throw projector is the BenQ W710ST, available for approx. ₹61,000. It needs only 3ft to make a 72-inch screen, so people need to see if the short-throw is worth the extra money for them. In other specifications, it is highly similar to the NEC projector, with similar performance, but its fan is a little louder, which is a minor irritant.

Also recently available in India is a wholly new type of projector set-up—the pico projector. These tiny devices are highly portable, fitting in the palm of your hand, but aren't meant for big-screen experiences. Instead, they are meant to be partnered with netbooks or smartphones to perform as medium-sized screens that can be carried around easily.

If you need to make a presentation or want to watch movies while you travel, pico projectors work really well. One of the first available in India is the Acer C110, launched in September for approx. ₹15,000. The Acer C110 receives power and the video signal via a single USB port, making it an excellent netbook companion. It weighs just 175g and can fit easily into your pocket. It has a 1000:1 contrast ratio that falls far short of full-size projectors, but is still quite impressive, and is able to create a 25-inch screen with an approximate 2ft throw distance.

Whether you want to create a home theatre or an excellent gaming set-up, full-size projectors have a lot to offer at affordable rates, while pico projectors are game changers for mobile display. The projector market has not seen many consumer buyers yet, but with flat panels being even more expensive today, going for a projector seems like a great idea for anyone who has the space to support the set-up.

NEC V300XG: *3D and HD, for ₹48,500.*

Acer C110: *A projector in your pocket, ₹15,000.*

BenQ W710ST: *72 inches from 3ft with this ₹61,000 projector.*