

# New design firm taps into Central Florida talent to transform homes

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A “street view” of DVI’s 4,500 square-foot Charlotte basement project that won two regional and national First Place awards from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. The street design ties together a number of fun spaces and also reflects the family’s heritage as Italian-Americans from the Bronx. The ceiling features one of the largest residential installations of a fiber-optic star field in the country. (Paul Boskovich/Handout)

It’s possible to have a pre-show dinner in a restaurant, go to a movie, and head to a pub after without ever leaving your home.

“The whole thing that Dream Vision Interiors centers around is creating multi-space entertainment centers that are very immersive within a house,” said Jim Duffy, founder of the company with his wife Kris. “It’s creating these different play spaces and tying them together in a cohesive environment, a very theme park like immersive environment.”

The Duffys recently moved from Charlotte to the Orlando area and brought their business of transforming residential spaces with them.

The two have years of experience in film and video production and after getting involved in an elaborate project to turn a basement into a Bronx street, decided to make a life change.

“We just fell in love with the whole process and the whole idea of doing interior design in a very specialized way,” Jim Duffy told GrowthSpotter.

They decided to relocate to Orlando when their son Greg got a job in the area. He is also DVI’s art director and supervises the fabrication on each of the company’s projects.

The transformation projects start at about \$50,000 and go up from there, depending on the space available and the extravagant nature of the idea.

“I’m not talking about turning a family room into a home theater. I’m talking about multiple rooms where you take a wing of rooms or a grouping or a cluster of rooms and through some extensive remodeling, convert that area into an entertainment center that would stand alone from the rest of the house,” he explained. “If you get into redoing entire basements or building an addition on to your home, it could run \$700,000 to a million or more, depending on how elaborate you want to get.”

The interior of this home theater is designed to reflect an outdoor Egyptian temple setting, complete with a fiber-optic star field. Despite the ancient setting, the technology is all state-of-the-art, with a 4K Sony 3D projector, a 10-foot screen, and a nine-speaker Dolby Atmos surround sound system. The system is easily controlled with a Control 4 home automation system. (Handout)

The bigger the home, the more a homeowner can do and the longer it will take. A small project takes about a month or two from beginning to end while others can take up to a year.

“A lot of people down here entertain in their home and can create a unique entertainment space for them when they have family, friends, or business entities over.” Kris Duffy said. “It can impress your guests that you’ve got this amazing space in your house.”

Incorporating home theaters into the design seems to be a popular project.

“We did that a lot up in Charlotte, you go down to the soda shop and make up dinner, and then walk across the street to the movie theater and sit and watch a movie for the evening, and then maybe pop back to the soda shop later on for a pie and coffee afterwards,” he said,

creating a scenario where it is possible to have a night out without ever going outside. “It’s just a lot of fun and it brings families together and it brings friends together.”

Jim Duffy said his mother loved the environment they created in their own Charlotte basement so much, she never wanted to go out.

“She just absolutely fell in love with it and she refused to go see a movie anywhere. She just wanted to stay in the house and just watch movies in our own theater,” he said. “That’s a big part of it is letting people fall back in love with their house and really bond with their family and friends, because it’s a great bonding environment.”

The designs can also incorporate a homeowner’s passion.

“If you like gambling and things like that, you can build a casino in your home and maybe a catering kitchen so that everything is contained and separate from your main part of the house,” Kris Duffy explained.

The start of the design development includes a five-page questionnaire.

“Part of our process is getting to know the client, so the space is tailored to them and it fits their needs, their life and makes it truly a place for them to celebrate their family and to do the things they love to do,” Kris Duffy said.

The Duffys have created street scenes, pubs, music venues, places to display collections and much more, but one stands out.

“Probably the wax museum ranks right up there,” Jim Duffy said. “There was an artist who created these life-sized figures of all of the Universal classic monsters, and he wanted a really cool way to display it. We created a wax museum in part of his house that showed that off.”

The museum included controls to make the museum interactive and tell each character’s story, which is part of the interactive and immersive experience the DVI team strives to create.

“It’s creating the theme that ties it all together. That’s what separates us from any other interior design firm,” Jim Duffy explained, adding a lot of research goes into making sure the immersion is accurate to whatever the theme is. “Getting all the details right and thinking of things in the environment that maybe most people wouldn’t think of.”

For example, for a street scene project, the DVI team added sounds of cars going by and children playing in the distance. During Halloween time, the audio track would change automatically and add spooky sounds and in the winter there were sounds of Christmas carolers in the distance and church bells ringing.

“A lot of people discount audio but to really create an immersive environment, you need the tech to be able to do audio which really helps set the scene for whatever it is that you’re doing,” Jim Duffy said. “Those are the types of things that we do that most other interior design firms do not get involved with.”

Even though the Kissimmee area has the nation’s highest concentration of vacation homes, that isn’t a target market for DVI.

“We looked at that early on, but realized the level of customization that developers are interested in doing is not quite to the level of what we do,” Jim Duffy explained. “They’re big on doing murals and theming a few kids bedrooms and things like that. Our whole philosophy is much more immersive and interactive than that.”

The Duffys have already noticed a big difference between Charlotte and Central Florida.

“There are a lot more artists and theme park minded people down here than there certainly were up in the Charlotte area,” Jim Duffy said, adding it is easier to find the types of skilled workers they need for their projects. “We’ve put together a pretty impressive team of people with theme park experience, art experience, sculpting experience, and tech experience. It’s much easier to find creative workers and vendors and artists down here than it was up north.”