



Best

The Ultimate DADS & GRADS GIFT GUIDE!

HOME THEATER SECRETS!

10 tips you need to know

HDTVs GO FOR GOLD

Why you can't miss the summer Olympics on a new HD set!

TAKE BETTER PICTURES

We pick the best all-around shooters

BEHIND THE SCENES

An in-depth look at the new John Mayer Blu-ray Disc



SERIES | 6

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SPRING/SUMMER 2008

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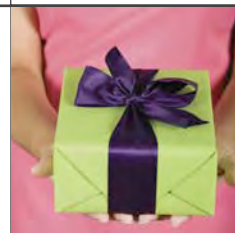
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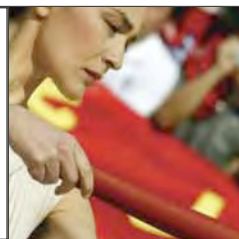


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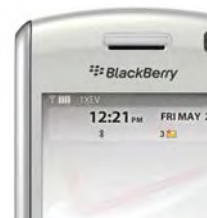


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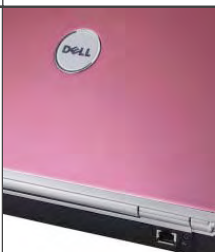
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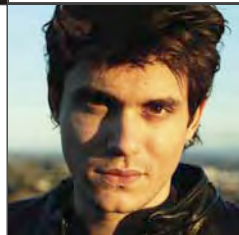


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What to watch this month on home video, the latest in games, and an exclusive sneak peek at the new Blu-ray disc, Where the Light Is: John Mayer Live in Los Angeles.

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ONLY WHAT'S **BEST** FOR DADS & GRADS

Welcome to our Dads & Grads issue. This time of year, not only do the not-so-young move on to the world of college or work, but we also get to say thank you to the fathers in our lives. For all of them, we've themed this edition of *Best* around the concept of providing gift ideas they will surely appreciate. Best yet, we've done the heavy lifting for you.

Dad deserves the best in life, so reward him with one of the luxury rides in "Father Knows Best." From a sizzling Jaguar convertible to a rugged Range Rover SUV, there is something here for any discerning father figure. If he's a sports fan, now is the perfect time to upgrade to a huge-screen HDTV with the 2008 Olympics just around the corner. In "Go for the Gold," we pick our favorite 50+-inch flat-panel HDTVs that will make him feel like he is in Beijing watching from the sidelines. And, of course, every grad needs a computer to help him or her navigate the collegiate or professional world; Dad might stand to upgrade as well. See our "Picking the Perfect PC" for reviews of the best in computers, whether you're a gamer, business exec, an entertainment buff, or simply want to write a few documents and surf the Internet. And we know travel is in their future, so you definitely don't want to miss "Head of the Class," in which our resident photo expert picks some of the very best cameras available—for the casual snapshooter or budding pro. And if that's not enough, you'll certainly find a gem or two in our "Dads & Grads Gift Guide."

Of course, we have lots of other features to satisfy your quest for the best. The most important thing to know is the products shown in these pages have been hand-picked by our team of editors as best-in-class. You really can't go wrong with any of them. So sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride the latest issue of *Best* provides.

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8.2
Mega Pixels

PMP
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Digital Image
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Intelligent LCD
Screen

World Tour
Guide

Face Detection

Self Portrait

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Best

WHAT'S
NEW

*A sneak peek
at the latest
and greatest*

Kodak Goes Multimedia

We've always trusted Kodak to bring our pictures to life. The new M820 and M1020 digital picture frames take that concept to the next level, adding video and MP3 playback. The 8-inch M820 (\$179) and 10-inch M1020 (\$229) have flexible input options, with two SD card slots, a USB port, and 128MB of internal memory so the family faves can remain in permanent rotation. Quick Touch technology lets you easily adjust the frame's image brightness with a tap of the touch-sensitive border, and Kodak's EasyShare software allows for photo editing and drag-and-drop slideshow creation on your computer. **M820, \$179; M1020, \$229, www.kodak.com**



The Connected Fridge

If you find yourself lacking the space (and magnetic clips) to put all those family photos up on the fridge, the GD5VVAXT could be just the answer. It's the first to use Whirlpool's centralpark connection, a plug-and-play platform that lets you attach consumer-electronics gear to the fridge's front panel. The first compatible device is the \$249 CEIVA 8-inch digital picture frame, with a built-in card reader and Wi-Fi connectivity. The stainless-steel GD5VVAXT opens up some space inside too, thanks to its 25.6 cubic feet of total capacity and an in-door ice dispenser designed for more freezer space. Future centralpark attachments include a Web tablet, an iPod speaker system, and a digital message center—in case the Post-It Note approach isn't getting it done.

\$1,999, www.whirlpool.com/centralpark



Walk This Way

Forget that other portable music player. Sony hopes you'll step to the beat of a different drummer with its new Walkmans. The NWZ-A829 offers music, video, and photo playback, with a 16GB hard drive and a 2.4-inch screen you can view in landscape or portrait mode. Wires don't have to slow you down, thanks to built-in Bluetooth for streaming sounds to wireless headphones and other Bluetooth-enabled media devices. The NWZ-A829K has a smaller 8GB hard drive but comes with a pair of DR-BT21G Bluetooth headphones. Both have a slim, industrial design, and the extended battery life gives you about 10 hours of video playback and 36 hours of audio, plenty of juice to Walk the night away.

\$270-\$320, www.sonystyle.com



Fewer Speakers, Fewer Wires

We love the idea of 5.1-channel surround sound, but sometimes it just isn't practical. With the help of Dolby Virtual Surround technology, Klipsch's CS-700 can simulate surround sound through its 2.1-channel speaker system. Each speaker has two 3-inch woofers and a 0.75-inch tweeter in Klipsch's Tractrix Horn design, while the subwoofer sports an 8-inch woofer and 200 watts of amplification. In other words, you'll hear big, realistic sound. At the heart of the CS-700 is the A/V center, which includes an AM/FM tuner and a DVD player that upconverts standard discs to 1080i via its HDMI output. You also get three auxiliary inputs to attach MP3 players and other audio devices. To provide even more setup flexibility, Klipsch designed the subwoofer to communicate wirelessly with the A/V center using its KlipschCast 2.4GHz technology. Want an easy multiroom audio solution? Add a few RoomGroove iPod systems, and the CS-700 will wirelessly transmit CD-quality audio to them as well. *\$1,299, www.klipsch.com*



You Need It, Denon's Got It



When designing its new high-end A/V receiver, Denon truly thought of everything. The THX Ultra2–certified AVR-5308Ci is a 7.1-channel receiver with six HDMI 1.3a inputs and two HDMI 1.3a outputs. This is the first receiver in Denon’s lineup to include the high-quality Silicon Optix Realta HQV processing chip to upconvert all analog and digital sources to 1080p. The picture is terrific. The receiver can also decode the latest high-resolution Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio formats available on Blu-ray discs. The Audyssey MultEQ XH system will automatically set up and calibrate the receiver to suit your room. Both the digital-media fan and the custom installer will appreciate the Ethernet and Wi-Fi connectivity, which allows network audio/photo streaming and access to Rhapsody and Internet radio services. Plus, your installer can remotely diagnose problems and provide tech support. The AVR-5803Ci has second-zone A/V output, USB ports to connect media devices, and three tuners: AM/FM, XM, and HD Radio. The words “fully featured” hardly do this one justice. **\$5,200, www.denon.com**

The Real Deal

The Toshiba Satellite L355-S7810 notebook computer has a 17.1-inch TruBrite screen, a 200GB hard drive, and a DVD SuperMulti drive with Labelflash technology that burns images and labels directly onto Labelflash DVD-Rs. Running Windows Vista Home Premium, this model costs only \$750 and it’s packed with an AMD Turion 64 X2 Dual-Core processor, 2048MB of DDR2 SDRAM, and an ATI Radeon X1250 graphics card. The three USB Sleep-and-Charge ports continue to charge attached peripherals even after you shut down the PC. With built-in stereo speakers, a Webcam, and 802.11b/g functionality, the L355-S7810 is ready for business and pleasure. **\$750, www.toshiba.com**



A Pretty Picture

Whether you’re an exacting gamer or enjoy video and photo editing, LG’s new flagship W52 series computer monitors are designed for you. Available in three screen sizes ranging from 19 to 24 inches, the W52 models have a rated contrast ratio of 10,000:1, a response time of 2 to 5 milliseconds, and an attractive gloss-black cabinet design. LG’s f-ENGINE lets you enhance brightness and color independently of each other, while Digital Fine Contrast Technology is designed to produce a clear image that’s more lifelike. Need a quick close-up of text or small graphics? ez Zooming lets you change the image size and resolution with one button click. All three models have VGA and DVI (with HDCP) inputs, while the 24-inch W2452T adds VGA/DVI outputs and 1900 x 1200 resolution. **\$229–\$499, www.lge.com** •

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BEST BITS & BYTES

THE LATEST NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE DIGITAL FRONTIER

Merge On

By ADRIENNE MAXWELL

Are you trying to decide whether to embrace Sirius and its NFL broadcasts or XM and its MLB contract? Soon, that may not be an either/or decision. The proposed merger of satellite-radio companies Sirius and XM, which has been stuck in limbo for more than a year, has received a new burst of momentum, courtesy of the U.S. Justice Department. After a 57-week antitrust review, the Justice Department approved the merger, concluding it would not be anti-competitive or harmful to consumers because the new company would still face competition from traditional and Internet radio, as well as digital audio products like the iPod.

One final obstacle remains for the proposed \$5 billion merger: The Federal Communications Commission still has to approve the deal, and it could impose restrictions if it does. Commissioner

Kevin Martin hasn't tipped his hand regarding the FCC's decision, but many analysts expect the Justice Department's stamp of approval opens the door for the FCC to follow suit.

The decision may be good news for XM and Sirius, but not everyone is pleased. Critics of the merger—including the National Association of Broadcasters, public-interest groups like Consumers Union and Public Knowledge, and some members of Congress—disagree with the Justice Department's conclusion, arguing the merger will create a monopoly and allow the new company to raise prices, among other concerns.

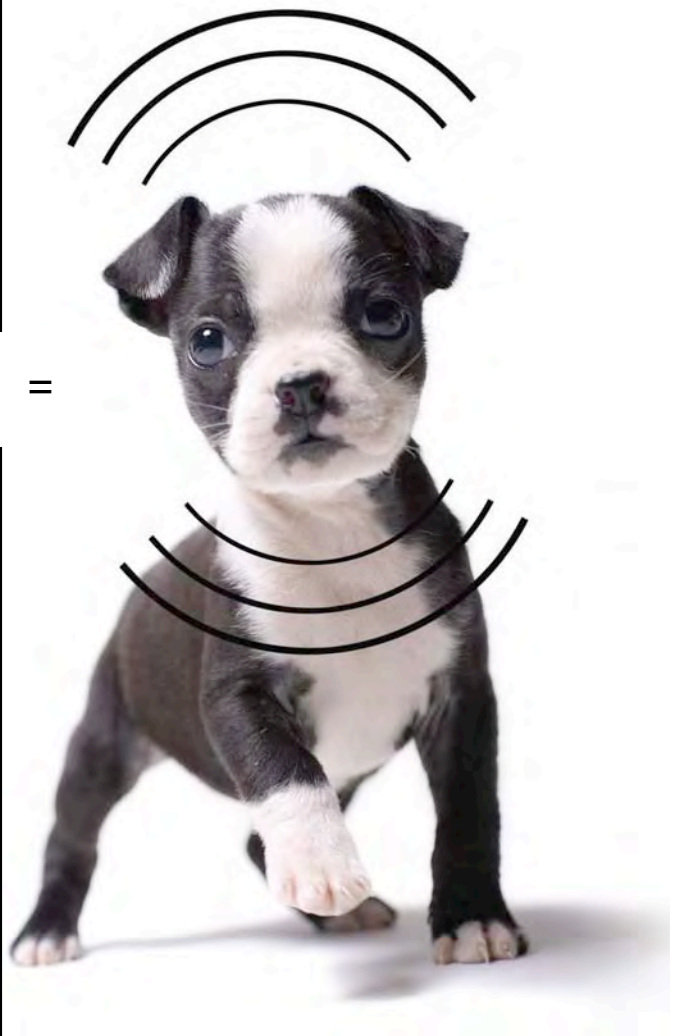
To allay some of those concerns, XM and Sirius have outlined some of their programming and pricing plans for the FCC. The proposal includes family-friendly packages and a *la carte* pricing options. For \$14.99 per month, you can choose 100 of your favorite Sirius and XM channels. For \$6.99 per month, you get a base package of 50 channels and can add individual channels for as little as 25 cents each. FCC commissioner Martin is purportedly a fan of the *a la carte* approach, and an FCC decision is expected soon.



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Analog-TV Cutoff Date Looming Large

The transition to a digital-only TV broadcast system is almost upon us. Are you ready? Do you know what that means? For the vast majority of viewers, it doesn't mean anything; however, it might impact relatives who still use an older set with an antenna. And you don't want them to miss out on the local news or their favorite shows. Currently, TV stations transmit their broadcasts by an analog signal. That will end on Feb. 17, 2009, when the analog system goes black and full-power broadcasters will be required to only transmit signals digitally. (Some have

Currently, TV stations transmit their broadcasts by an analog signal. That will end on Feb. 17, 2009, when the analog system goes black.

already started to transmit their broadcasts in digital form.) This transition will free up valuable airwave spectrum for use by public safety services and new wireless services.

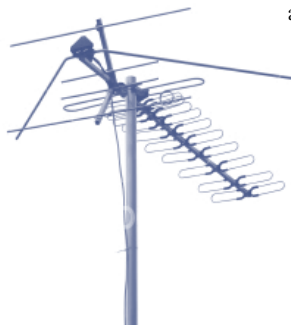
If you subscribe to a pay-TV service from a cable or satellite provider, the analog cutoff won't affect you, no matter what type of TV you own. However, if you know someone with an analog TV who pulls in over-the-air signals with an antenna (either rooftop or rabbit ears), he or she will lose their television signal on the cutoff date. According to 2007 FCC estimates, approximately 14 percent of U.S. households receive their TV content exclusively over the air—that's about 15.5 million households—out of more than 100 million TV households.

If you know someone like that—or have a TV with rabbit ears in that fourth bedroom—several options are available. The least-expensive choice is to purchase a special converter box that changes over-the-air digital signals to an analog format compatible with your existing TV. (Your current antenna might still work with digital signals; to learn more about the kind of antenna you need in

your area, go to www.antennaweb.org.) Manufacturers like Insignia, RCA, and EchoStar now offer these digital-to-analog converter boxes for about \$40 to \$70. The federal government has launched a program where every U.S. household can receive up to two \$40 vouchers to purchase the boxes; the program went live on Jan. 1, 2008, and will remain in effect while supplies last. For more information on converter boxes and the coupon program, visit www.dtv2009.gov.

Another option is to subscribe to cable, satellite service, or other paid-television service, in which case your provider will handle the necessary digital-to-analog conversion that allows you to keep watching your analog TV. Of course, you're also adding monthly service fees, and if you'd like to view high-definition (HD) digital programming, you may need new equipment, including an HD capable television. Finally, you could use the cutoff date as an excuse to buy a new TV that has an internal digital (ATSC) tuner, which will allow you to continue receiving free over-the-air broadcasts. The FCC has ordered TV manufacturers to add a label on or inside the TV packaging that clearly states whether the product has a digital television tuner. New digital televisions are available in standard definition (SD) or high definition (HD). Either will work after the transition. However, if you want to view high-definition programming, you'll need an HD television capable of displaying HD-quality resolution.

The TV-upgrade approach begs the question, what to do with your analog TV? The thought of 15.5 million households tossing their analog TVs into the garbage is enough to give environmentalists nightmares—not to mention the fact such an act is illegal in some states. A recent Consumer Electronics Association study found that 48 percent of over-the-air TV watchers plan to get a converter box; of those who do plan to dispose of their analog TVs, a large majority intend to do so the right way—by selling it, giving it away, or recycling it. To find a recycler in your area, go to www.mygreenelectronics.org





Edison's Title Goes Up in Smoke

Long hailed as the father of recorded sound, Thomas Edison may now have to relinquish the title, and he has audio historian David Giovannoni to thank for it. Giovannoni and his team of researchers recently discovered phonautograms, dating back to the 1850s and '60s, created by French inventor Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville. Scott's invention, the phonautograph, created visual recordings of sound through a needle that etched sound waves onto soot-covered paper. Giovannoni digitally scanned these works and sent them to the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, where Carl Haber and Earl Cornell translated the etchings into actual sound clips. Some of the phonautograms were merely noise, but one 10-second clip reveals a woman singing "Au Clair de la Lune," a French folk song. The clip dates back to Apr. 9, 1860—more than 17 years before Edison recorded the words "Mary had a little lamb" on his phonograph. As they say, records are meant to be broken, and you can hear this record at www.firstsounds.org. •

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SPECS APPEAL

We pick 8 unique pairs of sunglasses,
just in time for summer

By IRENE OLIVIERI-HARRIS

Best
GEAR



Sunglasses not only protect your eyes, they make a full-on fashion statement. And, in a fleeting glance, they convey an instant message about your personal style.

Yet does anyone really have only one look? That's why a sunglass wardrobe is vital as we head for those long summer days. At a minimum, an elegant pair is *de rigueur* for matching with your favorite suit, plus you'll need some stylish shades that express your casual side, and sunglasses that pro-

tect your eyes during the most extreme outdoor and sports activities.

In a category as vast as sunglasses, there are hundreds of designs—although most of them are variations within a few categorical shapes. Here are eight of our favorite models that are representative of what you can expect to see in display cases this summer. Grab a pair, get in the convertible, and head to the coast.

WOMEN



Two-Toned Beauties

Fendi frames have artful and whimsical designs, not to mention outstanding workmanship. The Fendi label reinterprets the luxury components, colors, and themes from its other lines into eyewear. This Fendi To You pair of shades (model 484) has the company's To You logo—a geometric imprinted pattern that details this unique frame. This particular set is inspired by the seductive style of Fendi's handbag and belt collections. In a two-toned double laminate frame, it has an ultra-modern feel plus durability. Available in black crystal and chestnut, these Fendi shades will add cachet to any woman's wardrobe. \$380, www.fendi.com



Buckled Up

An iconic house of fashion for more than 85 years, Gucci is among the more prestigious and recognizable brands in eyewear. The Gucci Donna collection has a head-turning selection of frames that have a '70s look with a contemporary edge. These large oval frames are accented with an elegant buckle detail and Gucci script logo on the temple, and are available in black or brown. The sunglasses provide 100 percent UVA and UVB protection. If you are looking for shades that are a bit more refined, this Gucci model fits the bill. \$295, www.gucci.com



Mediterranean Inspiration

Emilio Pucci's Sunwear collection is infused with innovative and exotic frames. The collection's Mediterranean inspiration is expressed through kaleidoscopic colors and graphic, abstract patterns. The provocative design of this frame (model EP608S) exemplifies the line's delicate craftsmanship. Floating lenses are softly suspended in a slim plastic frame, with a sophisticated pattern etched on the interior bands. A rich pattern neatly surrounds the Pucci logo, continuing in a sensuous silhouette toward the interior temples. These glamorous Emilio Pucci, available in ebony, white, brown, turquoise, burgundy, and bronze, are great for a day at the beach or for lunch with the ladies. \$365, www.emiliopucci.com



Italian Style

Christian Dior is one of the most reputable brands in the sunglass market. And its classy and stylish Italian-made summer collection has sleek, modern designs. The Airspeed 2 wrap sunglasses have a hidden plastic frame with a brown-tinted graded single-piece lens. Silverstone "D" logos hinge the thick plastic stems. Offering full UV protection, these shades keep your eyes protected in style. With this Dior frame, you'll definitely get noticed. \$350, www.dior.com



Wayfarer Wonders

Made famous by epic characters like James Dean, the Wayfarer shape has transcended decades of style, continuing to resurrect itself among the giants of fashion. The Wayfarer shape has been copied by many, but Fendi's rendition in the Fendi Elastic line (model FS 474M) is one of our favorites. Updating the look to the 21st century with bolder strokes, this attractive black frame embodies masculine style. Available in black, crystal gray, biscuit, and clear Havana, these Wayfarers make a statement that is relaxed and retro. \$300, www.fendi.com



Brains and Beauty

Von Zipper sunglasses are popular among the beach crowd, and the Gamma frame (shown here in cheetah tort and gray) is a full-frontal shield that provides 100 percent UV protection for those sunny days. The frame is made of nylon with a polycarbonate lens. This model is also available in black, bamboo wood, urban gorilla, and white gold, some of which come with polarized lenses. That's all well and good, but what will really draw you to these frames are their dashing good looks. \$115, www.vonzipper.com



Endless Summer

Kaenon is at the crest of lens technology. With its proprietary and optically optimized SR-91 polarized lenses, the company stands out with the best in performance eyewear. Designed to protect the eyes from harmful UV rays and blue light, Kaenon packages crisp optical acuity in an ultra-lightweight, impact-proof lens. The Gauge frame is an oversized model defined by its strong surface design, hard lines and edges, and a script icon on an inlaid metal detail. This frame is available in black and walnut. Whether you're using them for outdoor adventures or relaxing by the pool, the Gauge frames will make you wish summer never ended. \$219, www.kaenon.com

Opulent Oakley

Oakley is an innovator in sunglass technology and the Conduct frame is an example of Oakley's precision engineering. The Conduct is a limited-edition piece that is inspired by the culture, music, and lifestyle of sports pros. With ellipsoid geometry, it uses a single continuous contour of lens material—instead of two separate lenses—and high-definition optics optimize every millimeter for outstanding performance. These sunglasses have a three-point fit and stay off your ears, only making contact with the bridge of the nose and the sides of the head. And did we mention how cool they look? \$105–\$140, www.oakley.com •



GREAT GIFTS FOR DADS & GRADS

From luxury goods to electronics,
here are great gift ideas for dad and junior.

By DAVID ELRICH



The Big Day is approaching for your significant other, son, or daughter. Who has the time to research the perfect gift for Father's Day or graduation? That's where the editors of *Best* magazine arrive to save the day with high-end and affordable options for that favorite guy in your life—or that child taking the giant step beyond the confines of school. Whether it's for the avid golfer or gadget buff, here are gifts that are top of the class.

The Searchers

Portable navigation devices are wildly popular—and for good reason. A small device lets you know exactly where you are and how to get where you want to go. This is a great gift for a dad who wouldn't ask any human for directions; he'll definitely interact with a cool gadget instead. And if your child is heading out of town to college, a GPS will point them in the right direction on campus. Whether they get to class on time is another story.

Garmin is a top name in GPS navigation, having supplied pilots and boaters for years. The company's new nuvi 880 lets you speak commands and get on-demand travel info from MSN Direct. You can even navigate with your voice—no more tapping on the LCD screen as with other nav devices. This 4.3-inch widescreen GPS has hands-free calling, plus real-time local weather, traffic, movie times, gas prices, stock information, local news, and event info.



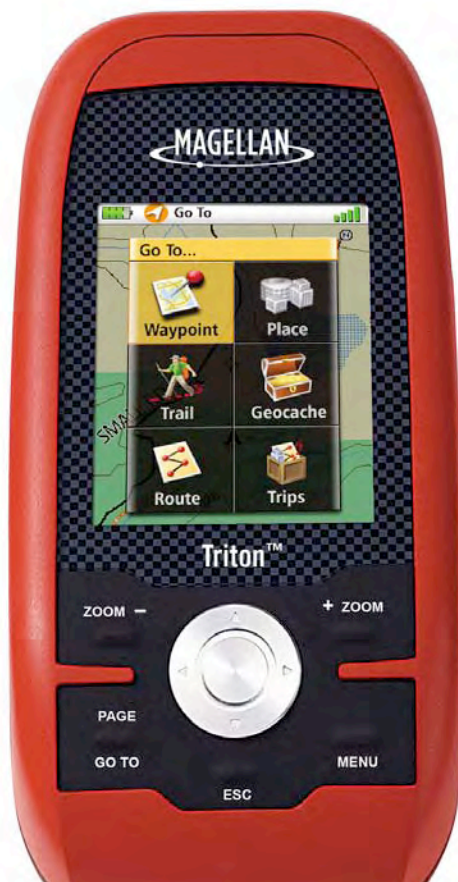
nuvi 880

\$1,071, www.garmin.com

The Magellan Triton 400 is for the person who's just as much at home on a trail as the turnpike. This waterproof handheld GPS is easy to use and has a 2.2-inch screen for its built-in maps. Eagle Scouts take note: With the compass screen you can see your direction of travel, distance and position of destination, heading, bearing, and speed. An SD card slot lets you add maps of your favorite lakes and ski resorts.

\$199, www.magellangps.com

Magellan
Triton 400



For the Golfer

It will be hard to disguise this gift, but Dad will love a new Hyper X Tour driver from Callaway. The company's latest titanium driver features Hyperbolic Face Technology that Callaway says will improve those first blasts off the tee. Along with the newly designed head, it has an advanced Fujikura shaft for a great feel. For icing on the cake, add a box of Big Bertha golf balls so hubby can unleash his inner Tiger. Starting at \$329 for the club, \$20 for a dozen golf balls, www.callawaygolf.com



Hyper
X Tour driver

Open Me First

Camcorders are great for recording life's top memories—from blowing out the candles on a birthday cake to that moment the sheepskin is handed to the glowing graduate. So they'll definitely want to take these gifts out of the box the moment they figure out what's underneath the wrapping paper. High definition is the way to go for that special someone, and Sony's new HDR-TG1 is a compact beauty. It has a pure titanium case, records directly to memory cards, and even includes face detection to ensure good exposure and focus of smiling faces.



Sony HDR-TG1



We'll take a different tack with the grad who wants something that's just as compact but will also be waterproof for a day at the beach or running the rapids. Panasonic's SDR-SW20 is shock- and dust-proof as well, making it a great companion for recording adventures—no matter how rugged or sedate. *\$899, www.sony.com; \$399, www.panasonic.com*

Time on Your Hands

Handsome watches are classic gifts for a reason—everyone loves them and they rarely disappoint. One of the most attractive new watches is the new TAG Heuer Calibre 6 RS, a very chic watch available with silver, brown, or black dials. The Rotating System at 6 o'clock, decorated with Côtes de Genève and diamond polished facets, indicates seconds. It's available on a stainless-steel bracelet or alligator strap for \$3,500 or with a steel and gold bracelet for \$5,500. Another timepiece that never goes out of style is the Museum Dial from Movado. In fact, this watch, with its single gold dot at 12 o'clock, recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. This bit of affordable luxury is available for men and women for less than \$500, depending on the band. *www.tagheuer.com, www.movado.com*



Movado Museum Dial



TAG Heuer
Calibre 6 RS

A Peaceful Flight

Dad always complains about long business flights. He'll feel like he's in first class on every flight, however, when he wears this very high-quality set of noise-canceling headphones. While Bose usually gets the buzz, we were very impressed by the new Sony MDR-NC500D headphones on a recent five-hour flight. They're extremely comfortable, do a fine job eliminating ambient noise, and let you hear all the notes from your digital audio player—even the soundtrack of the in-flight movie. Your grads probably think these over-the-ear headphones aren't very cool (that's their loss), but a pair of Shure SE110 sound-isolating earphones will ring the bell. Evolved from earphone technology road-tested by pro musicians, the SE110 features a balanced micro-speaker that delivers rich sound. Plus, they have that understated George Clooney cool. **\$399, www.sony.com; \$119, www.shure.com**

www.shure.com



Sony MDR-NC500D



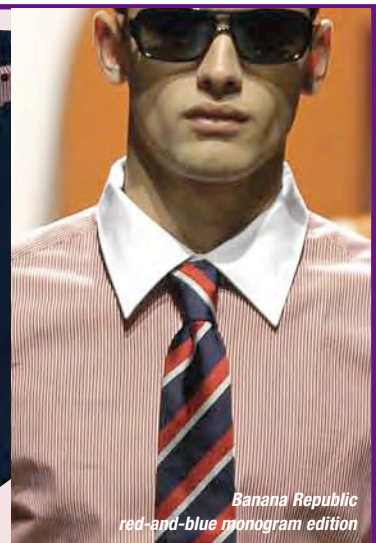
Shure SE110

Oldie but Goodie

It's as classic as Mom and apple pie—give Dad a tie for his day. Pop's power suit demands a new, yet classic, silk one from leading designer Ermenegildo Zegna. He'll feel like a Master of the Universe once it's neatly in place. The recent graduate probably doesn't have an extensive collection of ties, so add one to his repertoire for the big job interview. Banana Republic has a new red-and-blue monogram edition that is young and powerful.

\$150, www.zegna.com; \$68, www.bananarepublic.com

Ermenegildo Zegna
silk ties



Banana Republic
red-and-blue monogram edition



Westinghouse
15.6-inch frame



Philips 7FF3FBW 7-inch frame

Smiling Faces

Digital photo frames are amazingly popular for a reason—they take digital photos out of the computer and put them on display for everyone to see. You will definitely want to show off those great snapshots of your latest trip to Italy without having to log onto your laptop. And you might want to give one of these frames to a new college student so they won't forget your face (or who paid their tuition).

Westinghouse has a large 15.6-inch digital photo frame for those who are really proud of their children. The frame has very high resolution, so quality is quite good; plus it has internal memory to store photos and accepts almost all memory cards for instant gratification. Those who don't have the room on the credenza should consider the new 7FF3FBW 7-inch frame from Philips. The Radiant Color feature spreads color to the edge of the screen, eliminating black bars and filling in the space left by a less-than-full-sized photo.

\$329, www.westinghousedigital.com; \$89, www.philips.com

Not for Geeks Only

A computer is one gift that's always a winner—for dads, grads, and everyone in between. The Dell XPS One with its 20-inch widescreen monitor is a beauty that'll fit nicely in Dad's home office. It can even go into the kitchen—we won't tell. We like the XPS One with a built-in Blu-ray Disc drive so you can experience the latest BD movies and even back-up work to blank Blu-ray recordable discs. It's a fully loaded machine, as you'd imagine. So is the new garnet red M-6846 Gateway notebook with a speedy Core 2 Duo processor, wireless capabilities, HDMI out, and loads of RAM to keep things moving along nicely, whether you are at home or away from home.

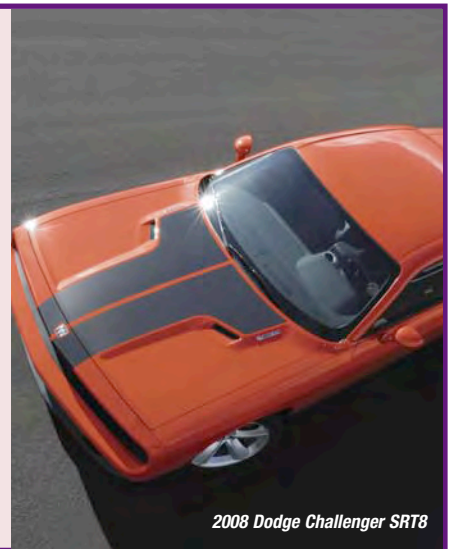
From \$1,999 with Blu-ray drive, www.dell.com; From \$799, \$899 as configured, www.gateway.com



Dell XPS One

Back to the Future

Pony cars send shivers up the spines of men of all ages, particularly kids who saw classic Mustangs, Vettes, even Chevelle Super Sports prowling the streets. Rather than bid at auction for an original, consider a new 2008 Dodge Challenger SRT8—back after a 35-year absence—with an outrageous 6.1-liter HEMI V-8 engine that produces 425 horsepower and 420 lb-ft of torque. Each comes with a limited-edition, numbered dash plaque. Dodge will offer the Challenger SRT8 in three colors: HEMI Orange, Bright Silver Metallic, and Brilliant Black Crystal Pearl Coat. Performance targets include a 0-60 mph time in the low 5-second range, 0-100-0 mph in less than 17 seconds, a quarter-mile elapsed time of less than 14 seconds, a 60-0 mph braking distance of approximately 100 feet, and a skid pad performance of 0.88 g. Fasten your seat belts! For more great rides, see our "Father Knows Best" feature this issue. \$40,095, www.dodge.com



2008 Dodge Challenger SRT8

Farewell Starbucks



Philips Senseo

that will crank out a piping-hot cup of joe in about 30 seconds. Perfect for single servings. \$699–\$799, www.nespresso.com; \$69, www.philips.com

Nothing tops a satisfying jolt of java to get the day started. Now dads and grads can have nice cups of coffee nearby without running out to Starbucks. Dad will appreciate the Nespresso Delonghi Lattissima, an attractive compact machine that turns out cappuccinos and latte macchiatos at the touch of a button. The grad will like the slick-looking Philips Senseo



Nespresso Delonghi Lattissima



Play Ball!

The 2008 All-Star Game will be even more of a classic on July 15th as it's the final one to be played in the original Yankee Stadium in New York. Talk about saying farewell to the House That Ruth Built—but with today's top stars. As you'd imagine, tickets will be hard to come by, but brokers like TickCo have them from \$1,000 each. If Dad's a baseball fan, this will be as memorable a gift as you could imagine. Top it off with room reservations at the Four Seasons and a steak dinner at Sparks, and this will be a Father's Day gift to remember. www.tickco.com

Memories Forever

Digital SLRs are more popular than ever—and this pair will make any photographer as delighted as can be. Our first pick is the Nikon D3, considered by many reviewers as one of the finest digital cameras ever introduced. It's a 12.1MP full-frame model, meaning it has a large imaging device that records images of outstanding quality. Not only that, but it



Pentax K200D



Nikon D3

takes nine frames per second so you'll capture horses hitting the finish line at the Belmont Stakes—or a child kicking a goal in soccer. The Nikon D3 costs \$5,000 for the body only, but it's a great investment. A much more affordable option is the new 10.2MP Pentax K200D, a solid D-SLR that runs on convenient AA batteries so you'll never run out of power. It's not nearly as sophisticated as the D3, but it's miles ahead of a point-and-shoot digicam. For more camera picks, see our "Head of the Class" feature in this issue. \$4,999, www.nikonusa.com; \$799, www.pentaximaging.com •



GO FOR THE GOLD

A big-screen HDTV can bring all of the exciting Olympics action right to your living room.

Here's a guide on getting a great high-def image for the games, plus our favorite 50+-inch flat-panel HDTVs.

By ADRIENNE MAXWELL

The time has never been better to buy an HDTV. Prices are at all-time lows, down almost 40 percent from last year. Picture quality is only getting better, even in less-expensive models. Plasma and LCD manufacturers are addressing problems inherent to their respective technologies, such as plasma's glare and image-retention issues and LCD's motion blur. The number of 1080p models—the highest of the high-def resolutions—is increasing, offering consumers more choice. The amount of HDTV programming is also

growing dramatically, with high-def broadcasts and Blu-ray Discs readily available.

If none of these reasons tempts you, let us offer another: the Olympics in high definition. No sporting event can rival the Olympics in terms of drama and pure competitive spirit. So many sports, so many athletes, one shot at gold every four years. It just doesn't get any better for sports fans who want to be fully immersed in the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. And what better way to immerse yourself than to enjoy the Olympics on a big-screen HDTV?

Best

HOME
ENTERTAINMENT



Like the games themselves, the flat-panel world is incredibly competitive. Options are plentiful, and prices continue to fall.

You could spend thousands of dollars in airfare, food, lodging, and event tickets in Beijing. Or, you could invest far less money in an HDTV, take in every moment of NBC's high-def Olympic broadcast, and continue reaping the rewards of your investment for many sporting events to come. While there are also several excellent rear-projection HDTVs on the market, we focus primarily on flat-panel plasmas and LCDs here. (For benefits of rear projection, see "Which TV Type Takes Home the Gold for You?")

Like the games themselves, the flat-panel world is incredibly competitive. Options are plentiful, and prices continue to fall. Your dollar gets you more screen size and better performance than ever before. The challenge is discerning the gold medalists from the also-rans. Like the world's best athletes, a great HDTV needs certain skills to rise above the competition.

Master the Fundamentals

Black-and-white information forms the foundation of a video image. A good black level is crucial to a TV's overall performance: The deeper the black foundation, the deeper and richer every color on top of it will be. A poor black level is especially problematic when you're watching TV in a dark room: Blacks look gray, and the whole image appears flat and washed out. Unfortunately, black levels can be hard to judge in a very bright retail store; when you're shopping, try to get a demo with the lights turned low or off, ideally using darker film content. You'll be amazed how dramatically different the TVs will look.

On the other half of the equation, the color of white (or color temperature) strongly affects image quality. An overly cool white can flatten skin tones and make the entire image look blue. An overly warm color temperature adds too much red to skin tones and robs whites of their pop. Most TVs offer several preset color-temperature options, so you can select the mode you prefer. We recommend a natural, medium, or warm setting. Higher-end TVs often include the ability to precisely adjust the color temperature. (For more on adjusting your TV to ideal settings, see our "Home Theater Secrets" article elsewhere in this issue.)

Fine-Tuning the Details

When 0.05 seconds distinguishes a gold-medal performance from a last-place finish, you can bet every detail matters. If you invest several thousand dollars for an HDTV, you want to see every bead of sweat on the athlete's brow, every stitch in the softball—and it all begins with resolution. Until recently, most HDTVs had a 720p resolution, but 1080p has now arrived in a big way. You don't have to be a math major to figure out that 1080p is higher

than 720p, but, for you number crunchers out there, a 1080p screen is made up of 1,920 pixels horizontally by 1,080 pixels vertically, for a total of 2,073,600 pixels—that's more than twice as many pixels as a TV with a 1280 x 720 resolution.

The value of 1080p on a smaller screen (42 inches or less) is debatable, as your eyes probably can't see the additional detail from a normal viewing distance. However, on a big-screen TV, those extra pixels make a difference, especially when you mate your TV with a true 1080p source, like a Blu-ray player. Currently, there are no TV shows broadcast in 1080p;



HDTV channels have either a 1080i or 720p resolution. That doesn't diminish 1080p's relevance, however, as the best 1080p TVs will bring out every detail in TV sources ... which leads to our next skill.

Excel on the Big Stage

It's one thing to create an attractive image on a small screen. It's another to make that image look just as good on a large canvas, where every flaw is visible. Source content comes in all shapes and flavors: It can be film- or video-based, with a 480i, 720p, 1080i, or 1080p resolution. An HDTV's internal processing chip must recognize all of these different sources and cleanly convert them to the resolution of your TV. The same 1080i TV broadcast can look much more detailed on one TV versus another, or perhaps a TV renders a clean, detailed HDTV image but does a mediocre job displaying the many TV channels that aren't yet available in high def. When shopping, it's important not only to check out the detail in high-def sources, but

to get a demo of standard-definition content, be it DVD or regular TV. Make sure the image quality holds up no matter the source.

Quickness

Sport generally implies motion—except for Olympic weightlifters—and some TVs are better than others at handling motion. What good is all that detail if the image grows blurry when the action speeds up? Older LCD flat panels have struggled in this respect. If you're sensitive to motion blur, look for an LCD that has a fast response time and uses 120 Hertz (Hz) technology. A standard TV has a 60Hz refresh rate, meaning it displays 60 frames per second, which is still decent. A 120Hz TV doubles that frame rate—the result, if implemented well, is a reduction in motion blur. We've seen some TVs, such as the few listed on the following pages, that do a great job on motion with just a 60Hz frame rate, so definitely compare models while shopping.

Agility

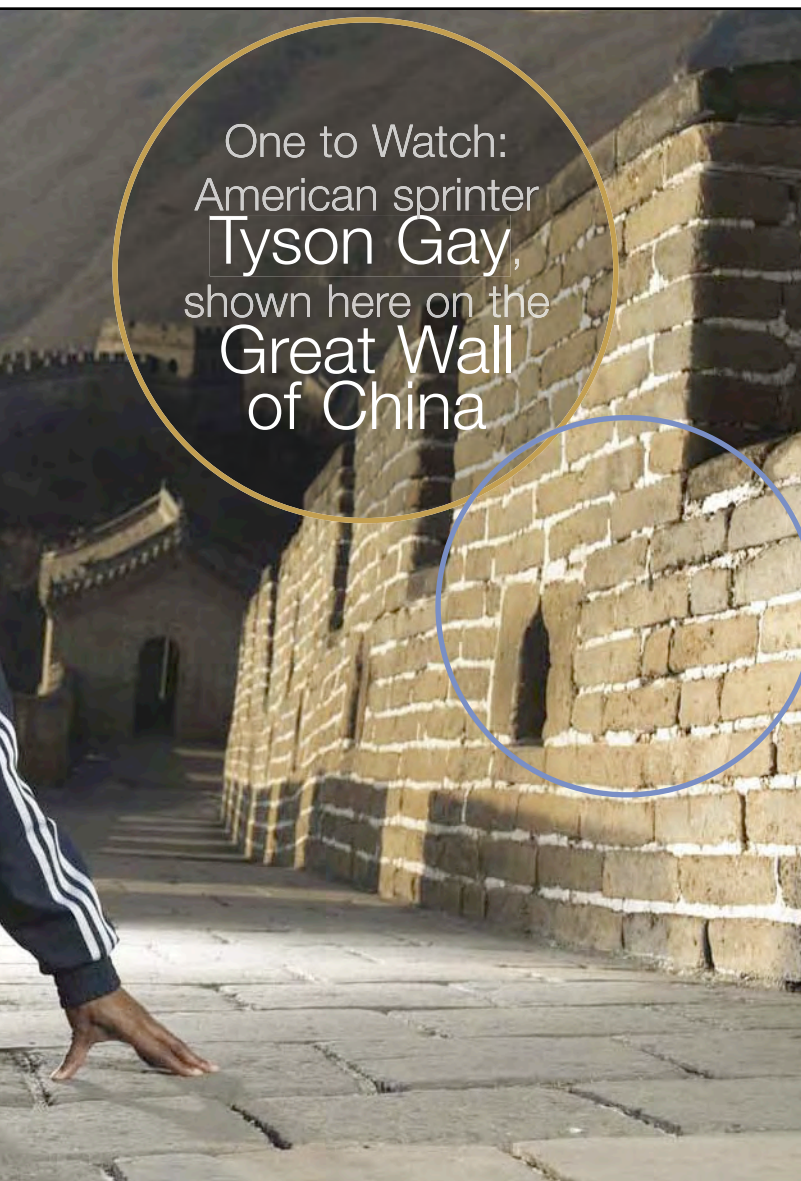
Your new HDTV should accommodate a wide range of sources and emerging trends. A budget HDTV isn't a deal if it lacks the connections and features you'll want a year from now. HDMI is the connection standard for HDTV; it can deliver high-def video, high-resolution audio, and control signals over a single cable. The more HDMI inputs your TV has, the better; however, you should also make sure the TV has enough "legacy" inputs to accommodate your current sources (component video, S-video, and so on).

Look for features that distinguish one TV from another: Do you want picture-in-picture? Does the TV have a USB input to display photos or play MP3s? How about an Ethernet port to access Web features? Many Blu-ray players can output theatrical films at their original speed of 24 frames per second, or 1080p/24. However, not all 1080p-capable HDTVs can accept this signal type; some can only accept the more common 1080p/60 format. Armed with this information, you'll know the right questions to ask when you shop.

Play to Your Strengths

LCD and plasma TVs have different strengths, and it's important to select a model that suits your viewing environment. LCDs can be very bright, so the picture pops in a well-lit room. However, lower-quality models are more likely to have motion blur, a limited viewing angle, and a mediocre black level, and therefore may not be ideal for sports or nighttime viewing.

Plasmas generally have better black levels and viewing angles and don't exhibit motion blur. However, their panels can reflect light, and they usually aren't as bright as LCDs, so they're not the ideal choice for daytime viewing in a very bright, sunlit room. Also, lesser-quality models can exhibit short-term image retention, in which you can see traces of static images that have been left on the screen for too long. As noted earlier, LCD and plasma manufacturers are well aware of these issues and are constantly improving their latest models. Now you know the stats, let's get to the contenders.



One to Watch:
American sprinter
Tyson Gay,
shown here on the
Great Wall
of China

Photo by Adam Pretty/Getty Images for adidas

EDITORS' PICKS

Here are big-screen HDTVs that rise above to deliver high-def Olympic gold.

Westinghouse TX-52F480S 52-Inch LCD HDTV

Thanks to Westinghouse, you don't need an Olympic-sized bank account to enjoy an Olympic-sized picture. The TX-52F480S may be the company's top 1080p offering, but it still adheres to Westinghouse's commitment to offer good performance at a good price. The generous connection panel includes four HDMI inputs, two component-video inputs, and a PC input—all of which accept a 1080p signal. The Autosource function automatically switches the TV to, say, the Blu-ray player when you power it up to watch a movie or to your DirecTV HD DVR when you are ready to settle in for a night of Olympic swimming. Additionally, the TX-52F480S offers a nice assortment of picture controls, such as precise color-temperature adjustment and an adjustable backlight to tailor the TV's brightness to your viewing environment—very cool.

The one omission here is 120Hz technology, but you currently can't find that feature in any 52-inch TV at this price, and the set still does a good job reducing motion blur. The TX-52F480S has a simple, clean aesthetic with a glossy black frame and brushed titanium accents. This one gets the win for a very good picture and a great price for the size.

\$2,499, www.westinghousedigital.com

LG 52LG50 52-Inch 1080p LCD HDTV (pictured on first page of article)

If you care as much about the sounds of the Olympics as you do the sights, you might consider LG's 2008 LCD lineup. The company is challenging the notion thin TV panels must have thin-sounding speakers, bringing in audio pioneer Mark Levinson to tune the new invisible speaker system. Speakers are subtly incorporated into the high-gloss-black bezel, and the audio system completely surrounds the screen to create a wider sweet spot—the place in your room where the audio sounds the best.

On the video side, this mid-level LG offering lacks the company's TruMotion 120Hz technology, but does a good job on motion nonetheless. It does offer other features found in LG's more expensive lineups, such as a professional calibration mode that allows for the precise adjustment of color temperature and an Intelligent Sensor that automatically adjusts color and light based on your room conditions—a very nifty feature. The three HDMI inputs will accept a 1080p/24 signal so you can experience movies at their best, and a USB 2.0 port allows you to view JPEGs or enjoy MP3s. We love this set for great audio and video, whether you are watching sports and movies or even listening to music through the set's speakers.

\$2,999, www.lge.com



Olympics Sneak Peek



Now that you have a beautiful big-screen HDTV, it's time to settle in for the Beijing Olympics, August 8–24, 2008. Everyone has their favorite sports, but the Opening Ceremony is sure to be filled with spectacular color—and with a new high-def television you'll see every shade of this glorious global rainbow. NBC will have wall-to-wall coverage; for the latest schedule of events visit www.nbcolympics.com. It's hard to pick definitive stars of the Games—that's why they're so much fun to watch—but here are some of the people and events that are sure to be high points.

U.S. Men's Basketball Team

Kobe Bryant. LeBron James. Jason Kidd. Carmelo Anthony. Coach K. Will this year's dream team reclaim the gold after a disappointing bronze finish in 2004?

U.S. Women's Softball Team

The U.S. team is trying to earn its fourth consecutive Olympic gold medal. The International Olympic Committee has decided to cut women's softball from the 2012 Olympic games in London, so this may be the sport's final Olympic hurrah.

Swimming

Michael Phelps took home eight medals in 2004 and is expected to compete in eight events this year. Can he live up to his own legacy? On the women's side, favorite Katie Hoff could have an equally grueling and exciting Olympics, as she's expected to compete in seven events.

Women's Gymnastics

U.S. gymnast Shawn Johnson enters the games as the reigning world champion. Her toughest competition could come from U.S. teammate Nastia Liukin. Together they could lead the U.S. to team gold.

Track & Field

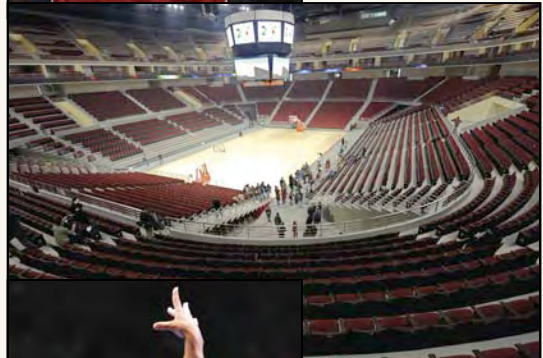
American fans may be watching sprinters like Tyson Gay and Allyson Felix, but the hometown crowd will show up to see their beloved Liu Xiang, the reigning world champion in the 110-meter hurdles.

Copyright 2008 NBAE. Photo by Gary Dreen/NBAE/Getty Images)

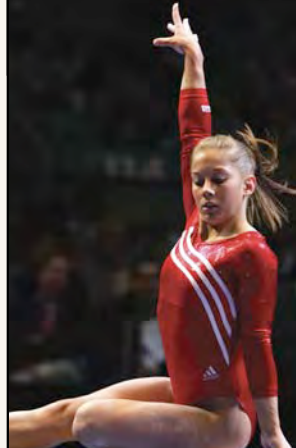


Top to Bottom:
LeBron James,
the Olympic Basketball
Gymnasium, Shawn
Johnson, Michael Phelps,
and Beijing's Olympic Village

THE BIG KOOK/AF/PH/Getty Images



Chris Trotter/Getty Images



Dilip Vismal/Getty Images



THE BIG KOOK/AF/PH/Getty Images



Panasonic Viera TH-50PZ85U 50-Inch 1080p Plasma HDTV

Panasonic has a reputation for offering some of the best-performing plasmas on the market, and for good reason. It offers big-screen plasma HDTVs with excellent black levels and detail, rich color, no motion blur, and decent prices. To give you an idea of how good Panasonic plasmas are, late last year several *Best* editors voted with their wallets and purchased plasma 1080p HDTVs (50- and 58-inch PZ750 series editions) from the company. One editor has become transfixed viewing Discovery HD specials delivered by Verizon FiOS HDTV, and his beloved N.Y. Mets never looked more colorful—and without any trace of motion blur.

This 1080p model is part of the new PZ85 series, which has an even better contrast than previous Panasonic models and includes a new anti-reflective screen coating that's designed to more effectively reduce light reflections off the glass. That

means you get a stellar image day or night. That said, plasmas are still best placed in rooms without too much ambient light.

The connection panel includes three HDMI, two component-video, and one PC input. Unlike previous models, the HDMI inputs accept the native 1080p/24 signal from a Blu-ray player for a very smooth, filmlike experience. The new series also adds a game mode to minimize lag time when displaying video games, incorporates several features to help prevent short-term image retention, and the redesigned gloss-black cabinet includes speakers that run discreetly along the bottom of the panel. Show off your JPEG photos and AVCHD videos easily via the side-panel SD card reader. This set is also supplied with GalleryPlayer that offers a slideshow of famous artwork, so even if you're not watching TV, the screen looks good. This 50-incher, with its big, detailed image, gives Olympic-watching hopefuls something to look forward to.

\$2,699, www.panasonic.com



Toshiba Cinema Series 52XF550 52-Inch LCD HDTV

Last year's high-end Cinema series earned kudos for its good blacks, superb detail, and rich colors, so expect great things from the new Cinema series lineup, including this 1080p model. The 52XF550 has three HDMI inputs that accept 1080p/24 sources, plus a host of advanced picture adjustments like precise color management and an adjustable backlight to tailor the image to your room and preferences. Toshiba's ClearFrame 120Hz technology reduces motion blur—great for watching Olympic gymnastics—while the Film Stabilization mode reduces the juddery look of film sources like DVD/BD movies. A gaming mode cuts down on the lag time between the gaming console and the video screen.

This TV is no slouch in the looks department, either. The attractive Super Narrow bezel, with less than an inch of high-gloss-black frame surrounding the screen, allows you to fit the bigger 52-inch screen in a smaller space—in other words, less frame, more picture. We like this set for its sexy exterior and love it for its rich, lifelike picture.

\$3,199, www.tacp.toshiba.com



WHICH TV TYPE TAKES HOME THE GOLD FOR YOU?

Plasma HDTVs

Benefits:

- Don't fall prey to motion blur on action/sports
- Unlimited viewing angle, meaning they look the same from any seat in the room
- Better contrast and deeper blacks than LCD HDTVs
- Cost a bit less than LCD sets of comparable size and quality (price differentiation is shrinking, however)

Drawbacks:

- Short-term image retention a possibility (though many manufacturers are addressing this issue)
- Screens can suffer from glare in bright rooms
- Use slightly more power
- Less choice in 1080p category compared with LCD

Especially great for:

Cinematic viewers planning on doing a lot of night-time movie watching or sports fans who have some control over the ambient light in their room

LCD HDTVs

Benefits:

- Brighter images, with no screen reflection
- No risk of image retention
- Slightly lower power consumption
- Lighter weight
- Greater choice in screen sizes and greater number of available 1080p models

Drawbacks:

- Limited viewing angle, meaning if you sit off-axis, the image can drop off in color, contrast, and brightness
- Blacks are not as deep as plasma
- Motion blur can be a factor, though most manufacturers are addressing the issue with 120Hz technology

Especially great for:

Those who have a very bright viewing environment

Rear-Projection TVs

Benefits:

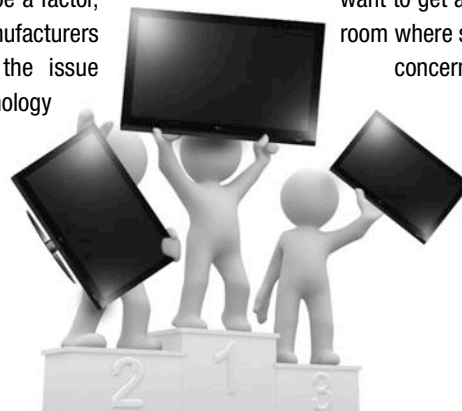
- Wide selection of 1080p models
- More screen for the money than LCD or plasma

Drawbacks:

- Bulky, deeper than both LCD and plasma
- Bulb replacement is necessary on a periodic basis
- Narrower viewing angle than plasmas; picture suffers when sitting off axis

Especially great for:

Those who have a limited budget, but want to get a big television for a room where space is not a major concern



Mitsubishi Diamond Series LT-52244 52-Inch LCD HDTV

The Diamond series moniker signifies Mitsubishi's highest-end offerings, and the LT-52244 is the top LCD Diamond. As such, this TV uses the company's best color and processing technologies, as well as Smooth120Hz technology. Connections are abundant, including four 1080p-capable HDMI inputs, three component video inputs, and a USB port for photo playback.

For the cable subscriber who doesn't want a bulky set-top box messing up his clean aesthetic lines, Mitsubishi includes a CableCARD slot with the TV Guide Daily program guide. The NetCommand system allows for onscreen control of analog and digital components that you've connected to the TV. This model has a smaller profile than previous generations, with less than an inch of high-gloss-black frame surrounding the 52-inch screen, so you can fit more TV in less space; a swiveling stand is also included.

At a recent tradeshow, we saw this set in action, and colors looked very saturated, bold, and the image looked great. Advanced features and technologies make this Diamond a real gem.

\$3,800, www.mitsubishi-tv.com

Sony Bravia KDL-52XBR4 52-Inch LCD HDTV

Sony's XBR4 series is one of the best TVs you can buy today, thanks to its excellent picture quality, abundant features, and attractive styling. This 1080p model produces good blacks, color, and detail, and Sony's Motionflow 120Hz technology helps reduce film judder and motion blur in fast-moving action or sports. The gorgeous floating-bezel design centers the matte-black frame within a clear, acrylic border; for an additional \$300, you can custom-order the bezel in silver, velvet black, scarlet red, Arctic white, sienna brown, or Pacific blue.

There are a ton of image adjustments at your disposal to fine-tune picture quality, all accessible via Sony's popular XrossMediaBar menu that is fun and easy to navigate. The TV's three HDMI inputs and two component-video inputs accept 1080p, and the back panel includes a connection port for Sony's \$300 Bravia Internet Video Link, through which you can stream Internet video from providers like AOL, Yahoo, and Grouper. Colorful design and a colorful image will complement any source material, whether it's Olympic gold or *The Hunt for Red October*.

\$3,999, www.sonymstyle.com



Samsung LN52A650T 52-Inch LCD HDTV

Despite being one of the few companies to offer plasma and LCD HDTVs, Samsung is earning a reputation as a top LCD manufacturer, thanks to recent high-end models that offer accurate color, excellent detail, and good black levels. The brand-new LN52A650T picks up where last year's well-received LN-T5271F left off, using Auto Motion Plus 120Hz technology to reduce motion blur and film judder. The four HDMI inputs accept a 1080p/24 signal, and this model offers advanced picture adjustments, for a really dialed-in image. Thanks to the TV's Ethernet connection and built-in InfoLink RSS technology, you can get instant access to news, weather, stocks, and (of course) sports information, great for checking stats on your favorite Olympiad. The LN52A650T is one of the first models to feature Samsung's stylish, new Touch of Color aesthetic; blended subtly into the piano-black frame is a hint of amber that accentuates without distracting. A touch of beauty meets a touch of brains in this excellent TV.

\$4,199, www.samsung.com



Pioneer Elite KURO PRO-110FD 50-Inch Plasma HDTV

Simply one of the best-performing TVs on the market, this 1080p HDTV earns every bit of its \$6,000 asking price. KURO means black, and this Pioneer Elite lineup produces some of the deepest blacks and richest colors, as well as one of the highest native contrast ratios you'll find in a flat panel. This plasma TV doesn't exhibit motion blur, but Pioneer has still included special processing modes that provide smoother movement and a reduction in film judder. It also offers a more robust speaker system than many flat panels and a great complement of features—including professional calibration modes, four HDMI inputs that accept 1080p/24, a CableCARD slot with the TV Guide On Screen program guide, and an Ethernet port for streaming A/V content (including HD) over your network. The PRO-110FD has an attractive high-gloss-black frame with detachable side speakers. If you can afford the indulgence, the PRO-110FD is the gold standard for high-def sports and movies.

\$6,000, www.pioneerelectronics.com



Sharp AQUOS LC-52SE94U 52-Inch LCD HDTV

AQUOS has become synonymous with LCD, and this special-edition 1080p HDTV combines the most advanced features and technologies from the Sharp's various other models. The LC-52SE94U looks unlike any other Sharp TV, with a newly redesigned cabinet that has less frame, corner accents, a smudge-resistant finish, and detachable speakers. The TV features Sharp's Fine Motion Video 120Hz technology for smooth sports or action sequences, as well as a backlight designed to offer a deeper color palette than you get from a traditional LCD fluorescent backlight. The connection panel includes three HDMI and two component-video inputs, all of which accept a 1080p signal. An Ethernet port grants you access to AQUOS Net, Sharp's online portal that offers special Internet content and live tech support. Set up a weather widget to check the conditions in Beijing, or, if you simply can't stand the suspense, check out the NBC Universal widget to get results from your favorite Olympic sport. Fully featured and a fabulous performer, this one earns the right to be called special. •

\$3,899, www.sharppusa.com





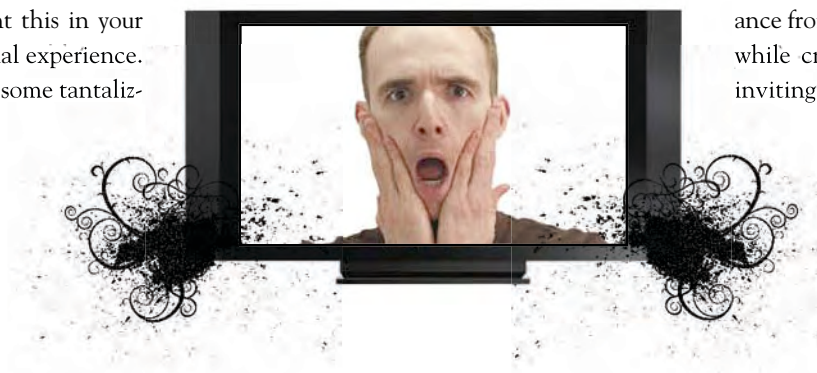
HOME THEATER SECRETS

10 tips to creating a better home theater

By KRISSY RUSHING

Home theater is like a Rorschach test. Everyone has a different interpretation of what the phrase actually means, but its essence is Big Picture, Big Sound. How you implement this in your home is an individual experience. That said, there are some tantaliz-

ing secrets about home theater that hold true for every situation—no matter how grandiose or compact. This short guide will help you glean extra performance from any home theater system while creating a room that's truly inviting.



1 Lighting Lowdown

When you go to the movies, they turn the lights down, not up. However, a completely dark room is ideal only for two-piece projection systems. For most HDTVs some room lighting is not only welcome, it's actually easier on the eyes. In fact, watching TV or a movie in a completely darkened room can cause eyestrain over extended periods of time. Putting a small lamp or "backlight" behind the TV set is ideal, but for flat-panel sets, not always practical. Instead, small lamps placed at low levels strategically around the room—so they don't cause reflections on the screen—make a huge difference in viewer comfort. (Philips Ambilight TVs, pictured below, have built-in backlights.)

Another way you'll get the most out of your HDTV is by taking a trip to the hardware store for a 6500K light bulb. 6500K is a designated "color temperature" best for watching TV. These bulbs, placed in lamps that are turned on during viewing, will have the least effect on your TV, allowing the colors to shine. We also recommend new TV owners adjust the color temperature to the same setting, which will be labeled 6500, low, or warm. By doing this, the television and room lighting will not compete—resulting in great, lifelike colors.

2 Where to Sit

There are many things to consider when assembling your home theater, but one of the biggest factors is room arrangement. Viewers sitting too close to the display will start to see the pixel structure on the screen (lots of small dots) and won't get the best image. Those sitting too far will not be as immersed in the image, losing the suspension of disbelief that's so important for movie viewing. You need to sit at a distance that's just right. One of the amazing things about HDTV is you can be closer to the screen than the supposed "good old days," which ultimately means you can fit a bigger TV in a smaller space than ever before. A good rule of thumb for an HDTV is to sit 1.5 times the screen's diagonal measurement. So the proper viewing distance for a 50-inch HDTV is 75 inches (6.25 feet) away from the screen. Keep this key equation in mind when arranging your room.

3 Make Sure You're Watching High-Definition Video

It may sound like an obvious thing, but it isn't. Many people, in fact, get their new HDTV home, only to watch standard-definition content. Here are a few guidelines:

- Make sure you have a high-definition set-top box. Just because you have "digital cable" doesn't mean you have HDTV. The same holds true for satellite TV. Call your service provider to verify if you do; if not, get the right equipment delivered and the programming package activated before the TV arrives. And definitely opt for a DVR upgrade. Once you use one, the thought of watching a commercial becomes an anathema.
- Turn to the high-def channels. Many networks, like TNT or the Food Network, offer a standard-definition and a high-definition station. Figuring out which is as simple as looking at your onscreen programming guide.
- Get more high-definition sources. Now that the high-def disc format war is over, it is a great time to purchase a Blu-ray player, which plays back high-def movies. They are well worth the investment, considering the gorgeous picture quality, and will still play your plain old DVDs.
- Make sure you are connected properly. We are continually surprised by the number of people who buy the proper gear, only to connect it improperly by using the wrong inputs and outputs. To get a high-def image, you must connect your components using the HDMI connection (or the component video connection). If you don't, you won't get high def. It's as simple as that.





4

Buy Speakers by the Bunch

Now that your picture is dialed in, what about the sound? Let's start by shopping for a speaker system. Piecing together a system out of various speakers from different manufacturers is a mistake. Speakers that aren't sonically matched can sound very bad—no matter how much you pay for them. That's why speakers are sold as systems (like the Klipsch Quintet system, left) rather than individually. Buy a complete surround-sound system (five-plus speakers), or, at the very least, speakers from the same manufacturer, for the best sound. Don't match old speakers with new ones—your ears will thank you for it.

5

Make Your Speakers Salute

You've managed to connect your speakers to the back of your audio/video receiver, but with the mess of wires, it's easy to get mixed up. Most receivers will have a "test" option that will play "white noise" (a test tone) out of each speaker individually while displaying the name of the speaker tested on the front of the unit. If the speaker on the display and the one being tested aren't the same, you'll need to fix that. For example, if the test tone comes out of your right speaker but the display says "center," then your dialogue will come out of the right speaker instead of the proper one below, behind, or above the screen. Now the dialog will not be in sync with the image onscreen, a big no-no.

6

Pay Attention to Details

There are several things you can do to improve the quality of your home theater sound. For example, put speakers at ear level. It's important to put the tweeters of the front speakers at about the same height as your ears would be in the sitting position. (Tweeters are the smallest speakers in a cabinet and are locat-

ed near the top.) Most speaker stands are built at the correct height, so consider putting speakers on stands instead of on a bookshelf or mounted high on the wall.

You should also upgrade your audio cables. Why invest thousands of dollars in a high-performance home theater, only to use sub-par cables? With good cables, the sound of your speakers will improve drastically.

Also take into consideration your room's acoustics. There are professionals in the A/V industry who make taming room acoustics a career. It *can* be rocket science, but there are a few simple things you can do to help. Add some acoustically "dead" material to your room, like heavy drapes and carpeting, which will help eliminate room reflections—sound bouncing around the room off hard surfaces like mirrors or hardwood floors.

Acoustic seals around doors and windows help keep speaker sound out of adjacent rooms in the home, and likewise keep noise in other rooms from intruding upon the sanctity of your home theater. Little details like these can really add to the quality of audio in your room.

Place speakers at ear level

Upgrade your audio cables

Put acoustic seals around doors and windows

7

Get Innovative

Don't be afraid to be flexible in your theater design. While the sound from a floorstanding surround-sound speaker package is ultimately going to sound better than a small home theater in a box, it's O.K. to make compromises, especially if you are just starting out. For example, if aesthetics are more important than surround sound, you might opt for simulated surround sound systems, such as a speaker bar (Philips, Yamaha, Denon, and Sony make great models) or a system with wireless rear speakers (KEF Home Theatre Wireless is a good one).

There's even flat speaker wire that looks like tape and can be painted over if you don't want bulky wires running from the front of the room, where the receiver is, to the back, where the two surround speakers are positioned. Once you get started with a home theater system, you can upgrade gradually to high-performance gear.



8

Remotes Rule

So you've set up your home theater, and you sit down to enjoy it, only to be met with an army of remote controls waiting to attack. A good universal remote control combines the functions of several remotes into one easy-to-use unit. You won't have to teach unsuspecting babysitters and in-laws how to use several different remotes ever again.



9

Get Organized

We've seen behind many an A/V rack that looks like a mess of black wires squirming in a cloud of dust bunnies. What happens when it is time to swap out your old standard-def DVD player for a Blu-ray Disc player? Disconnect the wrong cable and you may find yourself performing major A/V rack surgery, flashlight in hand, that could take hours. It might be as simple as using a piece of masking tape to label your wires as you connect them. Some A/V racks, such as models by Bush, even incorporate wire-management features into their entertainment furniture. You will thank yourself later if you get organized now.

10

When In Doubt, Ask for Help

One of the great things about the emergence of home theater as an increasingly popular room in the house is that the good people selling the equipment know a home theater system can be intimidating and possibly difficult for the layperson to set up. That's why most national retailers offer assistance. If you buy a flat-panel HDTV, you can have a trained technician come to your home, mount the TV to the wall, and hide the wires typically for \$300 to \$500. Don't be afraid to ask for help in order to get your system dialed in. You really won't be sorry you did. •

Picture Perfect

We can't say it enough: An HDTV viewed "out of the box" will not look nearly as good as one that's been properly "tweaked" or calibrated. Your image will dramatically improve by doing a few simple things when you get your set home.

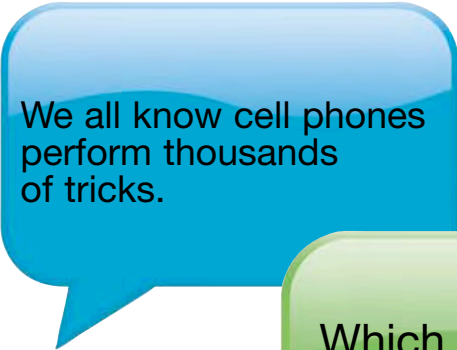
- **Get the room ready.** Set the lighting to the appropriate viewing levels, and sit where you normally would when you watch TV.
- **Make sure you have a source of high-def signals before your new HDTV arrives.** If you subscribe to cable or satellite TV, upgrade to a new high-def set-top box first, preferably one that includes a digital video recorder for recording and watching your favorite high-def programs at your convenience. Nothing beats a DVR for catching up on shows that air while you're at work, asleep, or traveling.
- **Make sure the set-top box is up and running when your HDTV arrives so you can check out the TV's different A/V inputs to make sure everything works correctly.** Set-top boxes usually have multiple output-resolution settings, such as 720p or 1080i. For a 1080p HDTV set, select the 1080i output—1080p output is not yet available on any set-top box. If you're having your HDTV calibrated, the technician will want to compare actual high-def signals before and after the calibration is completed. If you don't plan on having a professional calibration, the following easy steps will help you get the best picture quality:

- **Open the HDTV's picture menu and see what choices you have for picture modes.** Chances are one of them is labeled dynamic, vivid, or something similar. Dynamic modes on HDTVs are designed to make them look really bright in showrooms, but they can degrade the picture quality by washing out highlights and emphasizing the edges of people and objects in the picture. Look for and select a setting labeled standard, cinema, movie, or natural. The image won't be as bright, but it will look more pleasing because the colors and contrast will be more accurately lifelike. You may also find you don't need the picture to be as bright for normal viewing. Look for the contrast or picture control, and set it about midway (50 to 60 percent).
- **You may also want to turn down the set's sharpness control to 10 or 20 percent.** This will get rid of white outlines around people and objects. Sharpness enhancement is not needed when viewing high-def programs—they're already sharp enough!
- **Check to see if the picture menu includes a color temperature or white-balance setting.** If so, stay away from cool settings, and instead use the medium, mid, 6500, or warm setting to get better flesh tones and more natural colors.

- **Wherever possible, use the digital A/V connections to hook up DVD players and set-top boxes.** This will ensure that you get the highest picture quality with the lowest signal loss. HDMI cables carry as much video information as five component video cables! Any good HDTV will include two to three HDMI connectors, which should take care of almost anything you'd want to connect. Because HDMI connectors also carry the audio signals, you'll have a smaller nest of wires behind your set when you finish setting up. If you've also purchased a surround-sound system with your new HDTV, you can use an HDMI connector to hook into your A/V receiver with minimal fuss.

If this all seems like too much to deal with, many set manufacturers have an easy way to handle it. They have a special "movie" or "home theater" mode that gets the television close to what many feel are the best all-around picture settings. Again, it's like that Rorschach test—you may like your settings better.—*Pete Putman*





We all know cell phones perform thousands of tricks.



Which ones simply make great-sounding calls?

THE BEST-SOUNDING

By STEWART WOLPIN

Can you hear me now?

Cliché? Yes, but the “hear me” aspect of cell phones seems to have been neglected inside a department store of cell phones with newer, gaudier digital furnishings. These include music listening, picture and video taking, GPS navigation, Web browsing, emailing and texting, social networking, game playing, movie watching, TV viewing, and personal organizing. Whew! According to a survey compiled by Ditech, which sells voice-enhancing technology to carriers, an average of 23 percent of all mobile calls made in the United States fall below the industry minimum standard for voice quality.

So which are the best-sounding cell phones? As in all things digital, it depends. Your network—Verizon, Sprint, AT&T, T-Mobile, et al.—your specific geographic location within a network, and how noisy your immediate environment is will all affect how clear your call will be.

As you’ve probably discovered, you can lose a great-sounding connection simply by moving a couple of feet. Crisp calls suddenly are filled with echo, clips, and pops for no discernable reason. Considering how call quality can change with so little provocation, imagine how network quality differs from city to city. A phonically fulfilling phone in Philadelphia can sound bad in Los Angeles. And “faster” 3G networks—EV-DO for Verizon and Sprint, HSDPA for AT&T Wireless—move data quickly but aren’t necessarily designed to improve sound quality.

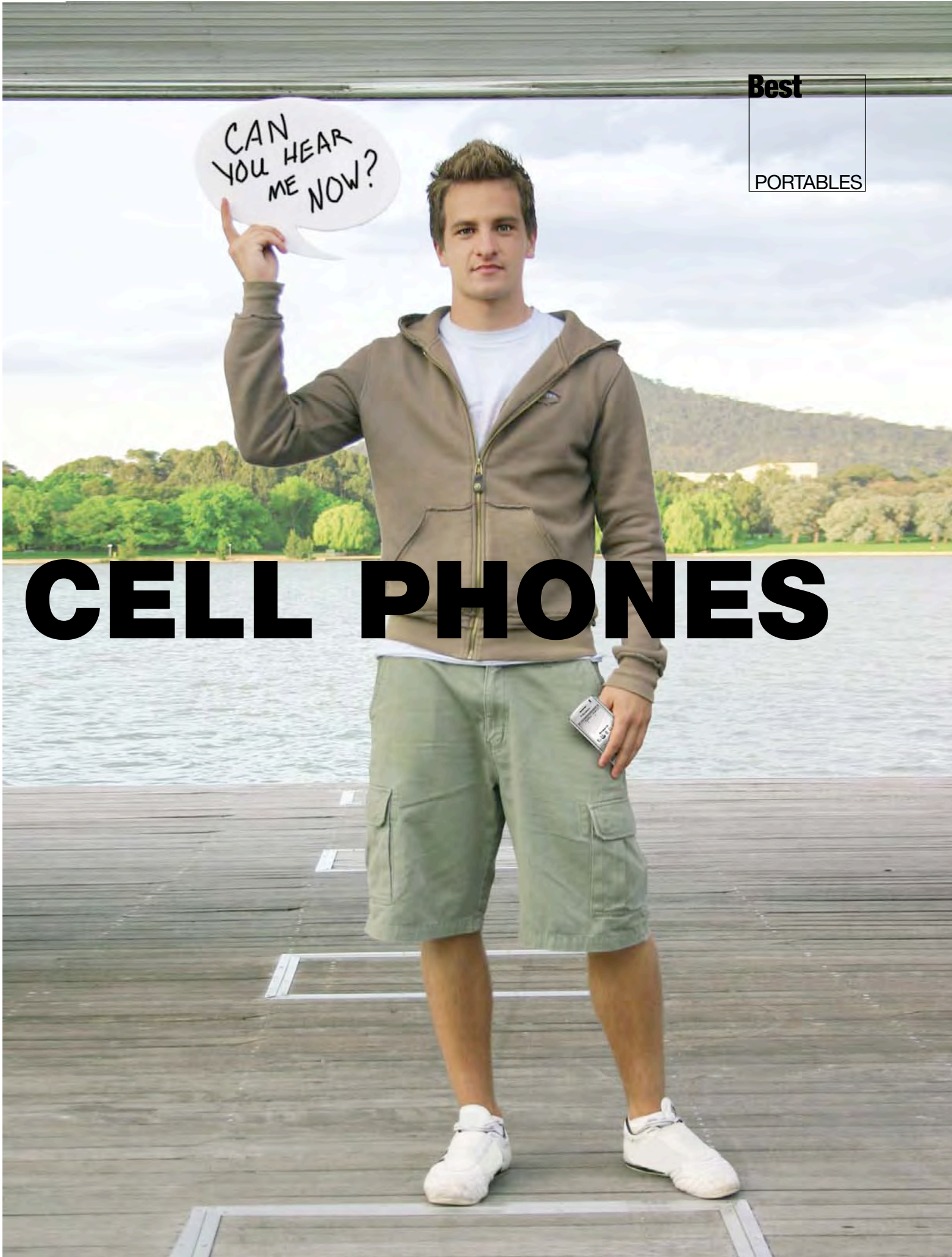
As a result, our list of the best-sounding cells is subjective. We tested these phones in New York City, which is filled with sonic pitfalls, calling the same person from a stationary position to reduce network vagaries. All are good, but we’ve listed them here with the very best at the top. Your experience may vary.

Best

PORTABLES

CAN
YOU HEAR
ME NOW?

CELL PHONES





1. Razor-Sharp Sound

AT&T, Verizon, and Sprint all sell versions of the upgraded Motorola RAZR2 V9, but the AT&T version supplies slightly better conversation quality over the Verizon model. The company that invented the cell phone has imbued the maroon-ish V9, along with several other models, with its Crystal Talk acoustic technology, designed to not only improve vocal quality but to adapt to noisy environments. Like other Crystal Talk models, the V9 has a vented speaker—a small slit on the rear of the top flip behind the earpiece that, combined with signal processing and other acoustic echo and noise-damping enhancements, heightens what you *want* to hear. In addition to the V9's vocal tweaks, you get access to AT&T's HSDPA 3G network, MP3/AAC/WMA music playback with stereo Bluetooth, a 2MP camera with an 8x zoom, access to AT&T's

video and music services, and a full range of texting and email options. This is hands-down the best-sounding cell we've tested. **AT&T Wireless, \$250, www.wireless.att.com**



2. A Rep to Protect

Like Motorola, LG has a reputation for superior-sounding phones. And the LG VX8350 lives up to that rep. In addition to high-quality vocals via its earpiece or dual stereo speakers, this cell supplies music (MP3 or WMA) via headphones or stereo Bluetooth and has music controls out front where they're easily accessible. Verizon VCast music, video, Web, and data are delivered by the carrier's broadband EV-DO network, and the 8350 includes GPS location-based services such as VZ Navigator, which provides voice-prompted turn-by-turn navigation functions. Chaperone lets you track your cell-carrying child's whereabouts. You also get a 1.3MP camera and LCD screens inside and out. Up to 4 GB of music and photos can be stored on a removable microSD card. Great for first-time cell owners and those looking for crystal-clear sound. **Verizon, \$80, www.verizonwireless.com**

video and music services, and a full range of texting and email options. This is hands-down the best-sounding cell we've tested. **AT&T Wireless, \$250, www.wireless.att.com**

3. Titillating Tilting

If you're Tilting, you're likely a texter—why else buy a phone with a full slide-out QWERTY keypad? The AT&T Tilt's name derives from its tilting top, designed to enhance the LCD screen's view-



ing angle. But we were surprised at how good this HTC-made phone sounds (HTC is one of the top global suppliers of cell phones). We found Tilt's audio crisp and clean, devoid of otherwise frequent AT&T network noise. Our co-conversation-alists also reported they could hear us now, loud and clear. Aside from good sound, this Tilt smartphone (a.k.a. the HTC Kaiser or the AT&T 8925) is powered by Microsoft Windows 6.0 operating on AT&T's HSDPA 3G network. You also get all the expected push email and messaging options, as well as Wi-Fi Web and GPS-enabled navigation capabilities. For play, the Tilt includes a 3MP camera with 10x zoom, and AT&T Mobile Music and video capabilities. If you are a texter who demands good audio to boot, check out the Tilt. **AT&T Wireless, \$300, www.wireless.att.com**

That's right, the Samsung Katalyst is free for T-Mobile customers who subscribe to T-Mobile's Hotspot @Home service (\$10/month) and a qualifying call contract. Hotspot @Home lets you make regular T-Mobile cell network calls or unlimited calls through the Internet via your home Wi-Fi network or any T-Mobile Wi-Fi hotspot, such as those found at Starbucks. In other words, you get two excellent-sounding phones, regardless of which network you're on, home or away. Calls gently slip almost unnoticed from Wi-Fi to cell or vice versa as you move from one environment to another, and the battery supplies five hours of cell talk time. When you're not chatting, this slider worldphone includes T-Mobile's quick-call myFaves feature, a 1.3MP camera, and EDGE network Web access. What more could you ask for in a free phone? **T-Mobile, free, www.tmobile.com**

4. Sounds Good, and It's Free



What more could you ask for in a free phone? **T-Mobile, free, www.tmobile.com**

5. Surprisingly Clear



Yes, it looks like a saddle shoe, but voice quality on this funky music-centric phone is anything but old-fashioned. It is surprisingly crisp with plenty of volume. Other than vital vocals, this chunky slider can play MP3, AAC, and protected WMA music files for up to 12 hours on a single charge; it includes an FM radio and has stereo Bluetooth and a 2.5mm headphone jack. The phone's microSD slot can handle a 2GB card; there's a 1.3MP camera with an 8x zoom, and it is myFaves capable. On the downside, you only get a disappointing three hours of talk time and the external speaker is mono, although plenty loud. Nokia has introduced a more traditionally styled upgrade, the 5310, but at press time it was not available from any of the four major carriers. Stay tuned. **T-Mobile, \$50, www.tmobile.com**

6. No-Nonsense Talker



The LG VX5400 is one of the best-sounding no-frills cell phones on the market. Sure, it has a camera (only a low-resolution VGA type) and, like its cousin, the LG VX8350, includes VZ Navigator and Chaperone capabilities for a little extra. But at its core, the VX5400 flip phone is a relatively simple cell phone that offers nearly five hours (280 minutes) of landline-quality talk on a single battery charge. Since it's designed more for talking than anything else, the VX5400's phone book can store up to 1,000 contacts, and also offers text messaging, chat and email capabilities along with Web access. If you don't need all the extra hoopla, but want a great-sounding cell, this model's for you. **Verizon, \$50, www.verizonwireless.com**

Good sound doesn't help unless a phone also delivers plenty of volume to overcome standard environmental noise as this upgraded Sanyo Katana does. Just pump up the volume on this already great-sounding cell if you get caught in a noisy area. You also get four hours-plus of conversation on a single battery charge. But this is a phone that looks as good as it sounds, especially for sophisticated *Sex in the City* types. With its mirrored metallic champagne, pink, or silver color schemes, the Katana DLX is an elegant ladies' cell. Katana's shiny face features a 1-inch square LCD that doubles as a self-portrait mirror and 1.3MP camera lens. Katana also plays back MP3 and AAC music files through headphones or stereo Bluetooth, and has 32MB of internal memory and a 128 MB microSD card. Running on Sprint's EV-DO network, Katana is also equipped with GPS navigation functions and email and text-messaging capabilities. This one has great sound, great features, and great looks. **Sprint, \$100, www.sprint.com** •

7. Bells + Whistles + Good Sound



The BlackBerry Pearl 8130's dazzling voice quality is gravy with a BlackBerry, especially one this stylish. It sounds as good as it looks, whether you are calling from the Pearl, or are on the receiving end of a call made from a Pearl. Aside from BlackBerry's excellent email functions, this next-generation Pearl is equipped with a 2MP camera, a music player, stereo Bluetooth, 64MB of internal flash memory, and a microSD slot that accommodates an 8GB card. From Verizon you get access to its broadband EV-DO network for speedy Web access and its VZ Navigator. And now, for an additional \$7.99/month, you can get 20 XM Radio stations. Unlike the full QWERTY keyboard found on other BlackBerrys, the skinny Pearl's keypad carries two alpha characters per key and uses SureType predictive text technology that knows what word you're typing with just single key taps. For many people, this arrangement is an acquired taste. Either way, you get all the features of a BlackBerry, plus the audio quality you deserve. **Verizon, \$200, www.verizonwireless.com**

8. For the Ladies





PICKING THE **PERFECT PC**

Eight great machines with the speeds and feeds to suit your needs

By STEVE MORGENSTERN



The very first step in buying a new computer isn't figuring out what the computer can do, but what you want it to do. For today's desktop and laptop machines, the available models break down into four broad categories:



- **“Meat and potatoes” machines** are tailored to basic everyday computing tasks. Even inexpensive models in this category today would have been considered top performers just a few years ago—they're just fine for basic home and student tasks such as word processing, surfing the Web, balancing your checkbook, and even entertaining yourself with music and videos.

- **Business machines**—specifically, home office and small-business models—are generally used to run several programs at once, which means faster processors and more memory makes a significant performance difference. For travelers, we're excited about the increased practicality of ultraportable computers. The ultraportable category includes machines weighing roughly 4 pounds or less, though we've found that every ounce counts when running to catch a connecting flight. A few years ago, ultraportables were accessory items—good enough for work on the road, but you still wanted a more full-featured machine back at the office. Today, if you choose a full-featured ultraportable, it can be your only computer.





• **Entertainment PCs** are no longer an oxymoron. Americans are spending more and more of their entertainment time in front of computer screens instead of TVs, so it's only natural to combine the two. Microsoft Vista's Media Center makes accessing live and recorded video, DVDs, photos, music, and more a pleasure, especially when your computer comes with an A/V-style remote control. And now that the high-def disc format wars are behind us, investing in a Blu-ray drive for digital movie enjoyment isn't a



bad move (many entertainment-oriented PCs even have HDMI ports so you can connect them to a big-screen TV if and when you choose). For digital entertainment pleasure, fast processors and lots of hard drive space are necessities, along with powerful graphics chips and, for laptops, a nice big screen to savor the visuals.

• **Gaming machines** are far from laughing matters. High-end computer games—the kind with legions of beautifully rendered bad guys swarming across the screen, versus the online Parcheesi variety—require as much computer horsepower as you can muster. We're talking about the fastest processors on the market and the latest high-end video cards—look for DirectX 10 support, a new Windows graphics standard that gives PC games like *Crysis* a hyper-realistic appearance. Too much is never enough in this category, though we did find a pleasant surprise on the laptop side when it comes to price and performance.



Here are eight great systems—we chose a laptop and desktop with in each category—each with features designed to feed your particular computing need. And they'll definitely leave you satisfied.

Meat and Potatoes

Dell Inspiron 1420

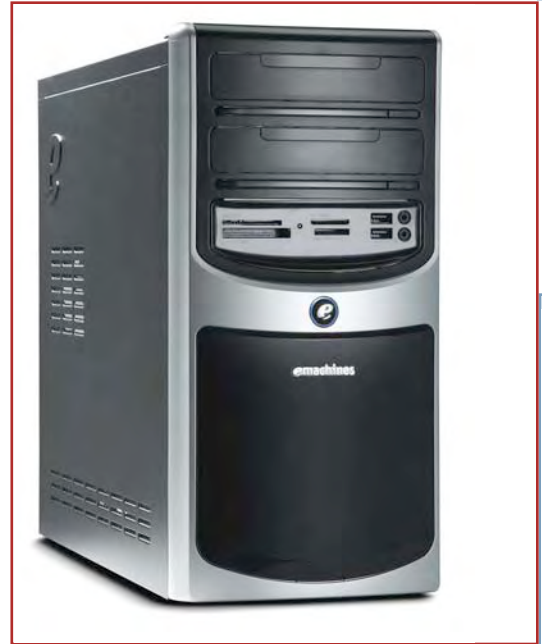
Even a basic laptop doesn't have to be boring. Apparently a phalanx of fashionistas stopped by Dell's Texas HQ and unleashed a palette of seven designer colors, from espresso brown and ruby red to sunshine yellow and flamingo pink (a modest \$25 upgrade over corporate black). Whatever hue you choose, the system under the hood should handle your day-to-day computing needs effortlessly, though we would recommend bumping the system memory up to 2GB. The 14.1-inch screen is comfortable for everyday use, but still small enough for easy portability. The system is highly customizable, with a wide range of available processors, hard drives, and so forth. A separate Nvidia graphics card is a nice step up from the stock integrated graphics; bigger batteries add weight but deliver longer computing time on the go, and there's even a Blu-ray drive available as an option. If it's a straightforward word-processing, Web surfing, MP3-playing kind of computer you're after, though, even a

basic budget-friendly Inspiron 1420 will get you where you need to go—and at about 6 pounds, this portable won't break your back or break the bank. **13.1" x 9.6" x 1.5", 5.5 pounds, prices start at \$649, www.dell.com**



eMachines T5246

Some budget machines push so hard to hit an ultra-low price that buyer's remorse kicks in before the new-computer smell wears off. The eMachines T5246, though, delivers all the key features you need for satisfying computing, and still comes in well under \$500. You get the 2GB of RAM you want (but often lack on a bargain system), a spacious 400GB hard drive, a DVD burner, and 15-in-one media card reader. The AMD Athlon 64 dual-core processor is up to any mainstream computing task and, while we expect the built-in Nvidia graphics will be just fine for most users, there's an open PCI card slot to upgrade the video down the road if you choose—another rarity in this price range. We even like the mini-tower case—nothing showy, but well constructed, and at just 14.5 inches tall, it doesn't take up much space on or under your desk. **14.5" x 16.1" x 7.2", 21.5 pounds, \$429, www.emachines.com**



Entertainment

HP Pavilion HDX

Calling this 15-pound behemoth a "laptop" implies a level of masochism I'm not entirely comfortable with, but it is entirely tote-able from room to room, which is more than you can say for any other piece of gear with this level of pure entertainment power. And, for many spouses, just the option to fold down the screen and shut the case will be reason enough to choose the HDX over a desktop-PC-plus-monitor combination.

Gaze in wonder at the superb 20.1-inch display, available in full 1080p resolution to make the most of your favorite Blu-ray movies. Connect your set-top box or antenna to the built-in tuner, fire up Vista's Media Center software with the included remote control (it nestles neatly in a handy compartment when not in use), and enjoy a satisfying



TV viewing experience on a screen big enough to share with friends and family. Pop your favorite CD into the CD/DVD drive, crank up the volume, and fill the room with surprisingly pleasing sound via the four, count them four, speakers plus subwoofer built into the chassis. And if you want to connect to a flat-panel TV (to watch a Blu-ray movie, for example), the convenient HDMI port handles video and audio out with a single cable.

While it's aimed at those who crave digital entertainment, the HDX is no slouch as your day-in, day-out home computer, with a full-sized keyboard plus numeric keypad and available hard drives up to 640GB. And while it's not a hardcore gaming rig, the HDX does have a high-end Nvidia graphics chip, making it a great all-around entertainment machine whether you prefer your amusements in the interactive or couch-potato variety. **18.7" x 13.4" x 2.3", 15.3 pounds, prices start at \$1,999, www.hp.com**

Business

Gateway GT5662

A desktop computer destined for small business tasks doesn't need a lot of flashy bells and whistles and doesn't have to cost a fortune. We're looking for processing power, lots of storage, plenty of memory, and a compact, unobtrusive design. The Gateway GT5662 meets all these criteria and comes in at under \$750.



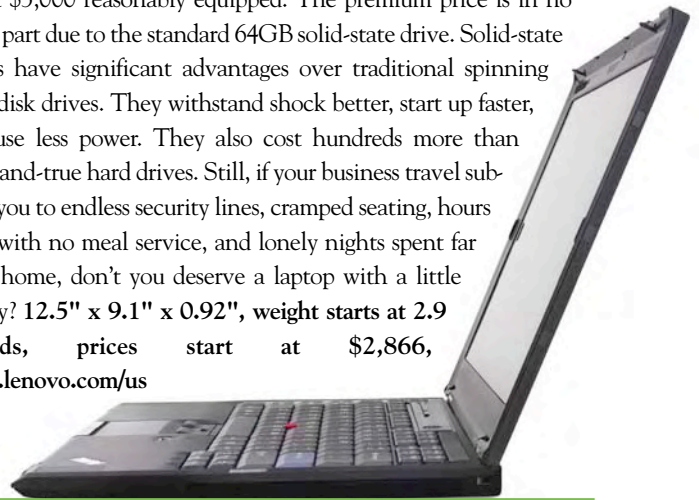
For starters, there's the AMD Phenom 9500, a quad-core processor that can handle multiple applications running simultaneously with ease. Also handy in the multitasking department is the 3GB memory configuration. Vista runs comfortably in 2GB, but the extra RAM definitely speeds things along when you're trying to do six things at once. Half a terabyte (500GB) of hard-disk storage in a desktop PC was a tech aficionado's impossible dream not long ago—now it comes standard in this inexpensive system. The ATI Radeon video card offers support for a dual-monitor configuration if you like to maximize productivity by expanding your visual real estate. There's even an HDMI output for easy connection to a TV for giving presentations or watching last night's episode of *Lost* streaming from the ABC Website (even business executives are entitled to a lunch hour, right?). **15.6" x 16.1" x 7.2", 23.4 pounds, \$749, www.gateway.com**

Lenovo ThinkPad X300

Long-suffering laptop-luggers rejoice—the weight is over! The new generation of ultraportable PCs delivers all the computing power you need, in a hotel room or back at the office, in machines that weigh 3 to 4 pounds. The Macbook Air is the most visible example of the ultraportable trend, but we're recommending the more sedate-looking ThinkPad X300 for business travelers.

Lenovo has crammed a cornucopia of desirable features into a package that starts at just 2.9 pounds, including a beautiful LED-backlit 13-inch screen and full-sized keyboard. Unlike the Macbook Air, the X300 includes an optical disc drive (a dual-layer DVD burner at that) and support for Verizon's cellular data network for go-anywhere connectivity in addition to built-in Wi-Fi. There's a convenient Webcam above the screen, surprisingly decent speakers, and a fingerprint reader for enhanced security, all housed in a tough-as-nails carbon-fiber case.

Make no mistake: This is an expensive notebook computer at about \$3,000 reasonably equipped. The premium price is in no small part due to the standard 64GB solid-state drive. Solid-state drives have significant advantages over traditional spinning hard disk drives. They withstand shock better, start up faster, and use less power. They also cost hundreds more than tried-and-true hard drives. Still, if your business travel subjects you to endless security lines, cramped seating, hours aloft with no meal service, and lonely nights spent far from home, don't you deserve a laptop with a little luxury? **12.5" x 9.1" x 0.92", weight starts at 2.9 pounds, prices start at \$2,866, www.lenovo.com/us**



Sony VAIO LT

To the untrained eye—heck, to the trained eye—it looks like a sleek 22-inch LCD TV. It can even be mounted right on the wall. In reality, though, this is one brainy boob tube because mounted behind the screen is a complete, powerful Vista PC, ready to play music and movies, record and play back TV shows, display photos in a dramatic slideshow, stream multimedia goodies directly over the Internet, and, if absolutely necessary, deal with email and checking your online bank balance.

You can tailor the configuration to match your entertainment desires (and budget). A Blu-ray read/write disk drive is available so you can watch prerecorded movies and also burn your own high-def camcorder video to disc. Go with a standard TV tuner, or a separate CableCARD box if you prefer feeding HDTV to the VAIO without a separate set-top box (allowing you to record HD shows from cable direct to the PC). And if HD on your PC sounds A-O.K. to U, hard-disk capacity maxes out at a massive 1TB (that's 1,000GB).

No matter which configuration you choose, the LT comes com-



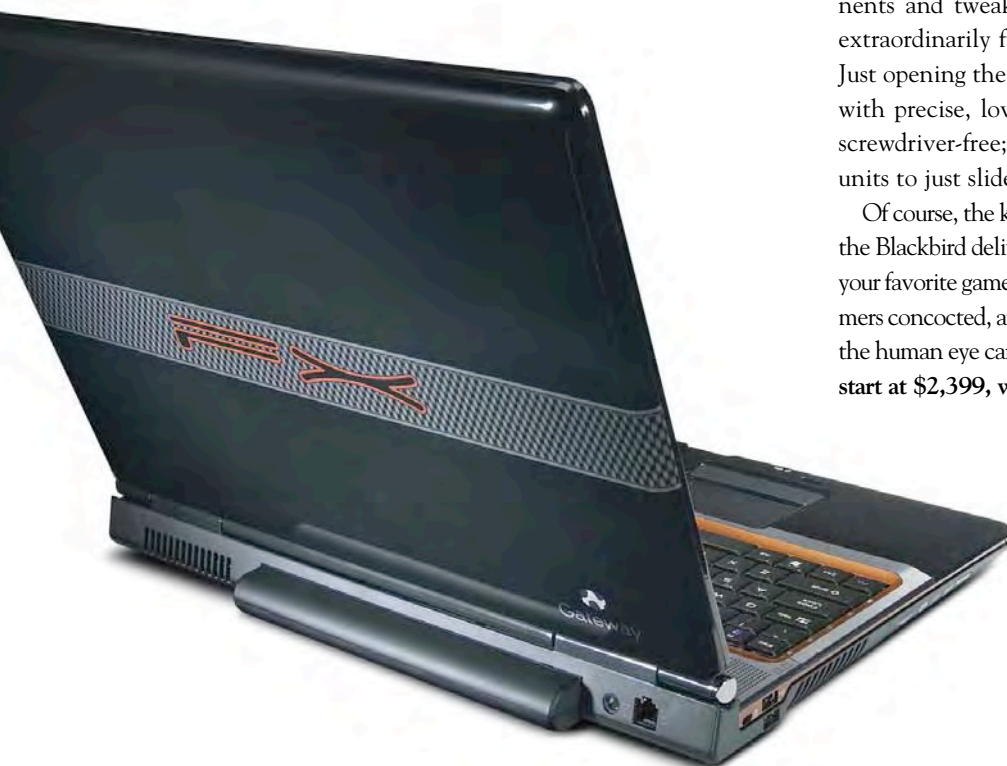
plete with a sleek wireless keyboard that folds into a neat triangle for storage, a comfy wireless mouse, built-in wireless networking, and miles of style. **25.3" x 16.5" x 7", 21.4 pounds, prices start at \$1,999, www.sonymstyle.com**

Gaming

Gateway P-Series FX Models

The key difference between a powerful laptop and a full-fledged gaming rig isn't the processor or even the flashy paint job—it's the graphics chip. And that's precisely where this series shines, showcasing Nvidia's hot mobile GeForce 8800M GTS (with DirectX 10 support) to squeeze all the goodness from the latest Windows games, all on a big, bright 17.1-inch screen. Paired with 3GB of RAM and an Intel Core Duo processor, you'll blast through your favorite PC games with high resolution and a fine frame rate. And, of course, these machines perform equally well on other visual-oriented tasks, such as video or photo editing.

Unlike some gaming laptops, the Gateway model is more quiet-good-taste than in-your-face when it comes to design, with simple bronze accents around the screen and keyboard about as bling as it gets (which, to be clear, is just fine with me). The keyboard feels solid and responsive, whether you're playing games with the WASD keys or typing reports for work, though printing some of the lettering in that same bronze color was a legibility mistake. That's a minor qualm for a top-notch system, though. And while you can spend \$3,000 and up on a tricked-out P-Series FX machine at the Gateway site, Best Buy has its own retail version, the P-6831FX, complete with the Nvidia graphics and 3GB of RAM that drive gaming performance, at a more-than-reasonable \$1,349. **15.75" x 11.75" x 1.3-1.7", 9.2 pounds, prices start at \$1,349, www.gateway.com**



HP Blackbird 002

When mainstream computer maker HP acquired the gonzo gaming company Voodoo PC in 2006, you had to wonder if this combination could possibly compute. Now that they've had their first kid together, though, all doubts are gone—this was clearly a corporate marriage made in heaven. The Blackbird 002 is a beautifully sculptured work of art, poised on its own pedestal (they tell me it helps with cooling, but I suspect it's just cool). Inside are all the high-performance components to satisfy the most demanding gamer's hardware lust, from Intel's quad-core processors to dual top-of-the-line graphics cards. The system is "overclocked," a technique for driving the components extra hard to eke out maximum speed. To keep it all from melting down under the load, a sophisticated water-cooling system is available and recommended.

Guys who go for this level of gear are often serious hobbyists, interested in adding new components and tweaking what's already there. The Blackbird is extraordinarily friendly to these devotees of digital overkill. Just opening the case is a pleasure—cabling neatly concealed with precise, loving care; parts latched in place to pull out screwdriver-free; drive bays ready and waiting for additional units to just slide right in.

Of course, the key promise of a system like this is raw power, and the Blackbird delivers the goods. Crank up the screen resolution of your favorite game, turn on every visual special effects the programmers concocted, and enjoy—you'll still have frame rates faster than the human eye can perceive. **23.5" x 22" x 9", 72 pounds, prices start at \$2,399, www.hp.com** •



[REC]



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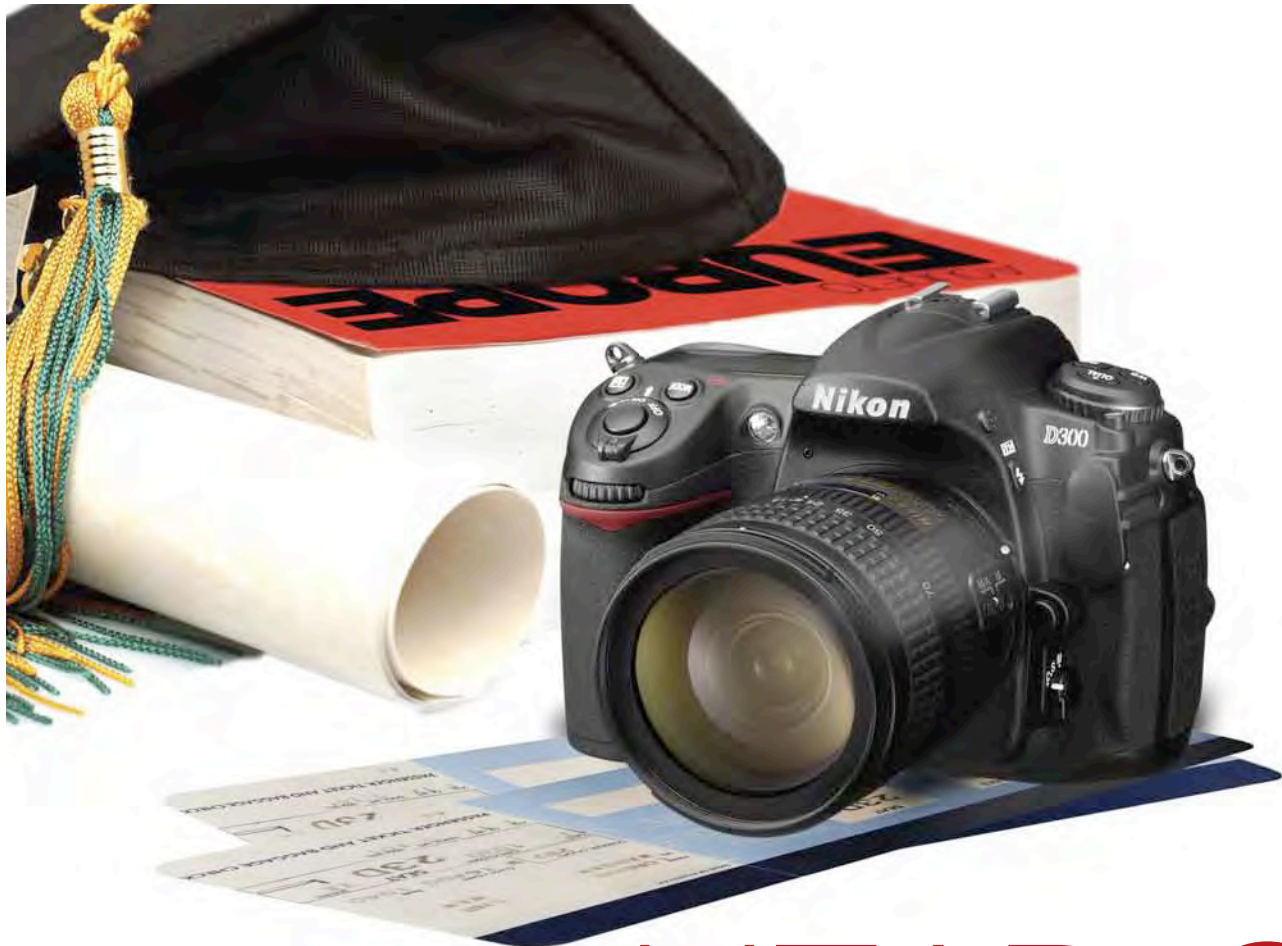
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HEAD OF THE CLASS

Thinking of a new digital camera as a gift or as a companion for your next vacation? We pick 12 of the best.

By SHAWN BARNETT

With spring coming to a close and the summer sun rising higher in the sky, it's time to turn attention to fathers, thanking them for all they've done all year. Beyond dear old dad, perhaps you have a student about to reach the important milestone we call graduation. If you choose a digital camera for Dads or Grads, you'll end up with a gift that keeps giving in the form of photos you can hang on the wall and send to friends. We've picked 12 cameras with great potential for a wide range of uses, but particularly suited to those wanting to take family and vacation pictures, and to those taking their first steps into the real world of college or work.

There are hundreds of cameras to choose from, but these rise to the top.

For Serious Photographers Only

Whether dad or grad, the Nikon D300 (pictured above) is the ultimate digital camera choice on this list, but beware that although a novice can use it, it's really designed for the serious photographer. Just holding the Nikon D300 tells the story. It's hefty, big, and rock-solid. Placement of every control is excellent, offering a photographer comprehensive control of the camera via buttons and dials without having to delve into the Nikon D300's menu system. But there is no "Green Zone,"

Best
**DIGITAL
IMAGING**

that zone on many cameras that pretty much ensures a good snapshot, and no scene modes to turn to. The Nikon D300's 12.3MP resolution delivers crisp images with great color, and it nearly performs miracles: capturing images in ridiculously low light thanks to its ISO 6400 setting. When the angle you want is too tough to get through the optical viewfinder, you can switch to Live View mode and see a big, bright, crisp image on the D300's 3-inch LCD screen. For the rest of your shooting, you'll want to use the capacious optical viewfinder, whose intelligent focusing system will blanket your subject with up to 51 autofocus points, or you can choose from all 51 individually, pinpointing your subject with impressive accuracy without having to recompose your image. As for speed, you can fire off up to six frames per second; add the new battery grip and you can squeeze off up to eight in a second thanks to the extra power. Anyone who knows photography knows Nikon is renowned for its fine optical quality, and that whole array of excellent SLR lenses is open to you with the D300. The Nikon D300 feels amazing in the hand, and like those older Nikon pro cameras, it seems to beckon: "Let's go see what we can capture." **\$1,799 (body only)**, www.nikonusa.com



Canon Rebel XSi

And the big 3-inch LCD serves as a gorgeous way to compose your images. The XSi will also take a more careful look at your pictures before saving them to the card, thanks to the new Auto Lighting Optimizer. This new algorithm actually uses Canon's face-detection technology to make sure faces are exposed properly, and it also works to maintain detail in shadows and highlights. The end result is improved contrast and better-looking images, making them more accurate representations of what your eye actually saw. Also new is the revised kit lens. It's not only been improved optically, offering better sharpness across the frame; this 18-55mm lens includes optical image stabilization. When you buy it with the camera, it's only \$100, while it sells separately for \$200. As I mentioned, it's a bargain. Like its predecessor, the Rebel XSi also offers a comprehensive dust-reduction system, Picture Styles that are now customizable across other cameras in the EOS line, high-speed USB 2.0 connectivity, and direct printing to PictBridge printers. Most importantly, the Canon Rebel XSi offers great SLR picture quality with less effort than ever before. **\$799 (body only; \$899 with 18-55mm IS lens)**, www.usa.canon.com

A Sure Bet

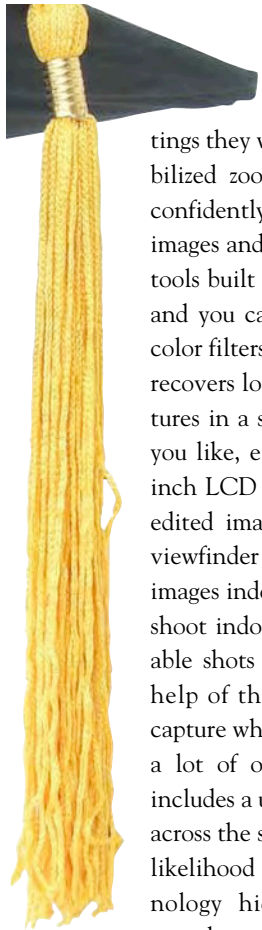
Rarely is a bargain also a sure bet, but that's what you get when you buy a Canon Rebel XSi. This user-friendly digital SLR packs some of Canon's most-advanced photographic technology. At its heart is the company's DIGIC III processor, making the Rebel XSi capable of handling the high-resolution 12.2MP images at 3.5 frames per second. But that's not all the processor allows: You can shoot in Live View mode with more functionality than Canon's ever offered, making the Rebel XSi shoot more like the digicam you may be accustomed to than any SLR.



Nikon D60

Great for First-Timers

The Nikon D60 is the king of the hill in terms of easy excellence among digital SLRs. No other SLR offers as many great features with such a reassuring interface. While other cameras are aimed to appeal to advanced amateurs who like a gadgety feel, the D60 conceals that complexity, showing only the buttons the average snap shooter will be interested in. You won't need to squint at a bunch of tiny icons to try and figure out what they mean—just point and shoot. You can delve into the menus for more control, but most will be so impressed with what the Nikon D60 can do at its default set-



tings they won't need to. Its 10.2MP sensor and 3x image-stabilized zoom lens combine to make images that you can confidently print up to 16x20 inches, or you can crop your images and still get a great 11x14 or 8x10. Enhanced editing tools built into the Nikon D60 allow you to crop in-camera, and you can correct for red eye, add star effects, play with color filters, and employ the camera's D-Lighting feature that recovers lost detail from shadows. You can improve your pictures in a short time, and print them without a computer if you like, either at a kiosk or via your home printer. A 2.5-inch LCD screen gives you a big view of your captured and edited images, and an infrared sensor beneath the optical viewfinder dims the screen so you can comfortably compose images indoors without having to squint. To further help you shoot indoors and even at night, the D60 can take remarkable shots with low noise at up to ISO 3200. With the help of that image-stabilized zoom, you'll be better able to capture what your eye sees indoors with less image noise than a lot of other cameras. Nikon's new dust-control system includes a unique new airflow system that moves a blast of air across the sensor each time you take a picture, decreasing the likelihood of dust in your images. All of this advanced technology hides behind the simple interface, giving the complete novice all of Nikon's photography expertise in one small, fun camera the entire family can use. **\$749 (with 18-55mm VR lens), www.nikonusa.com**

Legendary Lenses

Lovers of Sony Electronics products need not abandon their favorite company when searching for an SLR, nor do they need to feel like they're missing anything if they don't go with one of the other big camera names, since the Sony Alpha DSLR-A200 has all the latest imaging technology combined with the long optical heritage of Minolta's legendary Alpha lens system. Sony has come a long way in making a simple SLR with a lot of depth. Impressive technologies like sensor-shift image stabilization, dynamic-range optimization, and dust removal are nearly transparent to the user, requiring only a switch or menu selection to activate. An 11-point AF system makes auto focusing very fast, and the 18-70mm zoom lens reaches a little farther than most kit lenses, while maintaining good image quality at all focal lengths. The Sony A200 has an infrared sensor under the viewfinder that not only turns off the LCD to make it easier to look through the viewfinder, it also starts auto focusing before you can even half-press the shutter, making focus acquisition that much easier. Sony's Super SteadyShot helps you avoid blurry

images, regardless of what lens you have attached, by actually moving the imaging sensor to compensate for camera movement while you're taking the picture. As easy as it is to use, the Sony A200 will also help you learn photography little by little, offering special exposure and white-balance bracketing modes to help ensure you get the shot, and custom white-balance settings to help you get the light just right. Those looking for a no-nonsense digital SLR need look no further: The magic of the A200 is in its images. And the price isn't bad either.

\$599 (with 18-70mm lens; add a 75-300mm lens for an additional \$200), www.sony.com

Mighty Megapixels

One of this year's resolution leaders is the Samsung GX-20 digital SLR, an advanced camera with a 14.6MP sensor. The GX-20's body is big and burly and is sealed against water and sand for greater durability in all environmental conditions. Controls are well placed, and the 2.7-inch screen features 230K pixels for good resolution. That comes in handy when using the GX-20's new Live View mode. Samsung claims their new sensor has the tightest microlens arrangement, for better light-gathering capability, which allows them to offer ISO settings up to 6400. The GX-20's viewfinder has greater magnification than their previous model, offering a better view of the 11 autofocus points. Built-in image stabilization is based on sensor-shift technology, one of the best on the market. The Samsung GX-20's stabilization



Sony Alpha DSLR-A200



accounts not only for vertical and horizontal motion, but rota-



Samsung GX-20

tional motion as well, accommodating those who put a little twist into their picture taking when pressing the shutter. Samsung took a two-pronged approach to dust control in the GX-20, offering a special coating on the sensor glass and a high-speed vibration motion to shake dust free. The GX-20 has no scene modes, but it does have two very unique exposure modes that take advantage of digital capture like no other digital-SLR design. Sv and TAv adjust something you couldn't adjust on the fly with a film camera: ISO. You can either set your chosen sensitivity value with Sv and let the camera set aperture and shutter speed, or set your desired shutter speed and aperture and let the camera choose the ISO in TAv mode. Samsung's GX-20 uses the Pentax K-mount, accommodating dozens of old and new designs, including the new faster, quieter SDM lenses; it's also compatible with Samsung's Schneider D-Xenon optics. The Samsung GX-20 is a unique alternative that has a lot going for it. **\$1,399 (with 18-55mm lens), www.samsungcamera.com**

Surf and Turf

Olympus really surprised the market with its new E-3, a high-end digital SLR with a solid, water- and sand-resistant



Olympus E-3

body design. Though it uses a sensor that's smaller than most digital SLRs, the E-3's body is big. That's actually good when you're taking pictures, especially if you're using larger lenses. Because the sensor is smaller, Olympus can pack more optical capability into a smaller space, and because of the digital-specific design of Olympus lenses, you get more sharpness from corner to corner across the image, while other designs tend to soften as you move out from the center. Even Olympus's less-expensive optics are quite sharp. To help get things into pinpoint focus, the E-3 employs a new 11-point autofocus array. Each point is "cross-type," which means it can focus more types of subjects, while single-pole systems can sometimes miss. The E-3's new shutter mechanism puts it on par with most other high-end digital SLRs, shooting at 1/8,000th of a second, and its flash sync is 1/250. Of course, it also has Olympus's pioneering dust-reduction system to

shake the dust off the sensor using their own Supersonic Wave Drive motor, which shakes the sensor 30,000 times per second at startup and shutdown. A separate Supersonic Wave Drive motor runs the E-3's sensor-shift image-stabilization system, and Olympus has included that technology in their new lenses as well, which slew very quickly and quietly into focus. Despite its size, the Olympus E-3 feels great in the hand, with a large grip and terrific control placement. Though it's a high-end digital SLR, it still has a pop-up flash for fill in tough situations, and a swing-out LCD screen makes the Olympus E-3's Live View mode that much more useful. Live View is capable of contrast-detect autofocus which reduces shutter lag significantly from the company's older Live View mode. It's a whole lot of camera, so it does have a higher price, but Olympus fans will surely love using the E-3, thanks to the array of excellent lenses available for it. **\$1,699 (body only), www.olympusamerica.com**

The Substitute

The hobbyist photography market has been starving for a camera like the Canon G9, so it's no surprise a great number of otherwise happy digital-SLR owners have taken a shine to this little black camera. Though an SLR can do a lot, and generally takes better-quality pictures, often it's the camera that is small enough to bring along that gets the best shots. You just can't get an SLR into a jacket pocket with a regular lens, let alone with a 35-210mm lens attached. That's why so many pros and enthusiasts have G9s. Its 12.1MP sensor is not quite as big as an SLR's, but it's bigger than most digicams, and that means G9s can take good-quality shots that are higher resolution than many SLRs. The fine manual controls and interface make the G9 feel like a "real" camera. Many point lovingly to the manual ISO dial on the top, which offers instant visual feedback and a good tactile feel, something missing from many digital cameras. Even the four-way navigator is surrounded by a dial, further connecting the design to the Canon EOS digital SLR that so many of the G9's owners have. The G9's lovely 3-inch LCD screen



Canon G9

gives you a great sense of what you've captured. To top it all off, the camera's 6x zoom is optically image-stabilized, and focusing and zoom are controlled with Canon's Ultrasonic Motor drive technology for fast and quiet operation. It's just right for any hobbyist photographer who likes to tinker with small, high-tech objects that make remarkable photographs. **\$499, www.usa.canon.com**



Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ50

All-in-One

As great as SLRs are, there are still people who would do better with a more traditional digicam like the Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ50. Sure, it's actually bigger than some SLRs, but there's no way you'd fit an SLR and a 12x optical zoom with an $f/2.8$ lens into this form factor without a lot of compromises, especially in optical quality. The FZ50's 35-420mm equivalent lens is an excellent performer, true to its Leica heritage. Rather than a motorized zoom, the FZ50 has a manual zoom ring, which in addition to being faster and more precise, opens up some interesting opportunities when using it for video (something no D-SLR can do). You have to pay a lot of money for a high-end video camera with a manual zoom, but you have it here for less than \$500 in stores. The zoom is also quiet, unlike about every other long-zoom digicam on the market. Its 2-inch LCD screen swivels out from the body, enabling shooting from many angles, something most SLRs don't do, and its AF system is easily customized to include just one, three, or nine image areas for better control depending on the situation. Its functionality is also enhanced by Panasonic's Optical Image Stabilization system, which really helps out on a zoom this long. The Panasonic DMC-FZ50 is a great choice for anyone who wants one camera that can do it all. **\$549**, www.panasonic.com

Sporty Package

For a long zoom that fits neatly into a jacket pocket, Canon offers the 10x PowerShot SX100 IS, an image-stabilized camera in a sporty package. Controls on the SX100 are surprisingly simple, with a mode dial on top and a control dial on the back, as well as a few buttons that are clearly labeled. A big 2.5-inch LCD serves to frame and view your images. The 8MP sensor delivers resolution sufficient for 11x14-inch prints from the lowest ISO images, and



Canon PowerShot SX100 IS

even its highest ISO of 1600 can deliver a good 4x6-inch print. Covering a range of 36-360mm, the SX100's 10x zoom includes Canon's optical Image Stabilization, which includes a special panning mode to stabilize the camera when you're tracking a moving subject—a rare feature usually limited to Canon's high-end SLR lenses. The SX100's face-detection feature can pick out nine faces to focus on, and it'll even zoom in on those faces after you've taken the shot so you can verify that they're in focus. The SX100's swing-up flash is great because you won't accidentally cover it with your fingers, as can happen with smaller cameras, and movie mode captures pretty high-quality 640x480-pixel images at 30 frames per second. The Canon SX100 IS runs on two AA batteries and stores its images on SD and SDHC cards. For a long-zoom digital camera, it's a 10x zoom in a mid-sized package at a bargain price. **\$249**, www.usa.canon.com

Smooth and Sweet

Sony offers a rare feature in a small pocket camera in their Cyber-shot DSC-T300: a 5x zoom, equivalent to a 33-165mm lens. Long a favorite with fashion-conscious consumers, the Sony T-series oozes elegance from every seam. You haven't experienced grace until you've slid the cover of a T-series camera open: It's so smooth and sweet, you'll find yourself taking more pictures just to move that cover again. But there's even more to the T300's wizardry than the fun sliding cover. First, it has a touch screen and a stylus, which you can use to navigate menus, select AF point locations, or even draw on your pictures. The zoom toggle is a little swiveling lever on the upper right corner, and the screen is a huge 3.5-inch LCD with a 16:9 aspect ratio covering the entire back—which is great for inspecting your 10.1MP images. The T300's face-recognition feature also performs a few tricks: It can tell adults from kids and set its priority to take the picture the instant either a child or an adult smiles, helpful for those problem subjects. Sony's also brought its Dynamic Range Optimizer over from its SLR lineup to improve image contrast while maintaining highlight and shadow detail in every image. There's a lot packed into this very slim digital camera, and when you get home you can unleash it on your HDTV to display your images at the end of the day, another good trick. The Sony DSC-T300 is available in black, red, and silver. **\$399**, www.sony.com



Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T300

Power Plus

When it comes to high quality on a budget, nobody beats Canon's A series. The 8MP PowerShot A590 IS is a perfect example, offering a 4x zoom with optical image stabilization built right in. You can choose between using the optical viewfinder or the 2.5-inch LCD screen to frame your images, an increasingly rare option. The A590 IS also includes face-detection autofocus for better focus and exposure on the most important parts of your photos, and Canon's DIGIC III processor speeds autofocus, exposure, image analysis, and image processing. When enabled, a new feature of face detection allows you to zoom in on faces with a half-press on the shutter to check expressions before you take the shot. The Canon A590 IS will also check for and eliminate red eye

before it saves images. Though it has fully automatic modes to cope with unique situations, the A590 IS also has all the usual manual exposure modes, like the Shutter and Aperture Priority modes, as well as Manual, just in case you want to take control and get cre-



Canon PowerShot A590 IS

ative. All this capability is powered by easy-to-obtain AA batteries, available around the world for emergency power in a pinch. The A590 IS includes an enormous array of helpful features, but more important than any of that is the high image quality it delivers. \$179, www.usa.canon.com

Colorful Companion

For a slim camera with a cool sliding cover on a budget, look at the Fujifilm FinePix Z100fd. The Z100fd's slider moves diagonally to expose the 5x zoom lens, which ranges from 36-180mm. That's quite a nice zoom range to slip into a shirt pocket or purse. On the back you'll find a 230K-pixel, 2.7-inch LCD screen, and a scroll wheel for whipping

through images and menus. This shiny silver wheel also serves as a four-way controller if you desire. The Z100fd's 8MP sensor captures good-quality images, with ISO



Fujifilm FinePix Z100fd

settings from 64-1600. Sensor-shift image stabilization helps compensate for user movement, a good feature considering the Z100fd's longer zoom lens. Uniquely, the Z100fd is compatible with both xD-Picture Cards and the more popular SD/SDHC memory cards. This stylish little shooter weighs in at just 4.9 ounces and comes in four colors: Tuxedo Black, Cappuccino Brown, Satin Silver, and Shell Pink. \$249, www.fujifilmusa.com •



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Best

AUTO

Father Knows Best

Luxury rides for Dad's special day

By BETH STEIN

With Father's Day on the horizon, we decided it was the perfect time to cobble together a quartet of luxury Dad pleasers.

How did we arrive at this short list of vehicles, when fathers and their respective tastes are so diverse? First, we selected four broad categories that should cover a range of paternal preferences. There is a convertible, a luxury sedan, a sport utility, and a sport sedan.

After that it was simple: We just assumed Dad deserved the best.



Jaguar XKR

It's only fitting a convertible sports car be included in this lineup. What nicer reward for Dad after a hard day's work than to cruise home with the wind in his hair? In our fall '07 issue, we featured the XK coupe, the "base" model of Jaguar's two-door sportster. An '06 overhaul marked the second generation of the XK, a designation Jaguar hasn't used since the venerable XKE. The 1960s icon remains one of the prettiest cars ever designed.

Our visit with the XK8 was pleasant. Its beautiful lines pay homage to the XKE's sleek body, but bolder strokes now give it the grand presence of a true exotic. Enhanced performance demonstrates spirit without compromising a refined ride, thanks in part to an all-new aluminum monocoque body that makes chassis and body one unit and gives the XK both increased stiffness and slightly less weight.

Everything we liked about the XK8 turned to love with the XKR Convertible.

Cutting right to the chase—literally and figuratively—the "R" attached to this model denotes a supercharged engine that raises the XK's performance to a new level. The XK8's considerable 300 horses increase to 420 in the XKR. The supercharged and intercooled 4.2-liter 32-valve V8 produces 413 lb-ft of torque. Zero to 60 ticks only 4.5 seconds off the clock (compared to 5.9 for the XK8 coupe), and the quarter mile needs only 13 seconds in independent tests.

Yet, this cat moves with true feline grace: quickly, fluidly, and with a deep exhaust note that can only be described as a resonant purr. Even with stiffer springs for sportier handling, the ride still coddles its passengers in ways unimaginable for others with comparable horsepower (think Porsche 911). And Jaguar manages to maintain its light-touch power steering without detracting from the sport driving experience. The mere fact you can have this much fun without being rattled makes the XKR a serious competitor in a sporting class that heretofore looked upon the Jag only as a tourist. That it is available only with an automatic transmission may still stir some disdain among serious drivers, but the XKR's 6-speed automatic handles the 420 horses with such aplomb, the criticism hardly seems warranted.

As for those concerned a convertible delivers less structural integrity, the XKR Convertible's revolutionary design process provides assurance. Normally, any convertible is basically a lopped-off coupe and has to add weight to shore up rigidity lost in the removal of that roof. But in the case of the XK, the convertible was designed first.

This way, engineers didn't have to compensate for the loss of the hardtop, and exterior designers weren't faced with the often awkward task of slicing off an attractive coupe to come up with an equally attractive convertible.

Visually, the XKR distinguishes itself from the XK8 subtly. The oval grille is dark mesh and there are extra vents in the front fascia and hood. Rearward, a tasteful decklid spoiler and beefier rear bumper top four shining exhaust tips to complete the package.

This convertible also increases cabin dimensions to better accommodate front passengers, especially headroom. The back seat remains an afterthought suited only for briefcases and the like. But it's nice to have the storage.

Most notable are the sumptuous leather and wood that provide an unmistakably upscale feel to this interior. We could do with a little less plastic trim inside and out, and some may be put off by a soft-top at this price when hard-top convertibles are on the rise.

But no one can quibble with the enviable beauty and remarkable acceleration that define the XKR Convertible. It is a car whose physical attributes attract long, lustful stares wherever it goes. Jaguar is accustomed to that. But in the XKR, it finally has the performance to match. *Base price: \$92,035*



—————
This cat moves with true feline grace: quickly, fluidly, and with a deep exhaust note that can only be described as a resonant purr.
—————



BMW M5 Sedan

Let's suppose Daddy-O is the kind of guy who craves the ultimate driving experience, but remains shackled by the day-to-day demands of carpools and corporate accumulation. In other words, the man needs room.

For him, we suggest the BMW M5: seating for five adults, a full-sized trunk, easy four-door access, and 500 ponies harnessed beneath the hood.

That's not a misprint.

"Beast" is a word that easily comes to mind when considering this 5.0-liter, twin-cam 40-valve V10 engine. With 383 lb-ft of torque at 6100 rpm, it leaps 0 to 60 mph in a mere 4.5 seconds. Top speed is electronically governed at 155 mph. Dad will be home from those business trips in no time.

As is BMW's tradition, the M5 is a modern technological marvel. The good news is that all the power and performance you pay for here is absolutely state of the art. The bad news is, well, it's state of the art. While this M5 dazzles you with acceleration, handling, responsive steering, and a remarkably calm ride, not everyone will agree all of BMW's electronics qualify as improvements. The main controversy here is the transmission. A 7-speed Sequential Manual Gearbox was designed as the optimum companion for this mighty V10 and was the only transmission available initially. This tranny shifts manually via paddles behind the steering wheel or by tipping the floor-mounted shifter fore and aft. It can also operate in fully automatic mode.

Frankly, we couldn't get comfortable with either mode. The remote-feeling manual mode left us longing for an old-fashioned clutch and stick to connect with this M5's potential. Automatic mode takes such a long pause before each gear engages, it feels like something's wrong. All in all, it leaves much to be desired in a car that should be one with its driver. Outcry over this transmission spurred BMW to offer a traditional six-speed manual as an option. But it was borrowed from the previous M5 and has some drawbacks in this new configuration.

And while we're whining about technological "improvements," BMW's iDrive continues to prove challenging. It's better—we'll give BMW that. Other automakers have even emulated it in a simpler fashion. But as much as we appreciate the idea of consolidating many confusing systems (climate, entertainment, navigation, communication) into a single control, BMW's iDrive continues to make these systems only more confusing.

All this said, Dad may dig all this techno-wizardry. He may actu-

Where else
can you
get this
level of
sensible
and
sensational?

ally tingle over the fact this M actually comes with a submenu in the iDrive system called MDrive that allows him to program his own "preferred performance and handling settings for instant recall." If so, have at it.

Even if electronics aren't his thing, however, what guy could possibly resist a Formula One-inspired engine coupled with BMW's uncanny knack for making even the most athletic vehicle comfortable for the everyday commute? Or how about an exterior package that says "BMW" and "bad boy" in the same breath? The M5's unique front end with spoiler and air intake, deep rocker panels, rear bumper/spoiler/diffuser, 19-inch wheels, and four polished exhausts declare this is no ordinary 5 Series sedan.

Besides, he gets BMW's customary luxury treatment—surround sound, impeccable leather, power everything, multi-adjustable sport seats, you name it. Then there are those practical considerations like world-class safety systems, 14 cubic feet of trunk space, and 99 cubic feet of mid-sized sedan cabin space. Where else can



you get this level of sensible and sensational?

The only real problem, as we see it, is resisting the temptation to air out this M5. It deserves the Autobahn. Even around town, it is prone to sneak well past speed limits unbeknownst to driver and passengers, thanks to BMW's stellar structure and quiet ride.

Bestly as this fire-breathing 500-horse M5 may be, the only thing you really have to fear is the highway patrol. *Base price: \$82,900*



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Lexus LS460

Maybe Dad has reached a certain maturity where he values luxury, beauty, and quality most of all. For him, the Lexus LS460 is the choice.

This current generation of Lexus's flagship sedan, introduced in 2006, has garnered accolades from press and consumers alike. Foremost in our opinion is its stunning design that finally matches others in its class with breathtaking presence. Its deep profile and raked back lines accomplish successfully what some competitors have not, namely a sedan with the fine visual attributes of a coupe that doesn't look forced.

Powering the LS460 is a new-generation 4.6-liter V8 that produces 380 horses and 367 lb-ft of torque. Unique to this engine is electric motor-driven Variable Valve Timing with intelligence and Electronically controlled intake cam, or VVT-iE for short. This combo affects engine startup operation and the more muscular part of performance.

Another first is the LS460's eight-speed automatic transmission. It is designed to maximize torque at lower rpms and maintain that trademark Lexus whisper at the high end. Fuel efficiency also benefits. This grand sedan gets 16 mpg city and a noteworthy 24 mpg highway and qualifies for Ultra-Low Emissions Vehicle II certification. Don't let its efficiency and environmental compliance throw you off, however. The LS460 does 0 to 60 in 5.4 seconds—not too shabby for a limousine.

Speaking of limousines, the LS460 is also available in a long-wheelbase model, the LS460 L. If Dad is not inclined to drive at all these days, we think this model and a chauffeur would make a dandy gift. Consider the following:

We already know Lexus set the standards for insular cabins—"cabin tranquility," they call it. This refers to the absence of road and engine noise coupled with rich interior ambiance and a ride akin to sitting in your living room. Now factor in a backseat that affords almost 5 more inches of legroom than the standard LS and even more luxuries for backseat passengers, and Dad's leading the life of a diplomat.



The "Executive Class Seating Package," an option on the L, adds separate rear air conditioning controls with an upgrade that monitors lap, upper body, and seat, on each side with infrared sensors in the roofliner to make sure everyone's comfy. Side glass is laminated for extra sound insulation, and rear doors contain power sunshades to shield Dad from light and paparazzi. A fixed rear console hides a fold-out table, and the ceiling contains a 9-inch screen that appears via electric motor to entertain rear passengers.

Should Dad need a nap, he can simply scoot over to the right seat, which reclines up to 45 degrees with a 17-degree upper-back adjustment, and prop his feet up on the ottoman. Once he's comfy, he can activate the massage mode coupled with heating or cooling. Aaaaah.

O.K., so massage or no massage, Dad just isn't a backseat kind of guy. No worries. This LS 460 is almost as relaxing for its driver as it is for passengers. Everything about this sedan is effortless, from its gentle-but-confident steering to the imperceptible shifts of that 8-speed automatic. It even parallel-parks itself

using sonar sensors and a backup camera, one of its many the-future-is-now features.

Despite its eagerness to soothe, the LS 460 is no pushover. That it responds so well to its driver is part of the charm and further reinforces that feeling of well-being. It is a delight to drive, but not the sort of experience the sport enthusiast is likely to applaud.

When the LS sedan first came out in 1989, it was heralded as the bargain of bargains in the full-size luxury class for its quality, performance, and amenities at a price that undercut significantly the competition. The price has escalated in the ensuing years—along with everything else. But given the new LS 460's dramatic good looks, quality, performance, technology, and amenities, it still qualifies as one of the best values in its rarified class. *Base price, \$62,000; LS 460 L, \$72,000*

That it responds so well to its driver is part of the charm and further reinforces that feeling of well-being.





Range Rover Sport Supercharged

No lineup of manly vehicles would be complete without something to tackle the off-road. Although Land Rover's Range Rover Sport Supercharged may not be the vehicle that immediately comes to mind, we say why sacrifice the thrill of seeing gravel fly on-road in order to scale boulders off-road? It gives new meaning to the word "Sport" as applied to vehicles, on the pavement and off.

The Sport is built in the high-end luxury tradition of the flagship Range Rover HSE, but uses the new integrated body-frame structure from the Land Rover LR3. Wheelbase is reduced by 6 inches to enhance the Sport's agility. Although it looks like the handsome Range Rover family, a number of slight modifications have been made to ensure the Sport is the most aerodynamic SUV on the market. For example, the classic upright windshield is steeply raked here and meets the now-sloping roof at a lower point in the Sport. The trademark sculpted Rover hood has been smoothed out and the vehicle sits lower. The only drawback to its increased aerodynamics is less headroom for the big guys.

Powering the more potent of the two Sport models offered is a 4.2-liter supercharged V8. If that sounds familiar, it's because Land Rover borrowed this engine from Jaguar's performance lineup (see Jaguar XKR). In the Range Rover Sport, it produces 390 horses and 410 lb-ft of torque. This SUV sprints 0 to 60 in 7.2 seconds, and electronics limit its top speed to 140 miles per hour. No other SUV this hardy earned its stripes on the famous Nurburgring race circuit in Germany, the Autobahn, and Italy's Nardo high-speed test track, places where the finest sports cars go to test their mettle. What makes this all the more remarkable is how well the Range Rover Sport Supercharged handles the off-road. Like all vehicles that bear the Land Rover crest, this Sport wades in water more than 2 feet deep, climbs and descends 45-degree gradients, transverses a 35-



degree slope, and parks via handbrake on a 45-degree slope. It goes where other so-called SUVs dare not.

But, frankly, most of them never set a single tire off pavement, unless its field parking for the steeplechase. Who wants to risk dinging this good-looking exterior or tracking mud into the Sport's lovely leather and wood interior? Inside, it reflects the Range Rover royal standards of luxury, but introduces a cockpit design for the driver suited to its sport-oriented performance.

The Range Rover Sport's impressive off-road capabilities do beg the question: Is the on-road ride necessarily truck-like? The answer is a big "No." Despite its crisp handling around town and its prowess over trails, the Sport's ride is more akin to an upscale sedan than a truck. It is not as gentle as the more luxurious Range Rover HSE, but its level of comfort is truly amazing, considering its ruggedness.

Really, there is little not to love about this Sport Supercharged for the sport utility fan. It offers real sports-sedan athleticism every day with superior off-road poise, should you need or want it. Plus, it buys Range Rover luxury without having to pay the HSE price.

Surely, Dad will be proud of the fine reasoning that went into selecting this for him.

With any luck, maybe he'll still let you borrow his car. *Base price, \$71,675* •

**Its level
of comfort
is truly
amazing,
considering
its
ruggedness.**



WHAT TO WATCH

New boxed sets, great Blu-ray Discs, and more

By CHRIS CHIARELLA



INDIANA JONES™

the ADVENTURE COLLECTION



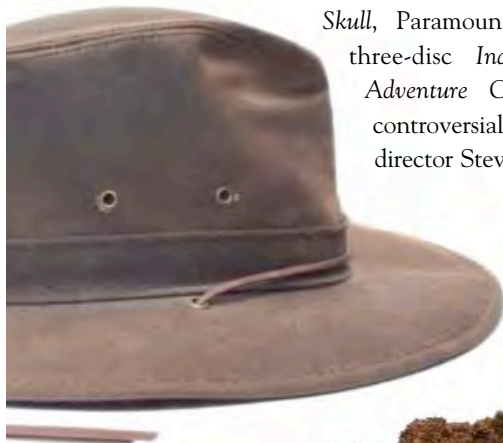
Indiana Jones: The Adventure Collection

Way back in 1981, the original poster for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* introduced the world to Indiana Jones “from the creators of *Jaws* and *Star Wars*.” And miraculously, despite his lofty pedigree, Indy did not disappoint, becoming perhaps the most iconic action hero in film history. Throughout *Raiders* and its two sequels—1984’s *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* followed five years later by *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*—star Harrison Ford portrayed a fallible, bullwhip-crackin’ 1930s college professor searching the globe for fortune and glory.

In honor of Indy’s return to the big screen this year in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, Paramount has issued the three-disc *Indiana Jones: The Adventure Collection*. Despite controversial artistic changes to director Steven Spielberg’s E.T.

and executive producer George Lucas’ *Star Wars* Trilogy, no major modifications have been made to the *Indiana Jones* films, and these beautifully restored DVDs are a time capsule of old-school blockbuster filmmaking. The new bonus materials are an interesting mix of on-camera interviews that take us deeper into the characters, the locations, special effects, and the memorable snakes/bugs/rats of the series, in addition to a wealth of storyboards and behind-the-scenes photos. We’re even treated to a glimpse of Lucasarts’ cute LEGO *Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures* video game.

Also newly available is the final installment of Lucas’ ambitious TV undertaking, *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones, Volume Three: The Years of Change*, including Ford’s only appearance on the show, and multiple discs of educational supplements. “The Man with the Hat” is back—on DVD—and better than ever. DVD, **\$59.98/set** (each film is also available for purchase separately for **\$26.98 each**), **Paramount**; *Young Indiana Jones Volume Three DVD Set*, **\$129.99**, **Paramount**





< Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World

Based on the seafaring novels of Patrick O'Brian, *The Far Side of the World* refers to the remote Galapagos Islands, making this the first feature film to shoot in that exotic locale. It's a pit stop of sorts as the *H.M.S. Surprise*

and her gallant crew—led by an electric Russell Crowe—elude and engage their French adversaries off the coast of South America in 1805. The audio is absolute reference quality, most notably in the thrilling cannon battles. And now, through the miracle of Blu-ray, we can follow the journey with an interactive map feature and optional onscreen geographical trivia. Five deleted scenes are also on board, and the image looks stunning. *Blu-ray, \$39.98, Fox*



< Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

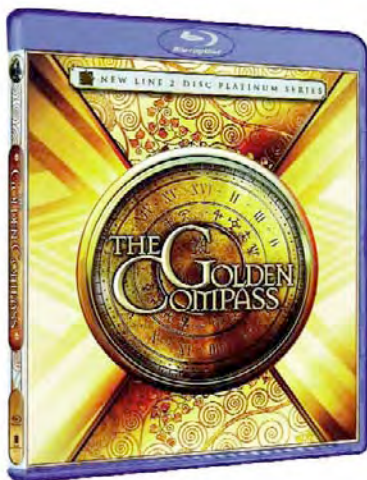
There are buddy-cop movies by the score, but what if the best friends were on the other side of the law? Cunningly conceived and gorgeously photographed, *Butch* follows in the great Western tradition while at the same time turning it upside down

with its subversive humor and charismatic ne'er-do-wells: Robert Redford as the epitome of cool with wise-guy Paul Newman at his side. Director George Roy Hill and legendary screenwriter William Goldman each provides commentary, while a recent "making of" is highlighted by new star interviews. A long-lost scene has also been unearthed, and the real Butch and Sundance are examined in their own featurette. *Blu-ray, \$39.98, Fox*



< National Treasure and National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets

The surprisingly popular *National Treasure* and its equally captivating sequel hit upon a winning formula, mixing a healthy dash of genuine history in with Hollywood-brewed mythology, resulting in a sort of American *DaVinci Code*. Nicolas Cage is convincing as adventurer Benjamin Franklin Gates, an expert in the lore of our founding fathers, out to protect the family name and maybe find a little loot to boot. The second time around, the always-radiant Helen Mirren joins the team as Ben's heretofore-MIA mom, as they solve even more hidden-in-national-monument conundrums. Historical and cinematic tidbits abound in the commentary, mini-documentaries, and Blu-ray-exclusive pop-ups that let us dissect the fact from the fiction. *Blu-ray, \$34.99 each, Walt Disney*



< The Golden Compass

Charming newcomer Dakota Blue Richards stars as Lyra Belacqua, a brave little girl with a magical destiny in this sprawling film adaptation from Philip Pullman's epic *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Along the way, our heroine joins forces with gypsies, witches, demons, talking armored polar bears (the most noble of them voiced by Sir Ian McKellen), and even the occasional cowboy. The PG-13 rating is well earned for some scary bits, but the Oscar-winning special effects and amazing 7.1 DTS-HD Master Audio make this a great showoff Blu-ray for the parents too. As to be expected, copious extras reveal the secrets of the book, the director, the music, and the mind-boggling design work. *Blu-ray, \$39.98, New Line*



< 24, Season 1 Special Edition

If a new TV show turns out to be a hit, the studio often comes up short on bonus features when it's time for the home-video edition—an embarrassment of sudden riches. That's what happened back in 2002 when *24* was first released on DVD, but because the beat-the-clock exploits of can-do guy Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) have since become a worldwide obsession, Fox now tenders this passionately assembled do-over. The premiere attack of kidnappers, traitors, and presidential assassins—all in a day's work—is now supplemented with a brand-new documentary, extended episodes, commentaries, deleted/alternate scenes, and, of course, a preview of the upcoming *Season Seven*, all inside a tin embedded with its own perpetual countdown clock. *DVD, \$59.98, Fox*



MUST-OWN BLU-RAYS

The format war is over, and you want to get started collecting Blu-ray Discs. Here is a list of our favorite movies on the winning format for audio and video quality as well as the quality of the film itself.

- 1. Black Hawk Down** (Sony)
- 2. Blade Runner** (Warner)
- 3. Independence Day** (Fox)
- 4. Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World** (Fox)
- 5. Pan's Labyrinth** (New Line)
- 6. The Patriot** (Sony)
- 7. Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End** (Disney)
- 8. Ratatouille** (Disney)
- 9. Saw** (Lionsgate)
- 10. Terminator 2: Judgment Day** (Lionsgate)

NEW GAMES

By SCOTT STEINBERG



< **Condemned 2: Bloodshot**

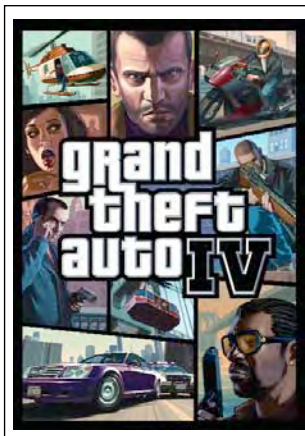
Can't get enough of midnight movie staples like *Hostel* or *8MM*? Consider testing your mettle (and stomach) by creeping flashlight-first down dripping, dimly lit corridors, using a twin-fisted combat system to bludgeon tar-spewing ghouls and homicidal bums with makeshift weapons in this ultra-atmospheric spin on

graphic cinema. You are the burnout investigator hero Ethan Thomas, solving puzzles using forensics and bringing bricks, pipes, and prosthetic limbs to bear against the possessed in solo/online adventures or instant-action *Fight Club* sequences. Tactile controller feedback and haunting storytelling combine to make this one nightmare we don't want to wake up from.

Rated M (Mature 17+), Sega (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360), \$59.99, www.sega.com



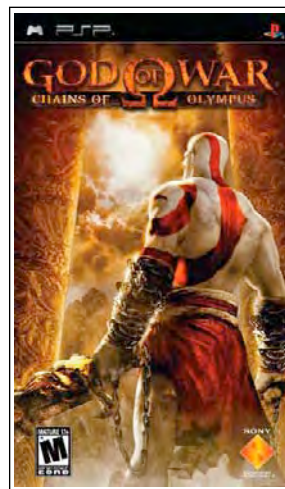
story expansions. Troubling, yes, but also ultra-addictive. **Rating Pending**, Rockstar Games (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360), \$59.99, www.rockstar.com



< **Grand Theft Auto IV**

As Eastern European immigrant Niko Bellic, cruise Big-Apple-knockoff Liberty City's photorealistic boroughs, using new moves, blades and automatic weapons to earn respect. Along with more lifelike landscapes featuring thousands of unsavory individuals, expect enhanced targeting, GPS navigation, and a Soviet-accented spin on the standard rags-to-Rolaxes epic. Notable

primarily for its "see it, slay it" open-endedness, the tale turns even darker for Xbox 360 owners, courtesy of downloadable



< **God of War: Chains of Olympus**

Face it—up until now, besides playing homebrew games or storing ripped DVDs, there's been little reason to cop a PSP. Enter the killer app we've all been waiting for via an original chapter in dual chain-mounted, blade-rocking warrior Kratos' bloodthirsty, Greek mythology-themed odyssey. At the gods' behest, save the world from darkness by slicing, dicing, and bludgeoning the odd basilisk, Cyclops, or Persian warrior into

gory chunks using eye-popping combos or brutal, anatomy-rearranging mini games. Albeit not for the squeamish, head-scratching mindbenders and riveting cinematic interludes do help take the edge off orgiastic maulings, if not the anti-hero's signature, all-consuming rage. **Rated M (Mature 17+)**, Sony (PlayStation Portable), \$39.99, www.playstation.com



LittleBigPlanet

< **LittleBigPlanet** *LittleBigPlanet* is an imagination-fueled toolkit that lets you dial up new worlds, characters, and escapades on demand. Build pop-up storybook-style realms filled with rag-doll heroes before populating them with giant soccer balls, vine-covered castles, rolling skateboards, and massive see-saws, and then link up over the Internet to share the trippy fun with friends. Such an open-ended approach surely won't be to everyone's taste, but rest assured the near-infinite replay value the outing affords will leave most salivating over the possibilities. *Rating Pending, Sony (PlayStation 3), \$59.99, www.playstation.com*

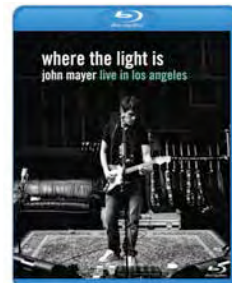


< **Super Smash Bros. Brawl** Mario may be a tot-friendly favorite, but like the other joystick icons (Pikachu, Yoshi, Sonic ... even *Metal Gear's* Solid

Snake) featured here, he's not above picking a fight. The gist: Might makes right—and a fun way for up to four to pass idle afternoons—as players compete in madcap multiplayer brawls to knock each other off floating fortresses and raging waterfalls. Shockingly engaging, featured battles range from the strategic (executing last-minute dodges or lasso saves) to sublime (pounding pals with randomly appearing swords and mallets). Supporting online scraps, custom-built levels, and countless hidden extras, though, the title's a stone-cold knockout. *Rated T (Teen), Nintendo (Wii), \$49.99, www.nintendo.com*



WHERE THE LIGHT IS: JOHN MAYER LIVE IN LOS ANGELES



We get the exclusive inside scoop on the new John Mayer home video release, the first pop-music disc to be designed and released for Blu-ray.

By STEPHEN WILLIAMS

John Mayer makes high-definition music. On stage, he's a kinetic, non-stop, high-definition act. To his female fans—that's most of his fans—he's the soul of high-definition sexy.

So it was no surprise when Sony BMG Music, Mayer's label, decided to pull out all the stops late last year, put a production crew of more than 100 people into place at the sparkling new Nokia Theater in Los Angeles, and capture a marathon Mayer set at the end of his successful 2007 live tour.

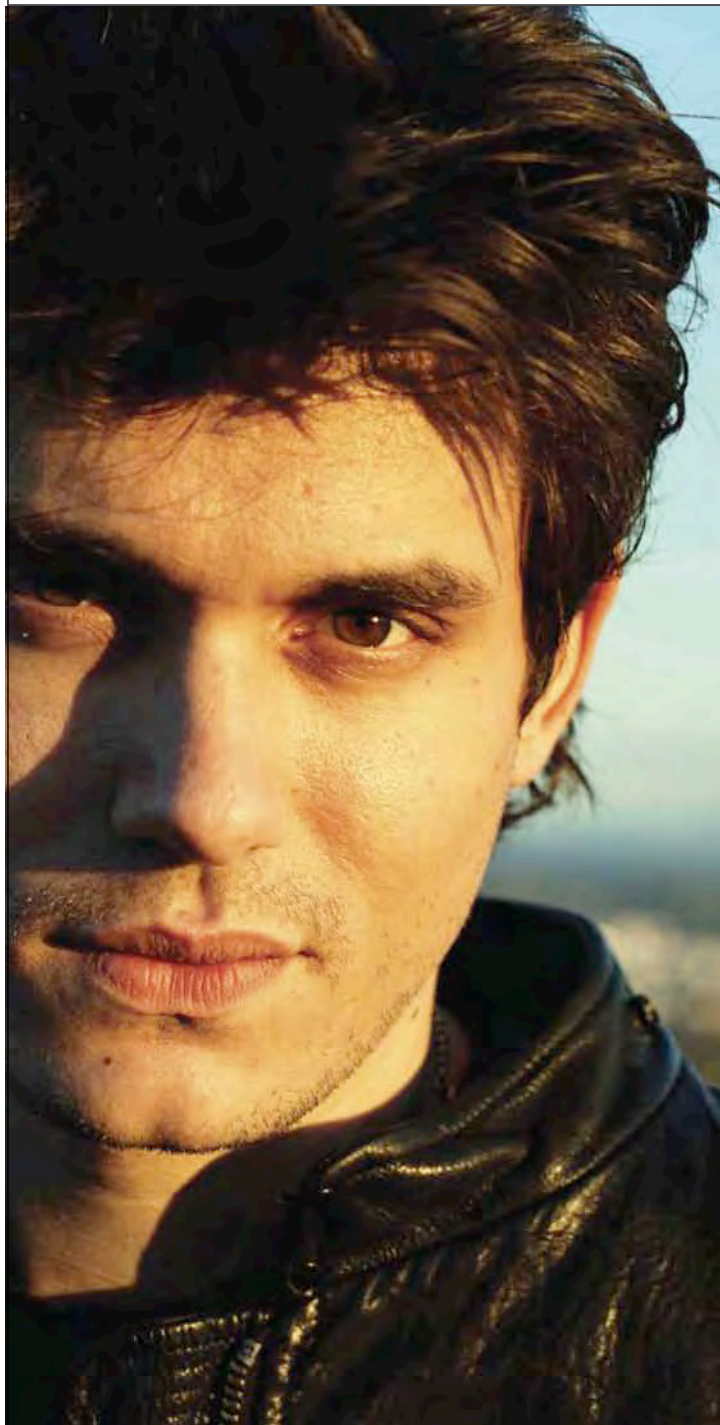
When it was released to video disc, though, the concert wouldn't be just any music video release: It would be the first-ever pop-music event designed and released specifically as a high-definition Blu-ray disc.

Why Mayer? "It was his idea to do the show, to showcase the different aspects of his career," said Richard Alcock, Sony BMG's vice president of video and content production.

Why Blu-ray? "That," said the exec, "was Sony's idea."

Releasing Mayer's no-holds-barred, nearly three-hour extravaganza on Blu-ray—the advanced disc format supported by Sony and more than a dozen other manufacturers, and now the de facto winner in the Blu-ray/HD DVD format war—seemed a no-brainer. Because of the capabilities of the BD disc—1080p full HD video resolution, multichannel surround sound, advanced interactive features, and the ability to fit bonus material on the high-density disc—the final product, to be released in late June, is a textbook example of the music video, 2008 style.

**The first-ever
pop-music event
designed and
released specifically
as a high-definition
Blu-ray video disc**



What gives the *Where the Light Is: John Mayer Live in Los Angeles* BD disc even more visual impact is the fact it was actually filmed. Yeah, that's right. On film.

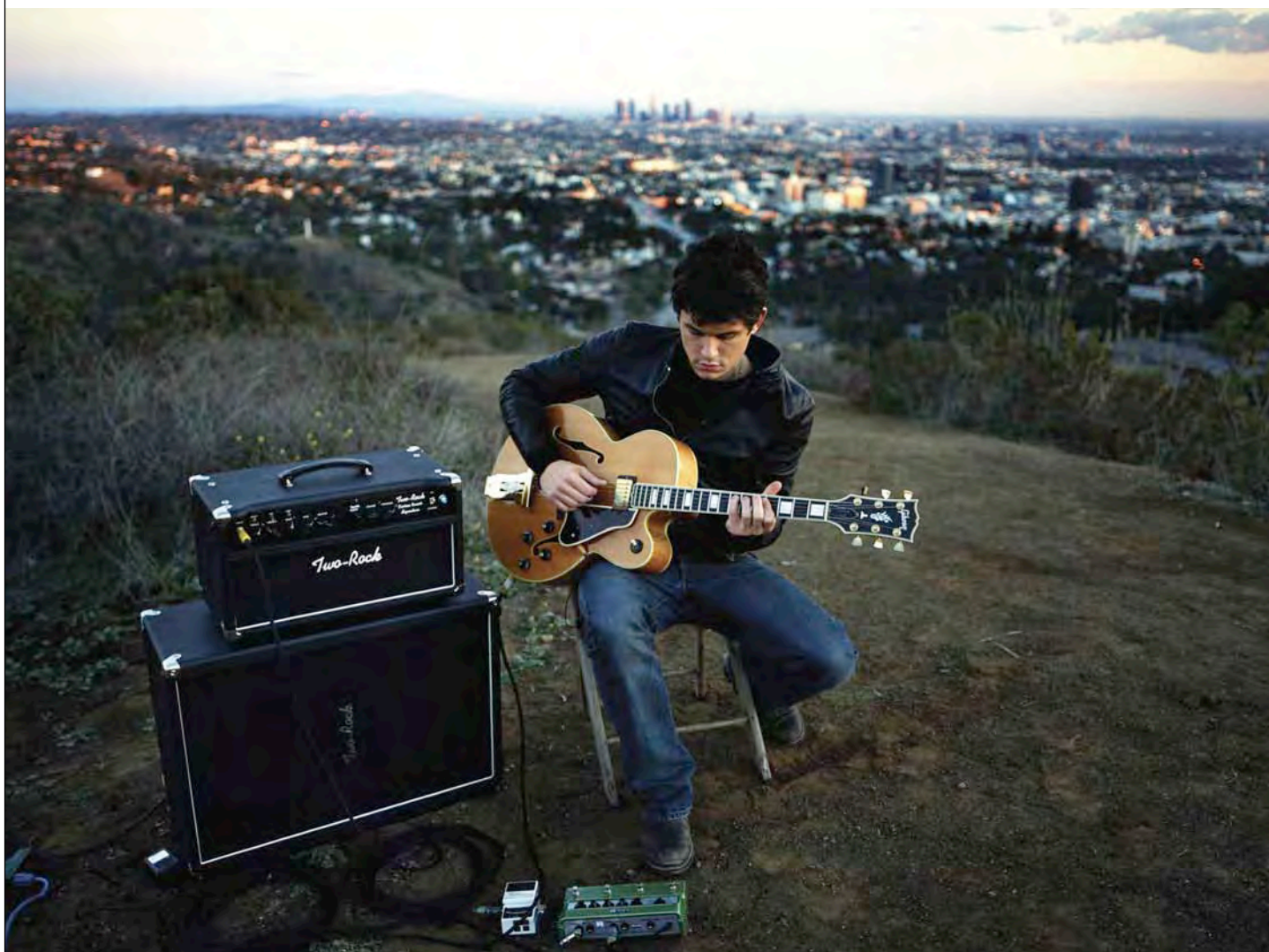
"For a Blu-ray disc we needed to make sure all the nuances and effects of this sensational production came through," said Vance Burberry, the project's director of photography. So Burberry, director Danny Clinch, and their crew of veteran camerapersons stocked up on a multilayer 35mm Fujifilm film, "a daylight stock, so we balanced the lights for daylight. With film, we get a great deal more latitude, and the images are just right," said Burberry.

The final result, judging from a preview we saw in April in New York, is lush images and super-clear, detailed surround-sound audio that brings out the best of Mayer in his three modes: acoustic, accompanied by his funky jazz trio, and joined by a full band that rocks out.

"I wanted to shoot 35mm film from the start, and John and I discussed it," said Clinch. "If you remember the look of *The Last Waltz*, that was shot on film as well. We were all dialed in to that, and when we heard that we were going to do a Blu-ray version, that was great."

Clinch said that with film, "You can see the contrast, the warmth. Also, film has a higher resolution than HD, although everyone assumes high-def is as high as it gets. Not so."

While the entire production was overseen by Clinch—who has previously shot videos with Bruce Springsteen, the Foo Fighters, and, most recently, Pearl Jam—it was the men behind the cameras, and their assistants, who constantly shuttled newly loaded film cassettes back and forth across the stage, that were under pressure. Clinch and Burberry called for from between four and eight cameras to be in play during the three musical segments. Some were handheld, others placed on





tripods; one swung from the rear of the cavernous Nokia stage attached to a massive crane, and there was the novel “Super Slider,” a kind of R2D2-esque “robot” camera that slithered back and forth, from left to right and back again, across the front lip of the stage.

“We give the viewers of the disc a slammin’ view, a front-row view,” said Clinch. “The idea is to give people something they didn’t see even if they went to the show.” Along those lines, Clinch has intercut short vignettes to break up the two-hours-plus of concert footage: Mayer talking about his passion for the band as he drives his Mercedes; clips of performers behind the scenes; a chat with Mayer about two other passions, his guitars and his wristwatches.

Where the Light Is opens with a lovely sequence of Mayer, alone with just his guitar and amplifier, noodling some blues and sitting atop Mulholland Drive overlooking Los Angeles at sunset. Shot by Clinch the evening after the Nokia performance, he and Mayer were blessed with the rarest of conditions: a smog-free day in Southern California.

With multi-platinum albums to his credit and a shelf full of Grammy awards, the young Mr. Mayer—only 30—has been a force of pop music and its various tributaries for nearly a decade. Starting out as an independent, he was signed to Columbia Records in 2001, and by the end of 2002 his *Room for Squares* album had spawned several radio hits, including

Your Body Is a Wonderland, for which Mayer won his first Grammy, for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance, in 2003.

He was obviously juiced for the Nokia show, which was billed as a holiday benefit for charity.

Of all of his musical “identities” laid out before about 7,000 fans, the guitarist seemed most inspired in Los Angeles ripping though blues with Jimi Hendrix-like abandon as part of the John Mayer Trio, where Mayer, dressed up in a tux, is joined by

bass guitarist Pino Palladino and drummer Steve Jordan. The segment comes in stark contrast to the relaxed “singer/songwriter” homage of the opening set, in which Mayer performs five sweetly sung songs, including a cover of Tom Petty’s *Free Fallin’*.

“The trio was amazing to me,” said Clinch, who ordered up cameras to isolate on both Palladino and Jordan during the trio set. Those clips will be included as part of the bonus material on the Blu-ray. “People can get a clear view

of what Pino does for a whole song, and Steve as well,” he said.

Mayer also seemed surprised, and elated, by the way his fans in the audience—young women, for sure, but plenty of young men as well—embraced the full range of his talents and repertoire. “Thank you for listening to anything I do,” he told them about halfway through, and you could tell he meant it.

As well as its release on Blu-ray, *Where the Light Is* will show up simultaneously in stores on conventional DVD, and there will also be a double-disc CD of the live concert. •

“We give viewers a slammin’ view . . . The idea is to give people something they didn’t see when they went to the show.”



ON-WALL FURNITURE



TV WALL MOUNTS



SPEAKER STANDS



TV WALL MOUNTS



SCREEN CLEANER

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