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CATERING TO THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE

Managing coast-to-coast installations for MLB's Adrian Gonzalez. PAGE 42

How do you define and sell high-end goods? PAGE 48

Los Angeles Dodger
Adrian Gonzalez (left) and
Otto Benson, La Jolla Home Theater &
Automation, La Jolla, Calif.

COAST -TO- COAST

SUCCESS

The installation firm of baseball all-star Adrian Gonzalez's homes is hitting home runs with long-distance installs — and a showroom Apple Store. *by Steven Castle, photography by Scarpetta Photography*

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PRIZED CLIENT moves or buys a house far away from your business, but wants your company to do the installation?

That's what happened to La Jolla Home Theater & Automation in La Jolla, Calif., after a star client, MLB all-star Adrian Gonzalez, was traded from the San Diego Padres to the Boston Red Sox. Gonzalez and his family purchased a new home on the opposite coast, nearly 3,000 miles away.

In 2010, Gonzalez' San Diego home had been equipped by La Jolla Home Theater & Automation with an Apple-based Savant home control system, relying on Savant apps on iPads and iPhones to command the system. The integrator included a five-screen home theater with four built-in iPads in a counter in the rear to surf the web or play games.

The new, 9,000-square-foot home in the Boston area features a 5.1-channel surround-sound system in a basement lounge, a 7.1-channel, two-screen system in a game room with a massive cherry bar, and a 5.1-channel McIntosh-powered system in the comfortable family room off the kitchen, accompanied by a



SYSTEM & EQUIPMENT

Home Control: Savant
AV Distribution: Savant
Lighting Control: Lutron
Video Displays: Samsung, LG
TV Mounts: Sarus
Speakers: Focal, Paradigm, McIntosh Labs
Subwoofers: Paradigm
AV Processing: McIntosh Labs, Anthem
Amplification: McIntosh, Paradigm
Source Components: Logitech, Apple, Pioneer
Security Cameras: IC Realtime
Equipment Racks: Middle Atlantic
Power Management: Panamax

65-inch Samsung TV. Through it all you won't find one in-wall touchpad. Nine iPads, several iPod touches and the Gonzalezes' iPhones operate a host of audio/video options as well as climate control, lighting and security cameras.

Fortunately, the Gonzalezes wanted the same Savant control system in their new home. So La Jolla Home Theater & Automation just had to duplicate some of its efforts — only this time as part of a long-distance relationship. (Note: Just before press time, the Red Sox traded Gonzalez back to the West Coast to the Los Angeles Dodgers, so he'll be able to use the Savant system to keep tabs remotely on his Boston home ... before he presumably puts it on the market.)

The first task for the company and its president, Otto Benson,



was to fly to Boston and do a walkthrough to check out the wiring and the room layouts. The Cape Cod-style house was being constructed when Gonzalez bought it, so the installers could specify wiring of the control, networking and audio/video systems for the local electricians working on the project.

Benson returned to San Diego and put the coast-to-coast plans in motion. "It was a matter of shipping everything," he says. The company shipped the necessary tools, gear and miscellaneous devices like connectors to a local Boston shipping company, and it had some other gear drop-shipped right to Gonzalez's house. Savant is located nearby on Massachusetts' Cape Cod, so that wasn't a problem.

Then Benson and his crew flew to Boston. They rented a

Los Angeles Dodgers' star first baseman Adrian Gonzalez (left) was wary of hiring another integrator, so he hired his West Coast integrator Otto Benson of La Jolla Home Theater to do the installation in his Boston area home.

U-Haul and took two trips to move the gear from the shipping company to the home, and got the home's 12 TVs from the local AVAD distributor. The crew spent two weeks and three days in the Boston area installing the Savant systems, the Samsung and LG HDTVs, Focal and McIntosh speakers and a Lutron RadioRA 2 lighting control system, among other gear — and then programmed and tested the system to make sure everything was in working order. "We did the programming and testing in two to three days," says Benson.

They stayed at a local hotel with kitchenettes in the two rooms, so they could have breakfast in the morning and then go to the house and work until about 8 p.m. "They know what needs to get done," Benson says of his crew, "and they work a little bit harder on fourth and fifth days," so then the crew could take a break. It was well worth it, because on one break day Gonzalez got them a tour of Fenway Park — and there was Benson, standing alone at home plate in baseball's most hallowed ground (Cubs fans might disagree). The crew's take on Fenway, especially exploring the bowels of the 100-year-old park where few are allowed to venture: Old and cramped — and the San Diego-based crew seemed to think it could use some of their A/V TLC.

Benson says his company's careful planning helped the project go without any major hitches, though the crew did encounter some surprises. When installing in-ceiling speakers, they realized construction differs in the Northeast when compared with their native San Diego, where wooden strapping between the ceiling drywall and the joists isn't used. Encountering the strapping when preparing to mount speaker brackets initially threw this crew, and some speaker wire wasn't in the precise locations, but these were minor setbacks.

Overall, Benson says the trip cost about \$7,000, which isn't

**"It's a matter of planning correctly, and making sure you have everything you need."
—Otto Benson,
La Jolla
Home Theater**

Apple of Their Eye

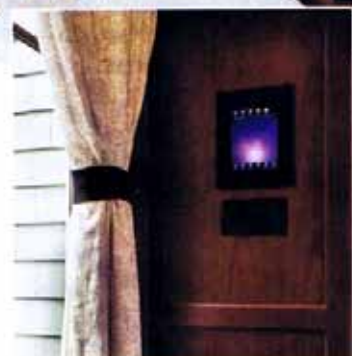
La Jolla Home Theater & Automation doesn't just cater to a high-end clientele. The company's offices and showroom is also a certified Apple Store, selling everything from iPads to MacBooks and iPhone covers and skins, to people walking in off the street.

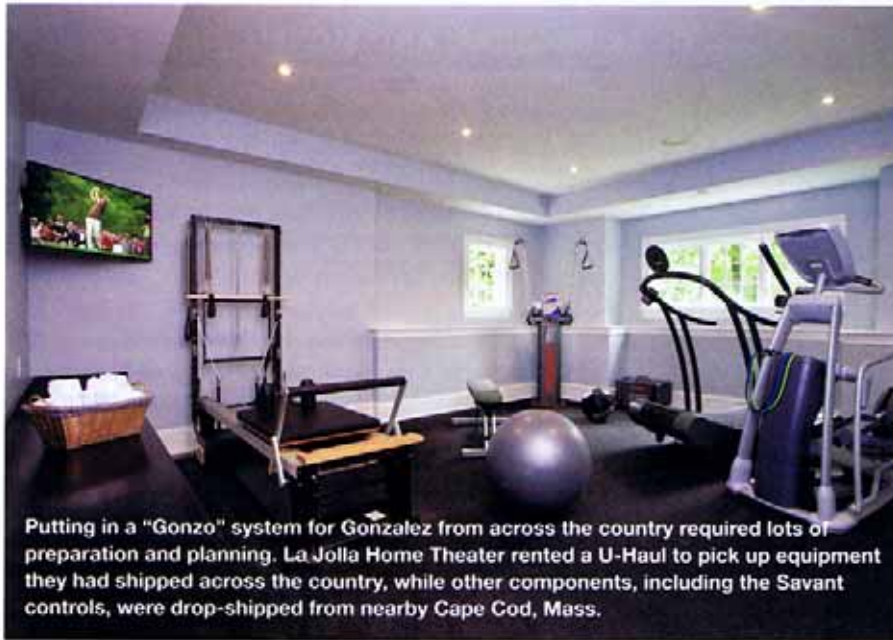
"It's a huge hook for us," says president Otto Benson. "We've gotten [automation] jobs from people coming to the Apple Store and buying a case for their iPhone, and then we sell them a control system. The [Apple and Savant] systems sell themselves. We really don't have to sell it."

It also helps that of the 11 people employed at La Jolla Home Theater & Automation, three are Apple specialists.



In all, La Jolla Home Theater crew stayed in a Boston hotel for 17 days while performing the installation at a total trip cost of \$7,000.





Putting in a "Gonzo" system for Gonzalez from across the country required lots of preparation and planning. La Jolla Home Theater rented a U-Haul to pick up equipment they had shipped across the country, while other components, including the Savant controls, were drop-shipped from nearby Cape Cod, Mass.



bad considering flights, vehicle rentals and hotel rooms, and the company has scheduled visits throughout the year, despite having the ability to monitor the system remotely and do remote checkups. "A lot of redundancy is built into the system. We have backup batteries and everything in place so the system does not lose control. We installed a redundant host on the Savant system and the surge protection [monitored through Panamax/Furman's BlueBolt system power conditioners]. If there's a problem, we can update remotely and get the system back up."

La Jolla Home Theater & Automation also partnered with a local dealer who is willing to do service calls if needed. And having Savant nearby for any control system support is handy.

"It was a fun project," says Benson, whose company has done an international project and one in Arizona, about a five-hour drive from Las Vegas' McCarran International airport. "We've gotten good at it. It's a matter of planning correctly, and making sure you have everything that you need. This one was definitely a treat, because a lot of our guys had never left San Diego or had

never been across the country."

They may get used to long flights. La Jolla Home Theater's Betto Perez stayed in the Boston area an extra day earlier this year to attend a party Gonzalez threw for his Red Sox teammates at the house — and as a result the company bid on a couple of systems. **CE Pro**

Breaking It Down

McIntosh Media Room. In the family room, McIntosh's MC8207 amplifier delivers 200 watts to each of five McIntosh 8-inch CS100 in-ceiling speakers. Each combines an 8-inch cone woofer with a rotating baffle of a 3.5-inch mid-range and 1-inch tweeter so that sound is aimed directly at the listener. The A/V is tied to a McIntosh's MX121 preamp, which contains Apple AirPlay for wireless iTunes streaming.

Mac Not-so-Mini. It's not just a little hard drive in this home, but a media server, of sorts, attached to two 4-terabyte hard drives that store more than 1,400 movies accessed through iTunes and Apple TV.

Cameras Galore. Fourteen IC Realtime cameras monitor the Gonzalez home, including six PTZ (pan, tilt, zoom) cameras capable of seeing objects in the dark up to 180 feet away. The cameras are connected to a DVR that only records when a camera senses motion.

iPort Ease. The Gonzalez home has five iPort LaunchPort WallStations (above, right) that use magnets to facilitate easy attachment and removal of iPads. The sleeve helps provide effortless inductive charging.

