

Custom Collaboration

Phoenix Systems Blends Intelligent Technology with Southwestern Design in Connecticut Home

by margot douaihy



Phoenix System's extensive installation project in Connecticut took over two years to complete

Clark Mulford, president of Phoenix Systems, knows how to “play well” with others. A major component of Phoenix’s Connecticut-based business is fusing its custom installation expertise with the efforts of leading architects and homebuilders.

Since its founding in 1990, Phoenix Systems has risen to prominence in Westport, Connecticut. A reflection of the firm’s success came in 2000, when Phoenix opened its second location in Atlanta, Georgia. By partnering with local homebuilders, the Atlanta branch has created a profitable specialty in high-end production homes and new home construction. Phoenix considers itself both practical and progressive.

“It’s easy to sell the sizzle that our competitors do,” Mulford stated. “But it is very hard to pull it all together in an easy-to-use, reliable, functional system. And that’s what we do.”

Besides a tight management structure that makes its day-to-day operation run smoothly, Phoenix’s ability to integrate *dissimilar* products is another big talent. “We have created modules in our software to interface with pool controls, digital music libraries, security systems and HVAC,” Mulford noted. “We take those modules and use them as building blocks to customize the application for the particular client.”

Because most of Phoenix’s projects have common programming themes, the develop-

ment of interfaces that are both robust and simple to operate was essential. “To have consistency is important,” Mulford stated. “If you let the client drive the design of the touchpanel they may throw the project off track.”

On a recent, large-scale project in Connecticut, Phoenix Systems maximized its collaboration strengths, as well as its automation forte. The project took almost two years to complete, and encompassed whole-house automation, lighting control, a home office and numerous media components. Phoenix Systems integrated the systems into a sophisticated Southwestern home design by premier architecture firm Peter Cadoux Architects (www.cadouxia.com). In the past 10 years, Phoenix and Cadoux have collaborated on numerous residential installations and have formed a fruitful relationship.

The home’s dominant hues are orange, yellow and soft pastels. Spacious areas and rustic wood beams further accent the home’s authentic desert flair. Phoenix and the architects maintained the integrity of the aesthetic by making technology complementary to the design philosophy, rather than incongruous.

During initial meetings, the two firms discussed the project’s scope and client requirements. It was clear from the outset that lighting control and “seamless” subsystem integration were major priorities.



Though not given *carte blanche*, the budget for the project was flexible enough for the Phoenix team to install all of the necessary equipment.

“The client is a very bright guy who had the resources to make it work,” Mulford stated. “And if he felt that [a system or product] was appropriate, he would spend the money for it.” The client’s key interests were lighting control and centralized temperature control with an easy-to-use interface. For Mulford, the client’s requirements pointed to one solution: a unified control system. “I’m not sure if he was originally looking for a control system or looking to spend the money on that initially, but it was clear that was what he should do.”

To meet these intense control needs, Phoenix called upon Crestron. “One of the reasons we chose Crestron was because of their lighting control system and its ability to integrate well with the control system,” Mulford stated. “Second, some Crestron touchscreens have been faux-painted to match the wall. Crestron just lended itself to that customized application.”

The master bedroom houses numerous creative applications as well. In one instance, Phoenix installed a projector above the bed and recessed it into the wall. The team engineered and hand-built an apparatus to support a motorized picture that



Crestron touchpanels have been customized to harmonize with the home's décor.

completely covers the projector when not in use.

Another motorized situation in the master bedroom is a display screen recessed in a cabinet at the end of the bed. Limited space prevented Phoenix from a full "drop-down" mechanism, so the team responded by building dual motorlifts to tilt, then angle the screen down into the fixture. The team also integrated a custom-made DVD storage unit into this piece of cabinetry, which is removable for servicing.

Equipment in the master bedroom included Bay Audio's BeBop black mini-monitor speakers, Chief's RPA006 projector mount, Crestron's STRFGWX two-way RF gateway for its STX-1700C touchpanel, a Kenwood DVD changer and receiver and Mitsubishi's SL25U projector. Phoenix also installed a Vutec "Silver Star" projection screen.

Another request that demanded a creative solution was a dual-display application in a large, 1,000-square-foot room. Phoenix needed to unite two adjacent areas in the room—a common area with an intimate viewing area, and a large, open "great" space—with one solution. To accommodate viewing in both locations, Phoenix decided to install one screen that could be viewed from anywhere in the room, including extremely close up. Phoenix used a unique two-projector configuration with longer and shorter throw distances to accomplish this feat. For servicing the projector, the installation team built custom-made access panels.

Though relatively new to Crestron's product line, its protean lighting control system won the favor of the Phoenix team. "You cannot name a brand of lighting control that we have not installed," Mulford stated. "We chose Crestron because it has a very intelligent architecture to it. It is a modular system; you buy a back enclosure with rails on it that these modules simply plug into.

It also has a processor like any other lighting



One of the reasons Phoenix chose Crestron was their robust automation offerings.



Phoenix Systems' project manager/engineer Jan Grube (left) and sales designer, Bob Dacundo

control system would have, but this one can run redundantly with the processor for the rest of the home's systems, so, actually, it acts as a backup."

Therefore, if the lighting system were to go down for any reason, Crestron's lighting control would reach out to the processor running the whole house, and pull the program over.

Additionally, the extensive security system around the property's perimeter has been integrated into the control system for accessibility from any touchscreen or IP-enabled device.

Creating intelligent, imaginative designs and strong partnerships with homebuilders and architects has proven a successful formula thus far for Phoenix, and will undoubtedly drive the firm's future growth.

Margot Douaihy is managing editor of Residential Systems.