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The Latest and The Best



Photography by Brent Butterworth

In Its Element
Brent Butterworth
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In Its Element

A second look at the SIM2 C3X projector—on a much larger screen.

The very best performers sometimes need the right setting to shine. Imagine operatic mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli trying to sing a Metallica song—or Metallica's James Hetfield trying to croon a Mozart aria. You get the idea.

After reviewing the SIM2 C3X projector in the May/June 2006 issue of *Home Entertainment*, we wondered if we might have a similar mismatch. The C3X is the most compact three-chip DLP video projector available, and at \$19,990, one of the most affordable. Unlike a single-chip DLP projector, a three-chip projector does not have a color wheel with alternating red, green, and blue elements. Each chip is dedicated to a specific color. The main advantages of the three-chip projector are that it does not produce rainbow-colored fringing on moving objects as a single-chip projector does; it can have more accurate color and a wider color range, or gamut; and it can produce greater light output because there are three chips reflecting light from the bulb instead of just one.

Sound Solutions' Steve Morsch lends a sense of scale to the 16-foot image, while our Photo Research PR-650 photospectrometer patiently awaits the appearance of test patterns. *(Click image to enlarge)*



When we tried the C3X on the 72-inch-wide, 16:9 Stewart screen we use for our projector tests, we were a bit underwhelmed. The picture was good, but not dramatically better than what we have seen from recent single-chip projectors. Yet the C3X is practically flying off the store shelves: It is currently the best-selling video projector priced over \$10,000. Obviously, many custom installers were finding something to love about this projector—but what?

After considering the C3X's measured output—an incredible 82 footlamberts, far more brightness than needed for a 6-foot picture—Mike Wood, then editor-in-chief of sister publication *Curtco's Digital TV & Sound*, and I decided to find out what it looked like on a much larger screen. Stewart Filmscreen was kind enough to loan us a 16-foot-diagonal 16:9 screen for our experiment. And Culver City, Calif., custom installation firm Sound Solutions was generous enough to provide a space large enough to accommodate the screen: the warehouse where the company's installers load and test equipment

racks for installations. (Our thanks to Sound Solutions' David Epstein, Steve Morsch, and Mark Elson for providing the space, helping us set up the screen and equipment, and covering the warehouse's rooftop ventilators to keep the light out.)

With the huge screen assembled, we placed the C3X atop a wheeled cart and powered it up. We zoomed the lens to fill the screen, focused the image, and let the projector warm up for a while.

When we cued up The Fifth Element DVD, we were rewarded with a picture that looked every bit as good as what we saw on our small screen—except this picture was almost as large as what you'd see at some art-house commercial theaters. To our surprise, the picture brightness still seemed more than adequate, and the black level looked just as deep as it did on our 6-foot screen. Any single-chip projector would have looked uncomfortably dim on such a large screen.

The projector's internal scaler easily held up to the challenge of the larger picture: Although we did notice a few unnatural video artifacts during our original test, none were readily visible even on the extra-large screen. And the picture looked impressively sharp even though we were playing only regular DVDs, not high-definition sources. High-def video played from a JVC D-VHS digital VCR (the new HD-DVD and Blu-ray high-def DVDs were not yet available) looked even sharper, as we expected. Even Sound Solutions' veteran installers—whose work includes several capacious "personal screening rooms" with screens as large as the one we used—were impressed with the C3X's performance.

As it turns out, using the C3X on a 6-foot screen was like using an Indy car to run to the 7-Eleven. Neither one would blow you away in a normal domestic situation, but in the right setting, both reach truly incredible levels of performance.

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[Scott Kingsley](#)

Convergence Marketing, Inc.

20 Miller Drive

Kutztown, PA 19530

PHONE 877.562.0558

FAX 877.562.9898