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DREAM SCREEN

United Talent Agency gives its private, state-of-the-art theater the star treatment. Will its Hollywood competitors follow?

BY DANIEL MILLER

The numbers on United Talent Agency's new 130,000-square-foot Beverly Hills digs are notable.

The Civic Center Drive property includes a 158-piece art collection, 11 conference rooms and a private plaza that can accommodate as many as 500 people.

But the standout figure is 275. That's the number of screenings UTA has held at its new screening room since the company's new headquarters opened last September.

The new theater was christened with a showing of longtime client Judd Apatow's "This Is 40," which was screened for the filmmaker's friends and family, along with UTA agents.

"It was fun because the room has perfect sound and picture, the decor is beautiful but not gaudy and it does not have the ghosts of a thousand bad movies," Apatow said in an email.

UTA's new offices have been the



Photographs MEL MELCON Los Angeles Times

THE PRIVATE THEATER at United Talent Agency has held 275 screenings since its new Beverly Hills headquarters opened in September. Above, David Lapeze, UTA's chief technology officer, and Lisa Perrine, CEO of audio-visual consultant Cibola Systems.

subject of much discussion in Los Angeles' talent agency circles, but it's the screening room that has piqued the curiosity of agency rivals. The fully digital theater seats 165 people in plush banquettes and has 3-D projection capabilities — technology that the competitors' theaters lack.

It's a significant upgrade for UTA,

whose clients include Johnny Depp, Gwyneth Paltrow and Channing Tatum. The company trails its chief competitors, industry powerhouses Creative Artists Agency and William Morris Endeavor, in terms of the size of its client roster and number of agents.

Although those companies, and another major talent agency, ICM

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Screening room gets star treatment



A **PORTRAIT** of Queen Elizabeth by photographer Annie Leibovitz, from United Talent Agency Chief Executive Jeremy Zimmer's private art collection, is a playful touch inside the company's private screening room.

Partners, have for several years maintained private theaters, UTA did not have a screening room at its previous Wilshire Boulevard headquarters. Agents had to walk around the corner to the Charles Aidikoff Screening Room, which UTA rented on an as-needed basis when a film or television program had to be shown.

"It was nice, but it wasn't ours," said David Kramer, a UTA managing director and Apatow's agent. "We couldn't host parties after screenings if we wanted to; we couldn't just walk in and show a movie."

Beyond convenience, the agency's swank new theater would seem to be a statement of purpose for the company, which was founded in 1991.

According to an audio-visual systems expert who has done work for several entertainment companies, the UTA crown jewel could force ri-

vals to respond to a screening room gap.

"I think the competitive nature of agencies means that everyone needs to follow suit once the bar is raised," said Eric Thies, chief executive of high-end audio-visual installation firm DSI Entertainment Systems. "There are going to be a lot of CEOs saying, 'Are we as good or better than this?' There will be some upgrades, for sure."

Private theaters are a key part of the business, allowing agencies to easily screen the work of existing and prospective clients, among other uses.

They also have an intangible appeal: In a business that puts a premium on image, a state-of-the-art theater could burnish an agency's reputation.

Larry Auerbach, for 47 years an agent at William Morris and now an

associate dean at the USC School of Cinematic Arts, said amenities like screening rooms are valuable to an agency.

It's important to show clients "you've got some style and taste, and the money to do it," Auerbach said.

In terms of capacity, the UTA theater is in the range of competitors' facilities. Creative Artists' theater seats 200 people. WME's accommodates 80. ICM has two theaters, which seat 127 and 46. None of UTA's rivals have announced plans to renovate their theaters.

"It's a very competitive market and I think each of the major agencies have beautiful offices and their own unique position," said Ron Meyer, the president and chief operating officer of Universal Studios, who made his bones as a talent agent and co-founded Creative Artists. "UTA did a great job with their screening room. People like to see beautiful things."

UTA hired audio-visual consultant Cibola Systems to handle the technical design of the theater. Architecture firm Rottet Studio designed its interior, along with the rest of the new four-story offices. In total, the renovation of the property, formerly the Hilton Hotels Corp. headquarters, cost roughly \$30 million. UTA signed a 15-year lease for the property with landlord Tishman Speyer Properties in 2011.

Although UTA declined to disclose what it spent on the theater, Thies, whose company has designed home theaters for a handful of talent

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agents and worked with companies like Walt Disney Co. and Spyglass Entertainment, estimated the cost at as much as \$4.7 million.

“For an agency, it’s probably the best screening room that exists,” said Thies, who reviewed detailed information about UTA’s theater but was not involved in the project. He noted that UTA’s screening room uses the same Barco 4K projector that can be found at Skywalker Sound’s Stag Theater in Marin County — considered among the best theaters in the world. UTA also invested in a high-end audio system from Meyer Sound, an official supplier to Cirque du Soleil.

“It’s a big investment. If you want to do it right — just the technology itself — it comes at a high cost,” Kramer said. “We looked at it as something we had to provide for our clients and ourselves.”

The details of the new theater suggest UTA has its clientele in mind. Kramer said that the entrance to the screening room is easily accessible from the talent agency’s subterranean valet area because it was important that clients coming to screenings be shielded from prying paparazzi.

On the technical front, a 3-D model of the theater was used to tune its sound system, ensuring there would be no distortion of audio.

The room features muted colors, warm LED lighting and fabric-covered walls. A portrait of Queen Elizabeth II by Annie Leibovitz, from UTA Chief Executive Jeremy Zimmer’s private art collection, is a playful touch. Lisa Perrine, chief



THE CONTROL PANEL inside the projection room at United Talent Agency’s private screening room.



POP-UP ARMRESTS and warm LED lighting are among the features of the private theater.

executive of Cibola, said the 3-D model was so precise that it included the frame that houses the portrait, ensuring it was “placed in the right spot, so we wouldn’t have any strange sound reflections.”

Though it’s a business facility, UTA’s 340 employees can still have

fun in the screening room. The company showed the college football national championship at the theater in January. Its 14.25-foot by 28.5-foot screen can be used to play video games too. The company even provides the gaming systems.

daniel.miller@latimes.com