

DTec Cinema

This is a short descriptive article about the ideal cinema that I would love to own and run. It is based on various cinemas that I have visited, and includes items of technology or concepts which have been mentioned.

The cinema was only built at the beginning of the 21st Century but it has built up a great reputation and local respect since it opened, some would almost say that it had become the centre of the local community. Unlike many of the other multi and mega-plexes which were opening at the same time, the DTec has the feeling that it could easily have been built in the 1930s, but all the technology and concepts of the 21st.

Situated inside a large shopping centre, designed to look and feel like a town, with a large glass roofed atrium, the cinema is at the far end. Standing outside looking at the entrance to this huge building it is not possible to see the exact amount of space which it uses. This allows the cinema to operate for nearly twenty-four hours a day, but without any security worries for its local residents. It also means that there is plenty of parking available in the shopping centre multi-storey car park.

On the exterior there is a canopy in traditional white, which is lit up with the weeks films, the lettering in red and black. Above this canopy is the name of the cinema 'DTec' in neon colours and this is also lit up whenever the cinema is open. There is a large tower on the left and this has a gold/yellow coloured neon sign on it which says - Movies. The canopy stretches out across the length of the cinema, just below it is a box office and entrance foyer. On either side of the canopy, opening onto the street are the entrances to two shops. The left-hand side is the entrance to the cinema and restaurant area, while the right is an entrance to a number of small shop units.

The entrance to the cinema is through a set of two double doors which sit on either side of a box office and information office. Here there is a member of staff who is able to answer general requests about the films and cinema from passing members of the public. They are also able to sell and book tickets as necessary, this is especially useful on busy nights when the film is doing very well.

On each of the large glass doors which go into the cinema foyer there is a concierge, who is dressed from top to in dark red and gold uniform with a dark red and black hat, and polished shoes, which shine in the daylight. The concierge is very friendly, but also act as security in the cinema, as necessary.

When people have gone through the double doors they appear in the foyer which is a fantastic area of the cinema. The whole area is still very bright and coloured. The foyer has been divided into two identical sides. On each side it is possible to buy a ticket from the box office, both of which have two cash areas. Next to this there is a concessions area, selling the largest selection of sweets, snacks and drinks that will ever been seen. Both of these areas are set a little way back from the front doors so that when there are long queues people can still be inside the cinema. On the sides of the walls all the way along before the box office, there are monitors set into the wall. These monitors show a variety of information. Some of the monitors show current information about films showing and what the seat availability is and times, while show trailers and advertising. Some of the rest of the monitors are linked to silver keyboards, set into the wall. These are connected to the BBC news pages.

If you turned your head to the right as you go in the doors, you would see a large glass window, which takes a large space, with a door next to it. This is the mangers office. The window allows the manager to see what is going in the foyer. This means that if there are any problems or a customer has a query of complaint the manager is able to respond quickly to the situation. At the back of the office there is a spiral staircase, which allows the manger to get upstairs quickly if necessary. (If the situation requires it there are blinds available to people can't see in - these take the form of large posters which are projected on the space!)

The foyer is very tall and by looking up it is possible to see more screens of information, but also there are film characters suspended from the ceiling. All over the foyer area there are movie posters and the area as a whole is brightly lit.

At the end of the foyer there is a door on the left which goes through into the cafe and restaurant and another door on the right which goes through to the shops. These doors are automated so people can just walk through.

Directly at the opposite end of the foyer to the main entrance doors are the escalators which go up to the screens. There are twelve screens in all in the cinema. But before these are looked at the rest of downstairs needs to be looked at.

The cafe bar is a fairly large movie themed place, which is light and airy. There is seating around the edge of the bar, which are divided off. There are sofas sat around a table, which looks like a film reel. All the floorways are painted to look like film. Next to each area of seating there are old movie posters in frames hanging on the wall. The music played in the background is movie themes and there are old movies on screens all over the bar and hanging from the ceiling. All around the top of the bar area there are film artifacts and props from film. The bar is situated in the centre of the area and is 360, but there is a walk way from the way to the staff area at the back of the cafe restaurant so that on the evenings when the bar is busy they can get to where they need to quickly. Also on the walls are copies of the film information screens seen the foyer, so people can see how long they have got until there films.

On the other side of the cinema there are a group of shops. There is a large bookshop of both new and second hand book, on the theme of the movies and cinemas. It is a specialist book shop where people from all around go if they want to know anything about the history of a theatre or cinema or want to know how a projector works, It is also the bookshop people go to when they are studying media studies at the local university or college. At the other end of the bookshop there is a huge area of movie memorabilia for sale, including film soundtracks and posters.

There are three screens downstairs, and then there are the other another six on the next floor and the final three are in the third floor. On either side of the escalators there are a glass sided lift which takes customers up to their floor. If customers are going to be watching films in screens 1-3 they go between the two escalators. The screens are all individually named with famous film stars (Screen 1 is Burt Lancaster for instance) and these are light on signs outside of each screen in red (along with the screen number in blue underneath). The name of the film showing scrolls along underneath that and also on the doors to the auditorium, where an usher greets the customer. The usher has a bar code reader who allows them to check the customers tickets. These tickets can be in PDAs mobile phones, standard print outs or the

traditional ticket. The ushers are also all in dark red and gold, with polished black shoes, which even the dim which is outside the screens can still shine.

Inside the screens each one has been designed and decorated so that it is different from the eleven others. Typically though inside the auditoriums have been decorated out in a modern day art deco design. The screen is large and has curtains and masking on each side. Although there are slide adverts showing on it at the moment, the curtains will close just before the film starts. The seats are all raked and are upholstered in red. The walls are all painted. The front of the stage where the screen is surrounded by a design which looks like a villa scene in Greece, although the other screen will have different designs. This has all been lit up in a soft colour wash, as you would expect all the screens are in full Dolby digital surround.

As we take our seat in the screen we realise that there are extra little speakers in the back of each of the chairs. This is a new sound format which has recently just come out which allows little bits of extra sound to be played to add to the feeling of surround in films.

There is also a little monitor in the back of the seat in front. This allows subtitles to be played at the same time as an ordinary film is being shown.

The seats are comfortable and there is plenty of legroom. All the arms move up and down so that a chair can be made suitable for a family or couple.

The main lights, which are in a star design in the roof, go down to half light as the curtains close and music fades. The famous Pearl & Dean music starts as the picture appears on screen and the curtains open. As the opening music finishes and the curtains have stopped opening the lights have dropped down and there are just the lowest level of lighting from the emergency lights and lights on the steps. There is enough light to move around the auditorium if necessary, but without it begin distracting to watching the film. All the seats have brilliant sight lines.

The picture of course is brilliant colour with a sharp colour and the sound is out of this world.

As the adverts finish, you notice that there is a sign telling you that there is CCTV installed in the auditorium which is there to make sure that there are no problems. As you look around you also notice that the usher on the door is now sitting on the usher seat near the entrance to the auditorium keeping an eye on what is happening.

Once the adverts and trailers finish there is a couple of short films shown which are about 10 minutes long. They are films which have been made locally and are shown at the local cinema before each of the screenings for a month or so. The films are entertaining. After the short films there are a couple of news items from the BBC with the extra news stories in text form around the outside of the screen. At the end of the news you are reminded that there are web learning facilities in the cafe restaurant, which are allowed to use.

After the film has finished you go outside and met up with an usher, who shows you to the projection box, where the projectionist is waiting to show you around. Unlike many cinemas there is a lift for the projectionist to go up from the bottom of the cinema and this also allows the films to be delivered and sent off from the projection room without too much difficulty. Unfortunately there are three projection rooms for the cinema because of being on three floors, but you are told this doesn't matter to much as there is a lot automation in the system now. When you are in the projection box for the top screens you notice that there are not just the normal film projectors (Victor 9's) but there are also a number of digital Barco projectors. According to the projectionist the digital projectors are used to show the alternative content which I have just seen - things like the news and the short films and adverts and trailers. These projectors are capable of getting the information from a variety of sources and in a variety of ways. The adverts are mainly sent via satellite every Wednesday ready for the following week and these sit in a protected part of a server. The short films often arrive on digibetas and are then played into the servers from there, although it is possible for the system to take practically any format. Having the digital projectors allows the cinema to show other content apart from films, including pop concerts and big sports events. Normally this is done with some sort of promotion in the cafe restaurant. According to the projectionist it is still very early days for the digital projectors and the traditional projectors are still used for showing older films, or films which are still available on 35mm film.

On the way out you notice that there is a whole area of the top floor which is label 'Conference Area' when you ask about this you are informed that there cinema has a large number of facilities available for people to have conferences, which includes having the main auditorium for speeches and presentations and then the conference facilities were available for break out sessions and smaller meetings and hospitality. According to the host the cinema makes a lot of money from the conferences during the day. We are also informed that there are a number of private, press and preview screenings which take place in one of the smaller screens. This also brings in more revenue for the cinema.

When you leave you realise that the cinema is very much part of the community as you notice the posters for local organisations and look through the what's on leaflet which you picked up on the way out. There are all sorts of screenings going on, including some arthouse films and even a couple of live stage shows. (Screen one is fitted with a complete stage and lighting system).

As you get back into the shopping centre, you realise just how pleasant and relaxed you had felt while you were in the cinema, and a smile grows on your face - well cinemas may not be what they used to, but this one is very close.

** This article is completely made up and in no way relates to a real cinema. None of the companies mentioned are actually related in anyway and used purely as examples. If anyone would like to give me the money to real build such a place, then please let me know :) **