



ON PROVEN GROUND

BY KRISSY RUSHING TOMLIN

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CREATIVE SOUND & INTEGRATION.

CREATIVE SOUND & INTEGRATION IN SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA has built a reputation on the foundational principle of delivering proven, reliable technology rather than chasing the latest technology trends. With years of experience and a keen understanding of the market, Co-Owners Doug Greenwald and Ed Moreau prioritize tried-and-tested systems that ensure consistent quality and performance for clients. This approach builds trust with homeowners and solidifies lasting relationships with builders and architects.

In fact, 85 percent of the company's accounts are builders in the Paradise Valley area, with homeowners representing only 15 percent of CSI's business. I sat down with Doug and Ed to talk about how they went from a single residential project in 2001 to a thriving business firmly entrenched with local builders and developers.

KRISSY: Let's start from the beginning. How did you guys start Creative Sound & Integration?

DOUG: Ed and I worked together for an A/V company in their custom integration division. Wanting to go out on our own in 2001, we had the opportunity to grab a large project in Paradise Valley and work directly with the client. That's how we got started and we grew the business slowly over time. But initially, it was Ed, me, and three other people.

ED: Back in 1990, fresh out of high school in Rockford, Illinois I landed a job at one of the first Best Buys. It was a pioneering concept, and I was part of the team that launched the first ten stores. I was pursuing studies in electronic engineering at college, but I advanced within Best Buy as it expanded. I transferred to Austin, Texas where I played a role in opening stores. I was also involved in the initial Best Buy hiring clinic in Phoenix in 1993, which got me to Arizona. I helped launch the first six Phoenix stores. I transitioned to working with system integrators, focusing more on custom installations, which eventually led me to meet Doug in 1997 when we both worked together.

DOUG GREENWALD
CO-OWNER
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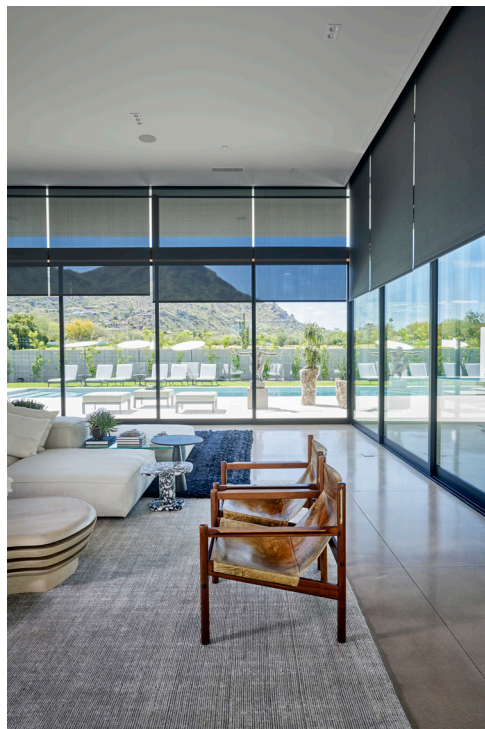
DOUG: Like many in our industry, I have a music background. In 1994, I applied for an audio retail salesperson job at a high-end audio store. That was my introduction to the industry, selling high-end two-channel audio equipment. I later moved to Arizona and joined another local integration company in their new custom division, a growing category.

I discovered I was good at sales. I immersed myself in learning about the products and set up my own high-end system at home. I saw where the industry was heading with surround sound and distributed audio and realized that high-end custom work was the future.

ED: We were fortunate enough that the first client gave us a huge upfront deposit, which helped us immediately reinvest in the company instead of taking big salaries. We used that money to hire people so we could focus on working on the business, not just in the industry.

DOUG: Our motto at the time, "We're done when you're done," was builder- and architect-centric. Initially, we didn't target homeowners, only builders and architects. Interior designers came into play later. The slogan emphasized our commitment to finishing projects on time instead of weeks and months after the home was ready for move in. "A/V guys"

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being last was a significant issue in our market then and all over the country, really. The reliability we provided to get jobs done in lockstep with builders helped us gain their trust and to grow. We've established and maintained lasting relationships with builders and architects ever since.

KRISSY: Now, you're working with local developers on multi-site subdivisions that include smart home technology, correct?

DOUG: Yes, we work with several, such as BedBrock, a luxury developer. We also work with other custom home builders. Our industry sometimes has a bad reputation, and many builders prefer not to "deal" with low-voltage or A/V systems due to past frustrations with unreliable providers. Our work product, service and the reliability of our systems allowed us to change that perception. Now, we find that the builders love the tech so much that they have become the best salespeople for smart home technology. Many underestimate that builder partners—when they know and love the technology—are great spokespersons for smart home technologies.

KRISSY: Talk about system reliability and resilience.

DOUG: We prioritize user-friendly designs and avoid overselling. Clients want technology that's simple to use and works reliably. We ensure that our systems are tested thoroughly before introducing them to clients. By keeping things straightforward and functional, we address the negative perceptions often associated with residential technology.

ED: We've always emphasized leading with proven technologies. Technology is constantly evolving, a factor that's always sparked my interest. When you think you know everything — HD, 4K, 8K — it changes. However, at CSI we focus on implementing only proven technologies. Our goal is to avoid constant replacements and servicing, promoting simplicity. While it's essential to stay aware of the latest technologies for our clients who want to keep up with the trends, we're cautious about adopting technology that isn't battle-tested. It's essential to balance innovation with reliability; otherwise, clients have the potential to become guinea pigs.

DOUG: Exactly. Clients want it to work; if it doesn't, they want customer service. Ed and I have been in this industry for a long time. We've taken the time to do the homework. We don't jump on the latest-and-greatest-product bandwagon, at least not anymore. We've gone down that road in the past, made those mistakes, and learned from them. We put products in our homes and showrooms before putting them in our clients' projects to ensure they are reliable.

DOUG: The core systems we design are consistent, though the number of audio zones, video zones, lighting, motorized shades, thermostats and so on may vary depending on the size of the house. This consistency makes installation and programming efficient and reliable.

Looking back a number of years, an early project Ed and I did as CSI was a Crestron distributed audio and video system. It was a complex system to program because Crestron started in the commercial sector, and all that technology trickled into the residential side even though it took massive program-

ming. Fast-forward to today and here is how those systems have evolved: Crestron Home is available, which is fine-tuned for residential homes with programming that streamlines the user experience, giving homeowners more flexibility to adjust things like lighting loads. Back in the day, the customer had to call us to come out and do this, even minor adjustments. Now it's completely intuitive. Integrating various subsystems into Crestron is a breeze and has streamlined our work while at the same time offers enhanced simplicity for our clients. With everything controlled through a single system, it reduces complexity and improves the user experience.

ED: We also use Ubiquiti enterprise-grade networks for reliability throughout the system. Network security and integrity are key to a high-performance smart home and will become even more important over time as attacks continue to occur.

DOUG: Ultimately, keeping things straightforward is key — more devices mean more potential failures. The goal is minimal devices in the signal path and simple, effective program-

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DOUG GREENWALD



ming. We prefer all-in-one projects from the design stage moving forward, ensuring an optimal signal path over run distances and necessary adjustments like switching to fiber for longer runs.

KRISSY: Are more of your clients interested in lighting and motorized shading?

DOUG: Yes. Home theaters are less common in our area and have been replaced, for the most part, by multi-purpose rooms. Lighting and shades often match or exceed the entertainment products in cost. Homeowners are coming to realize that lighting and shades are substantial investments and make a difference in your everyday experience of a space.

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We engage during the design phase, aligning with architects and builders to plan entertainment, lighting, security and other technologies. This early involvement ensures everything is tailored to the homeowner’s needs and the home’s design. We collaborate closely with builders, architects, interior designers and lighting designers. It’s a team effort to balance functionality with aesthetic appeal. Keeping our systems discreet but effective is a priority, though it can make it challenging to showcase in photos since our work blends in so well!

KRISSY: Let’s wrap with after-sales service.

ED: We partner with OneVision and have a detailed after-sale and after-install process. When a job’s done, there’s an orientation with the client, including the person who sold the project, the project manager, and the programmer. We walk the client through everything, address any questions, and tackle any remaining punch list items. Our full-time service coordinator and OneVision ensure clients can reach someone 24/7. There’s basic troubleshooting over the phone and priority service if needed.

