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ORANGE PEELED

They're big-television watchers

Video screen features the highest resolution in the world. But no Super Bowl viewing -- yet.

By David Haldane, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
August 13, 2007



Pixel whiz
[click to enlarge](#)

It wasn't built to watch the playoffs. And you can't tune it to HBO. Yet students and professors at UC Irvine say they've spent some scintillating days looking at the human brain, cancer cells and weather maps.

The images virtually jump out from what they say is the world's highest-resolution video screen.

"We had to build something big enough to make me look small," said Stephen F. Jenks, the 6-foot-10 assistant professor of electrical engineering and computer science who helped design the university's 23-by-9-foot Highly Interactive Paralleled Display Wall. The wall consists of rows of linked monitors, each of which displays a portion of the picture.

For those whose concept of high-definition centers on whether to buy an LCD or plasma TV, here's a number to chew on: 200 million pixels.

That's enough to provide a picture about 100 times more detailed than the best high-definition TV. And it's enough to have made UC's newest research tool, dubbed the HIPerWall, a hit among scientists throughout Southern California.

"It's exciting," said Joerg Meyer, a professor of computer graphics and visualization who helped develop the screen's software. "This display has higher resolution than the human retina can see."

Built three years ago with a \$300,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, the HIPerWall has been used to observe changes in the individual brain cells of schizophrenics, predict climate change by comparing a century's worth of weather models and study the cells of a woman who died of ovarian cancer.

"We can see the big picture," Jenks said. Or the small.

The screen, on the second floor of the Center of Graphics, Visualization and Imaging Technology at the Henry Samueli School of Engineering, has also provided satisfying moments for those creative enough to test its limits in unintended ways.

Its developers have spotted trapped cars and fallen trees in aerial photographs of the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. Beautiful mountain vistas can be enjoyed as if they were right in the lab.

One student even cranked the screen up for a game using Play Station and his favorite electric guitar.

The contraption's ability to entertain, in fact, is at the top of most non-scientists' lists.

Jenks' brother saw the HIPerWall as the perfect medium for watching the Super Bowl.

You can't -- for the most prosaic of reasons. "For that," Jenks said, "we'd need an antenna on the roof."

But it's a role that the technology behind the HIPerWall will play in the future, Jenks says.

"In 15 years," he said, "we will have these screens on the walls of our homes. It will no longer be wallpaper, just an active display."

Should you tire of California, for instance, the flick of a switch will transport your house to a virtual beach on the French Riviera. "Your whole wall will be a TV set," Jenks said. "You can have a lake, a fireplace, whatever you want."

Orange Peeled is one in an occasional series of stories that look at life inside the county.

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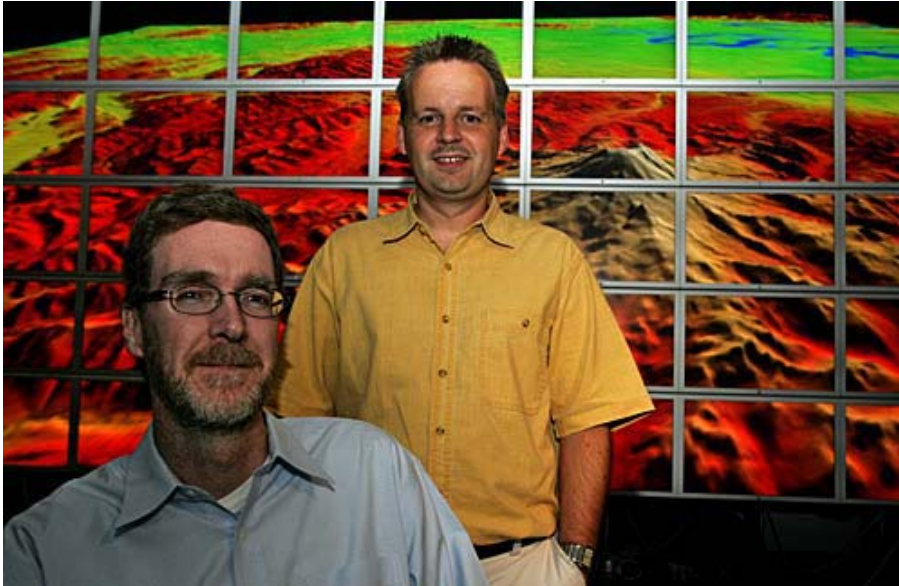
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Stephen Jenks and Joerg Meyer with their 200-million pixel screen. "It's exciting," said Meyer, a professor of computer graphics and visualization who helped develop the screen's software. "This display has higher resolution than the human retina can see." (Karen Tapia-Andersen / LAT)

June 3, 2007

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