

Time Out

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the
steak
issue

PRIME TIME!

SMOKIN' STEAKHOUSES THAT MAKE THE CUT
UNEXPECTED WINE PAIRINGS SURVIVAL TIPS
FOR VEGETARIANS **SUPER-SIZED DESSERTS**

PLUS Catching up with Rhett Miller **Weighing in on**
Primehouse David Burke Stripping with Carmen Electra

Cover Price \$2.50





Tube transplant

Ready to ditch your old TV? Get the big picture on high-def sets.

By Jaime Vazquez Photograph by Donna Rickles

Television is evolving, and so should you. In 2009, all U.S. television stations will convert from sending standard analog transmissions to sending high-definition digital transmissions. That means crisper images, sharper sound—and the need for a television that can pick up the broadcast. So even though we've got a few years before high-definition television (HDTV) will be the only way to watch programs, there are two good reasons to get on board now: HDTV broadcasts are free, and high-def televisions themselves are becoming more affordable. But before you race to drop your tax refund on a new boob tube, arm yourself with the facts to make sure you get exactly what you need—and don't get overcharged for what you don't.

What is HDTV?

Remember your first experience with a DVD, and how crisp and perfect it seemed? The improvement the DVD represented over the VCR was a small leap in screen resolution—a higher number of pixels, which means much more detail. These days, some consumer televisions display a resolution of 1,920x1,080 pixels, which makes the 720x480-pixel resolution of a DVD look like grainy yesteryear technology. HDTVs can display an astonishing level of realism, and change the viewing experience as we know it.

By federal law, local stations are required to broadcast their signals in two flavors: standard definition (SD) and high definition (HD). A traditional TV and a set of rabbit ears will get you standard-def television, and likewise, an HDTV will receive free over-the-air HDTV programming. The best part is

that receiving high-def content doesn't require hours of adjustment or aluminum foil; the way digital signals work, you either get it or you don't, so the signal comes in at full blast or not at all.

LCD vs. Plasma HDTVs

When it comes to choosing an HDTV technology, size matters.

Plasma TVs dominate the 37-inches-and-up market, mostly because they arrived first. Until LCD catches up, plasma is best for supersized images. Plasma provides a wider viewing angle—an advantage for large rooms—but it's not as bright as LCD.

LCD TVs are thinner, lighter and more durable than plasmas—making for a much easier installation. Some complain that LCD images aren't as crisp as a plasma's, but the resolution, contrast ratio, ease of use and affordability of LCD make it the better choice.

WHICH SET SUITS YOU?

The budget buyer's HDTV

The Samsung 30-inch SlimFit HDTV (TX-R3080W) packs quite a punch for \$900 (available at [Circuit City](http://CircuitCity.com), www.circuitcity.com). Samsung's flat-panel HDTVs have the highest contrast ratios in the industry, which means they're the brightest. The built-in HD tuner and plentiful inputs for speakers and gaming systems don't hurt, either.

The armchair athlete's HDTV

More than 50 percent of HDTV buyers cite sports as a reason for their purchase—watching such crisp video is like being in the stadium. Sports fans will like Polaroid's 50-inch PLA-5040 (\$3,300 at www.polaroid.com), which is perfect for high-motion content...or *SportsCenter*.

The movie buff's HDTV

When it comes to movies, it's Sony, Sony, Sony. Not only are Sony's models the easiest to get up and running out of the box, they also consistently excel in the 42-inch-and-up category, making them perfect for the home-theater experience. Sony's 50-inch KDF-E50A10 (\$2,300 at *Best Buy*, www.bestbuy.com) has impressive surround sound, which means you won't have to buy a separate audio system.

The technophile's HDTV

Believe it or not, Apple's 30-inch Cinema Display (\$2,400 at *Apple Store*, 679 Michigan Ave at Huron St, 312-981-4104) just so happens to also be a sparkling HDTV. No one does displays like Apple, period; it's partly why Mac users (sometimes) deserve to be snobby. This display doesn't come cheap, and requires connectivity via Digital Video Interface (DVI), which is found more commonly on computers and some cable boxes. But like always, Mac's simplicity in design makes it a winner.