

Is cinema really about **home comforts?**

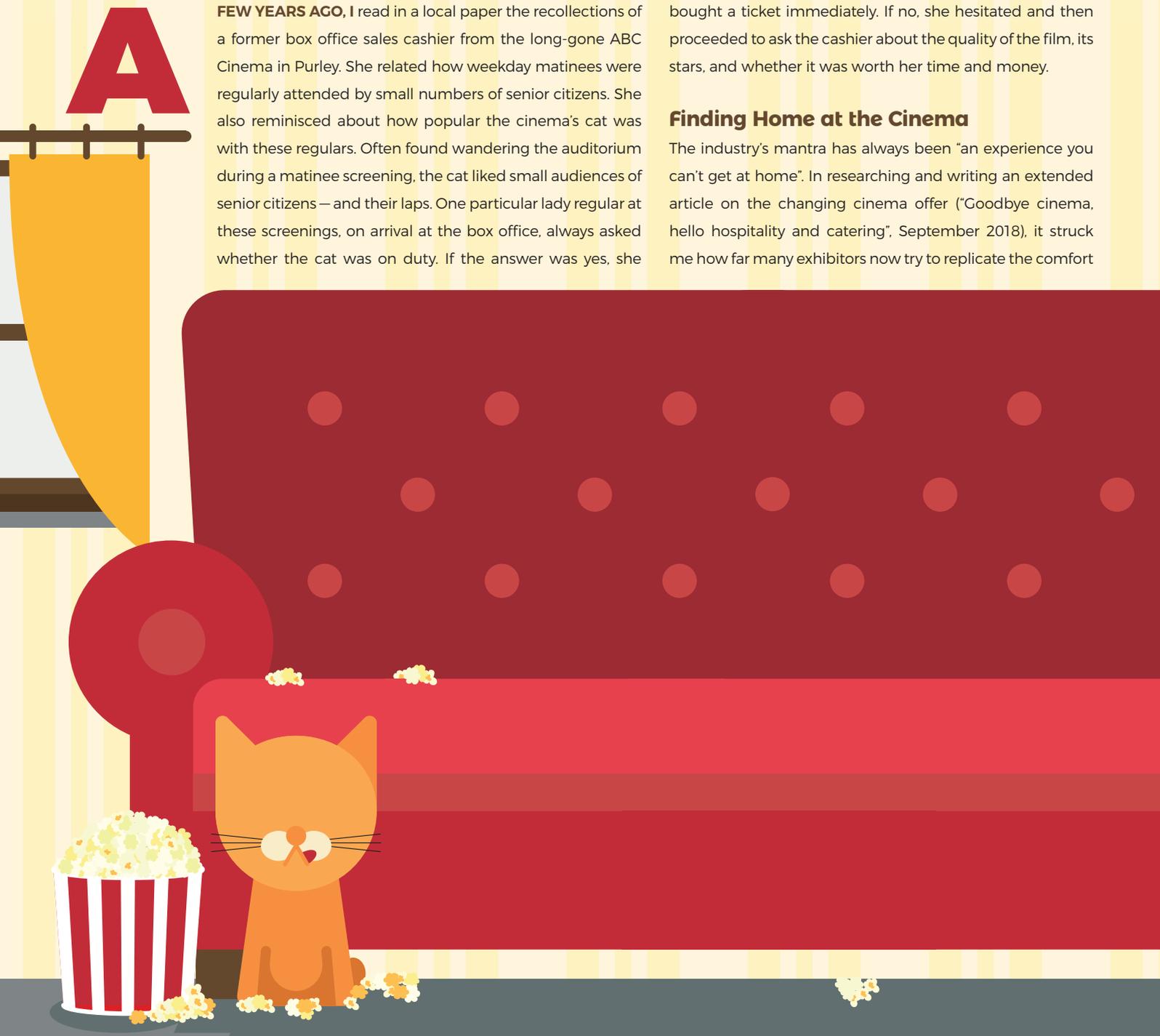
An experience that can't be replicated at home? Mark Trompeteler reflects on how it might seem that the dividing lines between commercial and home cinema are increasingly becoming blurred.

A FEW YEARS AGO, I read in a local paper the recollections of a former box office sales cashier from the long-gone ABC Cinema in Purley. She related how weekday matinees were regularly attended by small numbers of senior citizens. She also reminisced about how popular the cinema's cat was with these regulars. Often found wandering the auditorium during a matinee screening, the cat liked small audiences of senior citizens – and their laps. One particular lady regular at these screenings, on arrival at the box office, always asked whether the cat was on duty. If the answer was yes, she

bought a ticket immediately. If no, she hesitated and then proceeded to ask the cashier about the quality of the film, its stars, and whether it was worth her time and money.

Finding Home at the Cinema

The industry's mantra has always been "an experience you can't get at home". In researching and writing an extended article on the changing cinema offer ("Goodbye cinema, hello hospitality and catering", September 2018), it struck me how far many exhibitors now try to replicate the comfort



and convenience of the living room in their auditoria. Instead of seats, we have armchairs, sofas, stools, tables for drinks, snacks and meals and now full recliners – one cinema even advertises the qualities of its blankets (“If you are feeling chilly, ask one of our staff for a throw”). If it’s available, I’d go for the cat option – far warmer and more relaxing – and from the cinema’s perspective, self-cleaning.

IMAX, to me, has always been a “sit up, take notice and wonder at these amazing pictures and incredible sound” format. The idea that we now have IMAX auditoriums with full recliners, I find hard to assimilate. And that’s before the wine starts flowing on the recliner’s integral table. If cinemas have to add these costs to the ticket price for, essentially, a recreation of the home environment, a certain irony and confusion about what those venues are begins to creep up on me. As an aside, like many, I find it hard to cope with the way some behave in the cinema as if they are in their living room, checking phones, chatting during the film and so on.

The technological takeover

The irony becomes stronger when you think of the quantities of large screen 4K HDR TV sets now sold to the public, and the increasing numbers striving to recreate sound quality they experience at the cinema. A 4K TV can, with a bit of care about viewer-to-screen distance, deliver a great experience of a movie at home. Either consciously or unconsciously,

many people now aspire to recreate mini-cinemas at home. It all gets further confused by the arrival of active LED screens at the front of the industry’s own auditoria. The complete elimination of projectors means you do finally arrive at the stage where some filmmakers’ recent pronouncements that cinema is like watching TV in public are justified.

A cinephile’s confession

Now, I have a terrible confession to make. I love cinemas and experiencing great films in them. I am lucky to have seen

“Either consciously or unconsciously many people now aspire to recreate mini-cinemas in their own homes”

wonderful movies in many iconic venues in the UK and overseas, and I still visit the key London cinemas. But things have developed to the stage that arguably my favourite cinema is now in my own living room.

For modest outlay, and in line with current exhibitors’ trends, we recently refurbished our own venue to look like

a normal living room but with a fashionably minimalist and completely re-plastered brilliant white matt wall down one of its longer dimensions. Discretely placed in the room are a second-hand short-throw BenQ HD digital projector on a high shelf opposite this wall, an Onkyo amplifier, seven decent audio speakers and a sub woofer. It has wiring neatly routed in trunking. Blu-Ray discs yield beautiful 9ft-wide pictures with excellent 5.1 and 7.1 surround sound, or, by placing two white bits of wood under the two rear speakers and angling them onto the ceiling, I can bounce sound back over the sofa, yielding a passable impression of 5.1 Atmos.

Our version of a cinema comes with audience-focused sofas, chairs, footstools, an integral coffee table for drinks, snacks and meals, even a dedicated throw. Sadly the venue doesn’t have a cat anymore, but our cinema room has a few wooden and papier-maché substitutes. Now all I have to do is flick a few switches, move absolutely nothing, press a few remote controls and my feature presentation has begun.

A Final Irony

One final irony is that recently we had to re-arrange a lot of photos downstairs in our house. One that we couldn’t find a home for was an English Heritage archive photo of the local cinema of my childhood and my adolescence – the Odeon Balham, the very place where my lifelong love of the genre started. It was once my favourite cinema. The only space now left to put that photo is on the shelf, close to where the HD digital projector that powers my new favourite cinema is now situated. What goes around... comes around.

So what is modern cinema, truly? Is it really just about recreating all the comforts of home? **CT**

