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Reflections on CES: 3-D galore, The Beach's end, Gibson blues

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As they say in the U.S. Congress, everything has been said, but not everyone has said it. My own favorite demo at CES 2009 this past weekend was at the LG booth, showing two similar-sized 3-D TVs based on two different technologies: One was a plasma screen using a shutter-glasses approach. The other was [LCD](#) using polarized glasses. Regular readers of this space might recall my preference for the polarized glasses -- the same type used in theatrical 3-D movies -- but this side-by-side comparison really drove the point home.

Shutter glasses, some say, create more strain on the eye-brain system because of the way each eye is shown an alternate image, with both eyes never really receiving images at the same time. Some users have reported headaches. And to add my own two cents, despite the surprising physical comfort of today's shutter glasses -- which are amazingly lightweight compared to a few years ago -- I felt a vague sense of relief as soon as I switched from the shutter demo to the polarized. I went back and forth a few times to confirm it. There was something slightly disturbing with the shutters that disappeared with polarized. Sony also had a polarized 3-D demo that looked excellent, but no actual model numbers or prices for these were announced, they're strictly in demo [mode](#) now. Samsung did announce a shipping (but much smaller) 22" LCD 3DTV with shutter glasses. (Sadly, I didn't make it into Panasonic's 3-D theater, which required special tickets, but I did see the 150" plasma screen at their press conference. It was quite big.)

A \$79 3-D webcam from Minoru, using the primitive red-blue filter glasses, was a cool toy. Other items of interest to my own eccentric eye were a Panasonic "3MOS" camcorder with a combined 92-megapixels of image sensors (and 70x optical zoom), a game creation program for Xbox that Steve Ballmer showed off called Kodu, and a mind-controlled toy (think alpha and theta waves) from Mattel.

At the [chip](#) level, among many exciting new [video](#) and [imaging](#) product introductions by Marvell, Zii Labs, ADI, Intel, Ambarella, Silicon Image, Zoran, Dibcom, Xceive, IDT, NXP, ST Microelectronics, Fresco, Entropic, and many others, my own favorite was Zoran's incorporation of the previously high-priced "Let It Wave" [frame](#) rate conversion technology into mass market chips (see [Bandlet de-interface and up-conversion for HDTV via "super-resolution" framework](#)). We look forward to covering many of these developments in more detail in Video/Imaging DesignLine down the road. Ditto for the other "big story" of the convention -- connectivity, including [wireless](#) HDMI, LiquidHD, a new MoCA spec, STB home [networking](#) building blocks from Macrovision, and other technologies we'll be looking at.

Attendance was down, yes, and the mood was a [bit](#) gloomy. Bill Gates was missed (as was Steve Jobs at the competing MacWorld conference in [San](#) Francisco) -- Steve Ballmer, who was great as Gates' hard-driving sidekick in years past, lacked the charm, warmth and boyishness that always made Gates endearing, regardless of your take on Microsoft's near-monopoly. My own personal disappointment was the Gibson Guitar booth, which in previous years had been a reliable source for truly high quality post-convention live entertainment -- Peter Frampton played last year, for example. No performers this time.

CES regulars may also bemoan the disappearance of "The Beach" -- the once popular across-the-street from the LV convention center bar that has hosted more tech press parties than even the hungriest finger-food addict could possibly attend. It's a pile of torn down rubble now.

Prior to the convention I heard much conjecture that CES might go the way of Comdex -- after all, in its true glory days CES took place twice a year, not once. But Comdex did not die due to lack of interest, or declining attendance, but rather mismanagement by its private owners. CES, quite differently, is run by a trade association funded by member companies,

including all the big players such as Sony, Samsung, Panasonic, LG, Hitachi, Canon, Toshiba, etc. Microsoft and Intel are big-booth regulars too. As long as they collectively want CES to continue, it will. Though there have been some dropouts over the years, and a few new no-shows this time around -- along with Apple, of course, who always hold their own competing convention the same week -- and there was some notably empty floor space in the South Hall (and only one floor, not two, at the Sands), by and large it was the same. It may not have been the 130,000 in attendance, as claimed -- my own estimate: 112,239 (based on pseudo-precision) -- but it was big enough.

Footnote: After this was written and posted CEA, the organization that puts on CES, provided a revised attendee estimate of 110,000 -- down about 23% from last year's 140,000 -- and said final numbers will be released in 90 days.

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