4K projector turns any wall into theater-quality screen from inches away

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- Vava comes in a big sturdy box with foam inserts and a carrying handle. System76 laptop and Victorinox knife for scale.
  Jim Salter
- I’m pretty sure I got the big projector this time, and not the sneaky little mini projector…
  Jim Salter
- We’ll be using my System76 laptop as an HDMI source to make pretty pictures with.
  Jim Salter
- Vava and all the stuff that comes with it: power cord, manual, remote control, batteries, and a soft cloth lens cleaner.
  Jim Salter

This is Vava, a 4K definition Ultra Short Throw (UST) home theater projector retailing for $2,700. For those of you not familiar with the term, UST refers to “throw distance”—the amount of space you need between a projector and screen in order to get the desired image size. This projector also features a built-in Harman-Kardon speaker, motion sensors to

keep you from blinding yourself by staring into the laser, and plenty of inputs.

A few weeks ago, we reviewed Cinemood, a miniature and fairly low-cost portable projector that unfortunately did not really impress us. Vava is the projector we *thought* we were getting then, and we're happy to report that it impressed us a lot.

Setup

- Vava and all the stuff that comes with it: power cord, manual, remote control, batteries, and a soft cloth lens cleaner.
  Jim Salter
- Vava is well stocked with A/V inputs and outputs. Note the audio line in—that lets you use Vava as a very credible center channel speaker in a surround setup.
  Jim Salter
- Vava's remote is simple and gets the job done. Batteries included.
  Jim Salter
- The best thing to say about Vava's setup process is there isn't much to say. It's clean, intuitive, and functional.
  Jim Salter
- Vava has motion sensors that automatically interrupt the projection and only show a dim "do not stare into beam!" warning if you get too close to it.
  Jim Salter

Setting Vava up was a refreshingly straightforward process. Press the power button, and the system turns on and begins walking you through what little setup it needs or wants—select a source (with PiP to show you what's on each source!), connect to your Wi-Fi, and so forth. We were very happy with Vava's on-screen keyboard, which is laid out well and wraps in all four directions. You can "type" a Q and an L with only a

couple of button presses on the remote rather than laboriously arrowing over each virtual “key” across the width of the board.

We also accidentally discovered a pretty cool safety feature. While scooting Vava around on the floor on its cardboard box, getting the display size just right, the image cut out and a dim “do not stare into beam” warning came up in its place. Turns out that Vava has a motion sensor in it. We already knew better and were carefully looking away while anywhere near the beam, but it’s great to know that cats, kids, or particularly dense roommates are unlikely to blind themselves. (Ralphie from *A Christmas Story* will need to stick to his Red Ryder BB Gun, because Vava refuses to shoot his eye out.)

A closer look at UST (Ultra Short Throw)

- This is what we mean by “ultra-short-throw.” The meeting room’s mounted projector needs a throw distance of about twelve feet to fill this 136″ screen; Vava manages it with one.
  Jim Salter
- This side angle gives you a good idea of both how short Vava’s throw distance is, and how wide its visibility angle is.
  Jim Salter
- The downside to UST projectors is the extreme angle magnifies geometry issues with your projection surface. The ripples in our projection screen show much worse for Vava than they do for the ceiling mounted projector 12+ feet away.
  Jim Salter
- When we move Vava over to the side and project its image onto a wall, we can see our “ripple” geometry issues with the projection screen disappear.

Jim Salter

This wasn’t our first spin with UST projectors; we were familiar with the term from our time with the much smaller Puppy Cube last year. Vava is the first serious home theater UST gear we’ve seen, though, and it’s worth taking a little time to lay out its pros and cons.

The great thing about UST is that you don’t need ceiling mounts or long, unobstructed distances to put enormous images up on a wall or projection screen. In the (very) large meeting room at St. John’s Episcopal Church where we initially tested Vava, there’s a 136″ screen with a ceiling-mounted traditional projector about 12′ away. Vava was able to fill the same screen from roughly a single foot away, sitting on its own cardboard box on the floor.

There is, unfortunately, a downside—the projection screen isn’t completely stiff, and gentle air currents from the HVAC system were enough to cause equally gentle undulating ripples in the screen itself. The effect isn’t something we’d ever noticed when using the room’s traditional projector, with a much closer to head-on display angle. But with Vava and the extreme display angle necessary to achieve its ultra short throw distance, the ripples were much more noticeable.

During normal video, you might or might not spot the effect, but when setting up the system (or doing anything else involving what should be bold, straight lines) it’s obvious. This isn’t really Vava’s fault, and any UST projector will have the same issues if its screen isn’t completely flat—we made sure of that by doing another test projection against the wall to the right of the screen. Vava’s image was perfectly straight and rectangular on the wall. It was also surprisingly clear and bright, given that all of the room lights were up—including copious and harsh overhead fluorescents—and the walls are a dark taupe, not white!

Listing image by Jim Salter

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