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HOME

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CELEBRATING INSPIRATIONAL DESIGN AND PERSONAL STYLE

HOME
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Control **FREAK**

by Dana W. Todd



People are notoriously hard to control.

They don't want to follow someone else's rules. Sometimes the world seems completely out of control, but there is one thing, thanks to technology, that Type A homeowners can pull totally under their spell: their homes.

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Whole home automation systems are predicted to be one of the hot selling technologies this year. According to a recent study by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, consumer demand and sales of home automation systems are increasing. Several major players including Microsoft, Google, and Comcast have jumped into partnerships in the residential automation market, a good sign whole home automation is here to stay.

Taking all the applications we use at home, such as entertainment systems, window shades, lighting, security systems, sprinklers, appliances, HVAC units, and faucets, and integrating them into one control dashboard is the core goal of a home automation system. The system contains multiple points





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of access - a wall touch pad, smart phone app, computer, and mobile device like an iPad - to help satisfy the control freak in all of us. The good news for homeowners is the affordable price point and the technology's ease of installation in both renovation projects and new construction.

There are several vendors on the market, such as Control4 and Leviton, that offer whole home automation platforms combining the disparate systems and devices homeowners currently operate and leaving room for others they may wish to add later. Homeowners are not required to be tech savvy and benefit from convenience, security, enhanced energy efficiency, and property damage prevention.

Some people may not wish to integrate multiple systems and may decide to stick with automating one or two features in their homes. Regardless of the number of systems combined, here's what each industry currently offers.

Appliances

Stephanie Nedved of Mountain High Appliance says the industry has offered some level of automation in its products for several years; however, only a handful of major manufacturers provide integration with whole house systems, and the price point remains relatively high.



Hunter Douglas



Hunter Douglas



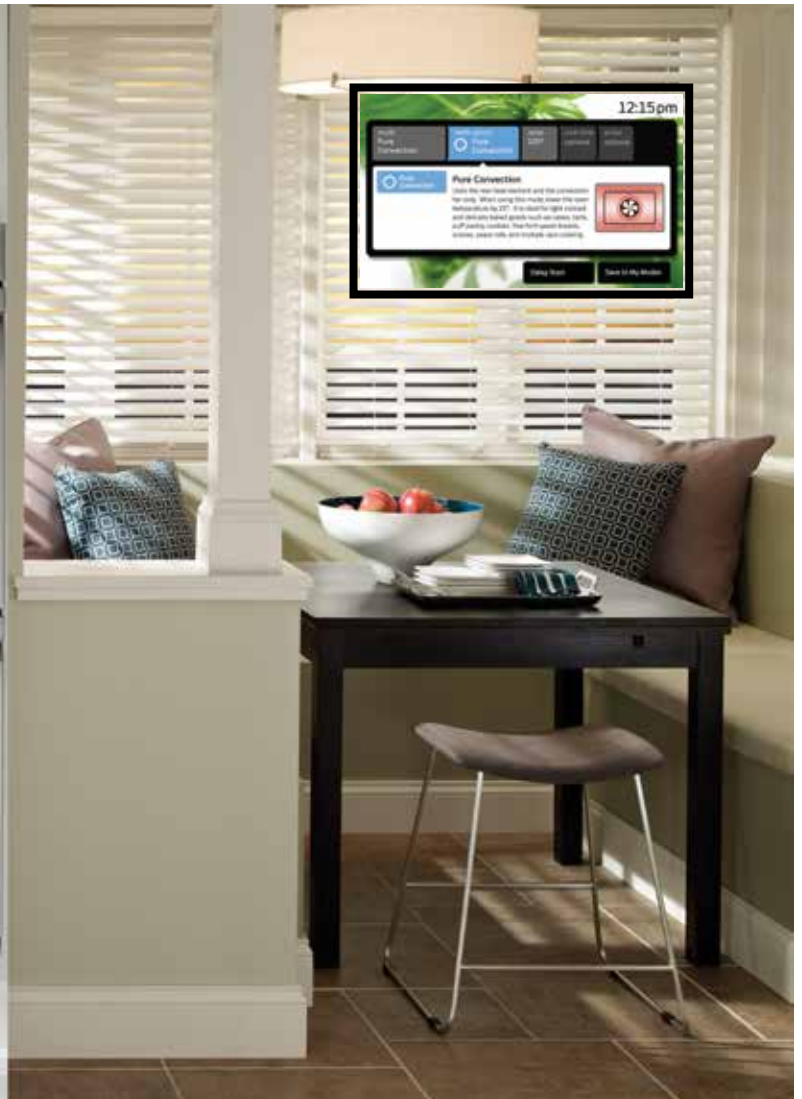
Dacor



Dacor



Dacor



The industry is tightly focused on energy efficiency, a main reason homeowners are choosing automation. Most appliance manufacturers offer some sort of smart technology, says Nedved, which allows homeowners to remotely control refrigerators, ovens, dishwashers, and washing machines. Whirlpool's 6th Sense Live technology, Dacor's Discovery iQ, and GE's Brillion Connected Appliances operate via an app to enable homeowners to change settings and receive maintenance alerts if a technical problem arises.

"You can set delayed starts to take advantage of lower rates during off-peak times or as a help to the family schedule," says Nedved.

Window Shades

Where automated shades used to be solely powered via a wall switch or a handheld remote, they are now powered via smart phone apps. Andrew Redenbarger of WindoVan Go says manufacturers such as Hunter Douglas have automated all their products with the exception of shutters. Hunter Douglas' Platinum 2.1 Technology emerged about one year ago. Redenbarger says the new app enables shades, lights, ceiling fans, and other components to integrate into a whole house solution from Lutron or Control4. A wide selection of high-end fabrics can be integrated with the Hunter Douglas technology, so a good match is a sure bet.

Older automated shades require homeowners to stand in just the right spot to engage the remote. The new technology removes that burden, with improved sensors operated via radio frequency.

Lighting

Many manufacturers, including Lutron and Leviton, offer integration of lighting with whole house systems. Lutron's Smart Bridge and its accompanying app allows homeowners to turn lights on as they arrive home, turn them off after they're in bed, and dim the lights for movie time without moving off the couch.

"The driver behind [wireless automation] is energy reduction," says Courtney Allen of QED. "Besides luxury and convenience, that's why manufacturers offer these products."

Sprinklers

It's difficult to establish healthy plants that will remain viable for years without consistent watering. This task is best performed by an automatic system, complete with separate zones for beds, lawns, and containers and their individualized moisture needs. Today's technology with smart controllers enables homeowners to operate the sprinkler system through an iPhone or Android app, setting each zone separately based on the app's feedback about moisture levels in specific areas of the yard. With the addition of a moisture sensor, the system can shut off the sprinklers when a rainstorm pops up.

Security

By its very nature, security systems necessitate wireless, remote access for complete security and access control of houses. Being

away from home and having the peace of mind of being able to check the alarm is securely set, receive security alerts via text, and remotely re-lock the front door when the housekeeper leaves for the day are advantages of automated security. ADT, well known for its security systems, has ventured into the whole house automation market with its Pulse Interactive product that integrates security with lighting automation, thermostat control, appliances, and access control functionality like unlocking doors.

Heating and Cooling

Heating and cooling contribute to 50 percent of a home's monthly energy cost. Since energy efficiency is one of the main reasons homeowners are installing whole home systems, it is important that HVAC units are included in the systems. Interesting options on the market include Aprilaire's Home Automation Thermostat and the Nest Thermostat, which "learns" your heating and cooling preferences within the first few weeks you use it. The Nest is a step beyond electronic thermostats in that it "senses" when the house is empty and lowers the heat until someone comes home.

Faucets

Automatic faucets contain presence sensors and turn on and off based on active infrared technology like that used for many years in TV remote controls. These faucets need a power source and can be hardwired or rely on batteries. There are so many options on the market today. One perfect for a modern home is Hansgrohe's Metris S, with its clean lines and touch-free operation.

RESOURCES

Mountain High Appliance	303.665.6850	www.mountainhighappliance.com
Windo VanGo	303.420.3788	www.windovango.org
QED	303.592.1223	www.gallerialighting.net

