



GETTING TECHNOLOGY OUT OF YOUR WAY

In Our Experience: what's possible & effective

Architects and designers want a blank sheet of paper. There are enough compromises in the building process to place a duty on every specialist to reduce the number of aesthetic trade-offs they bring to the table. Household technology has taken a lot of criticism for this, with its huge TVs and multiple control interfaces and everyone is familiar with the rash of tech that spreads across a wall when a thermostat, a light-switch and an audio-visual touch-screen sit next door to each other.

The bottom line is that only the solution should be evident: speakers should be hidden, TVs can be placed on arms to let them fold away and if a single specialist is given responsibility for the way the technological interfaces are presented to the client then controls can be amalgamated, reduced and hidden as appropriate.

Some Fundamentals:

- **Quality:** you can hide the obvious elements of technology, such as speakers, but you do need to be aware that there can be an effect on performance. For instance, the invisible 'plastered-in' speakers cannot physically shift sufficient air to give a convincing mid and low level sound so they require a subwoofer to be added which usually causes significant knock-on aesthetic integration issues. Equally, cameras can be made to be tiny and discreet but they will not necessarily provide a high enough quality image to fulfill their key purpose (whether that be in identification of intruders or baby monitoring, for instance).
- **Control:** many practitioners in the residential technology industry call themselves 'integrators'. This can be laudable but it needs to be done with great care because amalgamating functions on one device can lead to be complex to use and leave the customer wanting their simple one-function interface back. We believe the solution is to use two main interfaces: a simple one for the primary controls that are used 85% of the time (for instance turning on a favourite radio station from a standard light-switch) and a second controller (often wireless) in the room giving many more choices such as selection of music, a wider range of lighting scenes and control of functionality only used 15% or less of the time.
- **Flexibility:** now that we live in a world of wireless connectivity, the old requirement to hard-wire a control screen on the wall of each room is declining. Even systems such as door entry can bring up an image on portable touch-screens, iPhones and the like if needed. However, the world of wifi is congested and problematic (see Fact Sheet on WiFi usage) and it requires a more nuanced approach to combine some static controls (such as traditional toggle light-switches in historic homes) with intelligent functions and then a secondary wireless device to augment it.

Things to bear in mind when evaluating this technology

- Can the technology be made more discreet, can it be made to disappear from view entirely?
- Will this compromise its usability &/or performance?
- Consider giving the responsibility for ALL control interfaces the customer will have to touch to one firm so that there is a homogenous approach
- Which functions do the clients use 85% of the time
- and how can these be made simpler to use?
- Has the manufacturer put a lot of thought into their user interface & will this be impaired if it is 'skinned' by someone else?
- Do the controls mix wired & wireless?
- What level of remote operation is required?