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Why high-tech homes cost less



TAKE THE PLUNGE: An example of a Symm bathroom and, inset, Angus Gibson

IN 1936 the Ideal Home Exhibition included a Things To Come house of which HG Wells presciently wrote that the rays of the sun would provide solar heating and air-conditioning would create a dust-free interior atmosphere.

Mindful of the shortage of servants at the period, the home also featured a dining table with a conveyor belt.

Of course all this was far beyond the means of the average visitor but the show provided an escape from the gathering clouds of war. Technology in the home still exerts a huge fascination and until very recently was just as unaffordable as in 1936.

However, as Angus Gibson will tell an audience at this year's Decorex show, at the Royal Hospital Chelsea in London, that's all changed.

He specialises in high-tech installations and is a director of Symm, the Oxford-based restoration and building firm which numbers Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons among its clients.

He started in the industry 30 years ago, in the days when the latest home technology meant VHS. "Technology in the home

By Andrea Watson

has gone from ultra-slow to supersonic speed," he says. "But there have certainly been some growing pains.

"There was a time manufacturers were so keen to keep ahead of the game that they churned out products that did not really work very well.

"But people who were keen to have the latest gadgets were spending hundreds of thousands."

He adds. "Today's clients are very savvy. They're not so interested in what is new but does it work? Is it simple? And how much will it cost?"

Mr Gibson takes the example of home cinemas to illustrate how dramatically prices have fallen. "A few years ago plasma screens cost up to £6,000 and they were not very good. The latest Panasonics these days are terrific and you can get one for £800."

He puts much of the progress down to a gadget that costs £499 yet can run everything: the iPad.

"It was not unusual to spend thousands on making a house work in terms of wiring, lighting,

screens and so on. Today, thanks to iPads, that can be done for a fraction of that amount and it is getting even cheaper."

Mr Gibson admits that there's a time and place for technology. Not everyone

wants to have to read a manual to figure out how to close their curtains. He also says systems are getting a lot more user-friendly.

"There was a backlash about five years ago. Generally people found that things were breaking down but it's all different now.

"I'd say it is time to embrace technology. It works and you get so much more for your bucks today."

At Symm he works with a range of other technology and installation experts covering everything from underfloor heating to climate-control air-conditioning.

He admits putting in the new technology in houses is "really disruptive" but says nearly all homes can benefit.

"If you are doing up a house, it's a chance to include things that are now part of our lives. You will miss out if you don't take that opportunity."

THOSE looking to renovate their homes can visit Decorex on Tuesday afternoon, September 27, when the trade show is open to the public. There are more than 300 stands showcasing the latest trends and products.

INFORMATION:
www.decorex.com