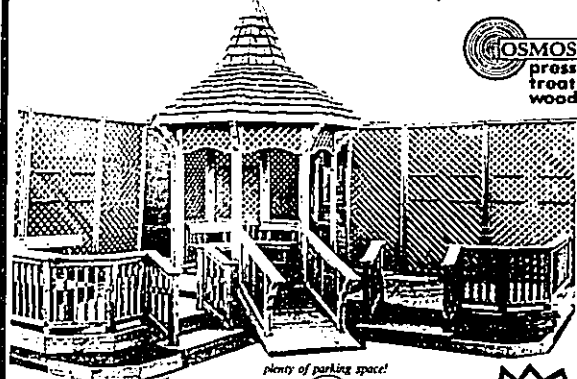


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## Safe, smart homes take tech to the max

**P**ROUD HOME owners spend thousands of dollars annually on the most visible of improvements — remodeling and redecorating.

But, sometimes, the smartest additions to a home are the ones that can't be seen.

These smart improvements may not elicit the compliments that a new piece of sculpture would inspire. Or keep the neighbors wondering about the outcome of an elaborate remodeling project.

But they can make a home a safer, more energy-efficient and convenient place to be, thanks to innovations in the high-technology and home protection industries.

We're still several years away from making the move into futuristic automated houses that do virtually everything for their owners.

**BUT THERE ARE** many home improvements available today that can give high-technology enthusiasts a taste of the worry-free, energy-efficient lifestyle that smart homes can offer.

Programmable timers can take on the responsibility of turning on sprinkler systems or lights at preset times of day while the home owner works or plays. Some timers are smart enough to calculate the changing hour of sunset for each day of the year, so lights always go on at dusk.

Many of these programmable devices work with touch-pad ease. Programmable set-up/set-back thermostats automatically turn down the heat when everyone's gone, and have the house warm and ready when everyone returns.

Computerized bath and Jacuzzi controls turn water on and off at programmed times and to the desired temperature, so the weary home owner needn't worry about overfilling the bathtub or bringing water to the boiling point in a hot tub.

Other devices go beyond the touch-pad. Motion detectors in a room can automatically turn off lights when the last person leaves, and turn them on again when someone enters, while solar-powered fluorescent patio lights automatically turn on at dusk and off at dawn.

Intercom systems are updated with no-hands operation, offering communication throughout the house and in adjacent buildings, such as the garage. Infants can be monitored and outside doors can be answered from any room.

**EVEN TOOLS HAVE** gone high tech. The Digtape, a handheld device measures distance by ultrasound. The

operator determines distance at the speed of sound simply by pushing a button.

With so many smart devices on the market, some home owners are opting for home automation devices that activate everything from lights to thermostats to home entertainment equipment with one remote-control system.

It only takes one break-in to convince a home owner that a smart home is a safe home.

When it's protection from an intruder that the home owner desires, the best place to start is at the front door. The newest locks offer deadlocking latches that are virtually impossible to pick, and protect the frames as well with screws that anchor locks all the way to the framing studs. "Panic proof" inside knobs let residents out quickly in case of fire or an emergency.

Today's security systems go far beyond the barking watchdog. Sensors for doors and windows and perimeter devices such as foil strips, sensors that detect glass breaking, and wiring sensors for window screens keep tabs on action outside the house.

**PRESSURE PADS** under the carpet, heat sensors, photoelectric beams, infrared lights and ultrasound waves can reveal an intruder's presence quickly once he's in the door.

The simplest security systems come in do-it-yourself kits that even a self-confessed klutz could install.

More elaborate versions offer single-function keys that let the user change system status at the touch of a button on a security center.

The consumer simply selects his protection on a modular basis, so he's free to move around in some parts of the house while protecting others. LCD panels show information on system status.

Other security systems offer the ultimate in burglary deterrent — making the house look lived in by adjusting temperatures, dimming lights, and turning appliances on and off at specific times through home-control systems.

Homeowners can even purchase mini versions of the quintessential corporate security systems — mini sight-and-sound surveillance systems with cameras that mount to the door or wall and deliver an image to a screen.

No matter how safe and high-tech a house, the potential for fire is as close as the nearest match, electrical outlet or fireplace. But today's smoke detectors can warn home owners before flames get out of hand, threatening lives and damaging their dwellings beyond repair.

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