



Automated gadgets for the home

Even with the television remote switching channels with a touch and the automatic coffee maker brewing away by itself, the George Jetson kind of life might seem light years away to the average homeowner.

After all, today's fully automated homes such as the National Association of Home Builders' "Smart House," usually are prototypes of dwellings yet to come.

Still, the average homeowner can install a wide range of automated gizmos and gadgets that can spread into virtual systems. They don't carry a high price tag, and yet bring the one-touch, programmable world of the future to and through the front door, and to nearly every room in the house. Consider:

- No-switch lights. No more groping in the dark for the light switch. Simply wave your hand under a light switch, and you turn the lights on. Wave it again and you turn them off.

- A controlled power outage. You left the iron on? No need to worry with a new control that breaks the electrical circuit on an appliance — thus automatically turning it off — after a selected time delay.

- A no-hassle alarm. Always figure alarm systems were too much trouble? One of the newest on the market wraps up entry prevention and entry detection with a simple bar. Fit into a door or window, electronic sensors inside the device activate a pulsating alarm and set off a bright, flashing light when the device detects motion.

- The smartest tub. Upscale bathers can indulge in a bathtub that is not only equipped with phone and stereo, but one that is actually smart enough to turn the volume down when someone is on the line.

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Plenty of help for novice remodeler

The wave of remodeling has also led to a boom in the do-it-yourself market. To cut costs and have more control over the project, home owners are picking up a hammer to make improvements — minor and major — themselves.

In the introduction to "The Home Hardware Handbook" (Fireside Books/Simon & Schuster), Bernard Gladston offers three reasons for the do-it-yourself trend: The disappearance of the jack-of-all-trade handyman

who could be trusted to do everything; the rising cost of living combined with higher expectations; and renewed pride in the home.

If you're a novice do-it-yourselfer, don't fret — there is a lot of help for you. Home improvement centers now stock the latest how-to books, magazines and videos.

For more hands-on instruction, there are classes in everything from basic carpentry to plumbing offered by community colleges, university extension courses and home improvement centers.

And there are a number of home improvement projects that you can do over one weekend:

Some favorites include wallpapering a bathroom, refinishing old furniture, installing closet organizers, adding shelving and racks in the kitchen and installing decorative brackets and molding in the living room.

Start your project with the right tools.

Here is the rundown of the basics recommended by the editors of "The Home Hardware Handbook":

- Swiss Army knife — "the handiest pocket companion you can carry"
- Spiral ratchet screwdriver with interchangeable heads
- Dozuki pull saw
- Combination square
- 10-inch curved-jaw locking pliers
- Butt chisels, ranging from 1 inch to 1 1/4 inch
- 22-ounce, mill-face, rip-claw steel hammer
- Electric drill
- Circular saw
- Belt sander.

HOMEFACTS

Only small percentages of Americans feel confident with do-it-yourself projects.

Percent of those surveyed who felt confident with a do-it-yourself project:

Auto repair 21%

Painting 19%

Carpentry 18%

Electrical work 17%

Woodworking 13%

Plumbing 12%

SOURCE: Home Air Compressor Association survey of do-it-yourselfers
Copley News Service

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