

# the clever home

Fresh out of the box, these state-of-the-art technologies are designed to save you time and energy – and make life a lot more entertaining

WORDS LEE SUCKLING



Year after year, we're showered with the latest developments in home electronics, all claiming to be 'the way of the future'. This new decade, though, could really fulfil that promise. Not since the 1970s – when colour televisions and dishwashers became widely available, and even home computers started appearing on the scene – has new technology had such a radically life-changing impact. Home entertainment of cinematic quality, wireless technology, robotics, innovations in lighting and one-touch control of virtually everything, from TV screens to security are all coming to a home near you soon. >

This page: 'C7000'  
40-inch LED TV, \$2899,  
Samsung, 1300 362 603,  
samsung.com.au.



### top-line television

From their early boxy incarnations, televisions have morphed into sleek panels, with bulky tubes now replaced by plasma, LCD and LED models, giving an ever-clearer picture.

The most radical transformation has been in 3D technology. "This year represents the sunrise of 3D technology in Australia," says Toby Barbour of Sony. Films such as *Avatar* gave 3D worldwide acclaim in cinemas, and it will soon become an in-home reality with major brands such as LG, Sony and Samsung offering this fully immersive viewing experience. "The effect is breathtaking – life-enriching, ultra-real picture quality that easily rivals cinema,

and can be watched from your own living room," explains Mark Leathan of Samsung. While prices are not prohibitive, a 3D TV set will cost more than a standard HD TV; Sony's 'HX800' 3D-optional 40-inch TV costs \$2799, while a 40-inch HD LCD TV might be closer to \$2300.

The newly available 3D televisions don't use the passive polarised glasses worn at cinemas; instead they utilise electronically powered 'active shutter' technology, which synchronises to the 3D content on your screen. Samsung offers two pairs free with its 3D TV, with additional pairs at \$99 for battery powered or \$129 for rechargeable. Meanwhile, some companies, such as Toshiba, are developing 3D TV sets which won't require glasses at all. Watch this space!



### new, blue world

Along with 3D, Blu-ray – the high-definition disc that offers better sound, and picture quality up to five times richer than standard DVDs – has been bubbling under the radar for a while. But as Dinawati Lie of LG confirms, it's here to stay. "With full HD video playback, the clarity and picture quality of Blu-ray is immensely impressive," she says. Cost may have been a factor in the sluggish switch from DVD to Blu-ray discs – you can buy a DVD player for as little as \$40, while Blu-ray players are upwards of \$200, plus you need a high-definition TV to reap the benefits of the enhanced picture quality. But prices in new home entertainment technology inevitably fall and most new TVs are now HD-ready, so expect an ever-increasing quantity of Blu-ray-standard movies for 2D (and soon, 3D) viewing to be available in your local video rental store.

### entertainment online

Alternatively, turn to the internet for your viewing pleasure. Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) is changing the way people watch TV, with leading electronics manufacturers teaming up with internet content providers to stream internet video on demand – as well as a host of other services – through their entertainment products. All you need is a broadband connection. From the comfort of their couches, people will be able to get "what they want, how they want it, when they want it," says Bob Perry of Panasonic. IPTV is available through internet-connected televisions, Blu-ray players and home theatre systems, and each provider offers different services – from YouTube access and weather forecasts to movie stores, new TV channels and more – so it's worth shopping around for the product that suits you best; for example, Sony IPTV devices offer ABC iView, Panasonic's Viera Cast includes Skype voice and video calls, while LG's NetCast offers Telstra products such as BigPond Movies and TV shows. >

PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP) DEREK SWALWELL

### SHOPPING



'S370' IPTV-enabled **Blu-ray player**, \$229,  
Sony, 1300 137 669, sony.com.au.



'LC52LE700X' LED backlight 52-inch **TV**,  
\$3699, Sharp, 1300 135 530, sharp.net.au.



'DMP-BD85' IPTV-enabled **Blu-ray player**,  
\$499, Panasonic, 132 600, panasonic.com.au.

## window wizards

Equally handy are devices that deal with your home environment – even when you're not there. The sensors on these smart products can take the human factor out of the equation entirely.

For peace of mind while you're out and about in changeable weather, rain sensors installed in sky windows, such as those from Acol and Velux, will close the windows at the first hint of precipitation. This feature adds around \$1000 to the cost of an automated skylight or roof window, but less per unit for more windows.

Luxaflex's motorised 'Sunrain' folding arm awning (from \$8562, plus installation) can be installed with sun and wind sensors which automatically move to screen your house from the worst of the elements. Slightly less high-tech but just as useful are motorised window coverings such as the Luxaflex 'Duette Architella' shades (from \$829, plus installation), which are controllable via switch or remote.

Advanced motorised blind systems continue to appear on the market, such as the Blinds by Peter Meyer 'Motoglide' panel glide system (pictured here), priced from \$1399 including remote control. These panels incorporate a unique gliding profile on plastic wheels for silent operation.



## the remote-control home

Revolutionising home automation are products that allow you to control your home over the internet through a laptop or smart phone. Clipsal's 'C-Bus Wiser' home controller, for example, enables remote access to your home theatre, multi-room audio, lighting, keyless entry, security cameras, motorised blinds and roller shutters, and airconditioning via your smart phone. Turning on home heating and cueing up a movie before you leave work is a real possibility, Alex Beltrame of Clipsal confirms. "This will happen in every home."

Similarly, Smart Systems' iPhone home automation kit (\$100 when purchased in conjunction with 'XIO' home automation products) lets you control everything, from lights to your electric blanket, from anywhere. No iPhone? Pick up a controller such as the Smart Systems 'XIO Touch Screen' (\$1399), which can also instruct your home automation system. The newest tablets, such as Apple's iPad, are set to follow suit; the thin, always-on devices can already browse the web, offer books, games and movies and send email – add an app and you can remotely control anything automation-enabled around your home. >

## SHOPPING

'DB-815' high-resolution intercom, \$299, Swann, (03) 8412 4600, swann.com.au.



iPad, from \$629/16GB, Apple, 133 622, apple.com/au.



'Nexion Vision' keyless lock set, \$299, Assa Abloy, 1300 562 587, assabloy.com.au.

## cutting-edge cable declutter

Cable clutter will soon be a thing of the past, thanks to brands such as Yamaha, which offers wire-free sound for your entertainment room. "Using Yamaha technology called Air Surround Xtreme, the YHT-S400 (\$999) provides virtual surround sound, so there's no need for speakers or messy cables," says Dale Moore of Yamaha. Intel Wireless Display Interface technology, or WiDi, will also soon be prominent. "While many people know that you can already connect your notebook computer to your television, it requires cables and cords that most people can't stand," says Anthony Geronimo of Toshiba – the first company to introduce Intel's WiDi technology into their laptops, allowing for a more simple connection process.

## locking up

While you're getting rid of wires, you might as well get rid of your keys too. With combined innovation from brands such as Lockwood and Assa Abloy, coming home with hands full of shopping bags will never be a problem again. The 'Nexion Vision' keyless lock set locks and unlocks via handheld remote. With a choice of 10 designer door levers and two knob styles, it fits into any design scheme. Plus its light-up alert shows the lock's status at a glance – meaning you'll never be away from home wondering whether you've left it unlocked.

If you've never been one to peer through the curtains at potential intruders, Swann's 'DVR4-2500' digital video recorder might change your mind about home surveillance – it allows you to stream live footage straight to your 3G iPhone! Swann's video intercom also delivers crystal-clear images, day or night, and can be self-installed in your doorway to give you peace of mind. The seven-inch, LCD colour screen with infra-red capabilities enables you to see, hear and speak to your home's visitors 24/7.

PHOTOGRAPHY (OPPOSITE) KEN HAYDEN/GETTY IMAGES





The latest TECHNOLOGY IN LIGHTING OFFERS THE POTENTIAL FOR DESIGNERS TO CREATE AMAZING LIGHTING EFFECTS.

## lighting up

Organic light emitting diode (OLED) technology is already available in super-slim televisions from brands such as LG. OLEDs are panels with an even cast of illumination (as opposed to LEDs, which emit pinpoint points of light), and as such, offer extraordinary potential in the creation of new light sources. OLED technology will soon be used in lamps from Philips that are responsive to gesture, able to be brightened or dimmed with the wave of a hand. There is potential for designers to create amazing lighting effects – think window-sized screens glowing with soft white or coloured light. Philips' latest concept product, the 'Lumiblade Reflections' OLED mirror wall screen, even has potential as an artwork, turning a mirrored reflection into dozens of miniature images with an aura of light.

## robo-home

With all the advancements in automation, it was only a matter of time before some of science fiction's more out-there ideas became reality. Mowing the lawn could be a thing of the past with Husqvarna's Automower. Powered by an eco-friendly rechargeable battery or even partly by solar power, the Automower silently cuts your lawn while you watch, or you can program it to mow while you're out. Similar indoor chores can be performed with products such as the 'Roomba' vacuum cleaner (\$599) and 'Scooba' floor washer (\$849) from iRobot, which covertly clean your floors and can be 'told' which areas to cover with Virtual Wall electronic room dividers. Samsung has also just launched an automated vacuum cleaner; the 'NaviBot' can cope with hard surfaces and carpets alike.

## what's next?

Product development is gathering pace, with prototypes and innovations for every area of the home showcased at technology fairs and smart homes on the global stage. Cocoon sleeping solutions such as the HiCan high-fidelity canopy could replace traditional beds, for example, offering ecological efficiency (heating just the cocoon, not the whole house), multimedia entertainment screens and motorised blinds to enclose you for a restful night's sleep. The Living Tomorrow 2010 concept home in Brussels displays touch-sensitive interactive surfaces, capable of handwriting recognition, online grocery shopping and energy consumption monitoring. Smart bathroom mirrors (from brands such as Roca) are set to follow suit, interacting with your toothbrush to update you on your health, display your blood pressure, remind you to take your medicine or turn on music, simply by touch.

## the energy question

With these amazing advancements, we need to remember the effect technology use has on energy resources – and its cost. Products such as the Clipsal 'Cent-a-Meter' (\$200, plus installation) measure your home's energy consumption, showing how much appliances are costing you in real time and the greenhouse gas generated by your electricity use, enabling you to trim your carbon footprint.

The good news is that television manufacturers are no slouches in the green energy game. "The large-screen TV is one of the most used, and thus power-demanding, lifestyle products after airconditioners and refrigerators," says Denis Kerr of Sharp, who have responded with the 'LC52LE700X' LED television, which has a low-power consumption of just 173W and is the only 7-star rated TV in Australia. Panasonic's new Viera plasma models (from \$999) are also impressively green options, boasting 5-star ratings. 

### SHOPPING

'Scooba' floor washer, \$849, iRobot, 1800 427 842, [roomba.com.au](http://roomba.com.au).



'Automower' robotic mower, from \$2999, Husqvarna, 1300 804 213, [husqvarna.com/au](http://husqvarna.com/au).

'NaviBot' vacuum cleaner, from \$799, Samsung, 1300 362 603, [samsung.com.au](http://samsung.com.au).

