

Technology turns off some... but it still sells

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When the owner let the water out, it flooded several floors below because the builders had forgotten to plumb in the waste pipe.

And if it's not plumbing, it's heating. One former resident of a high tech home complained of a heating system that seemed to be locked into mortal combat with the air conditioning. Both were adjusted to come on at pre-determined temperatures. The

'Why does every new house have a plasma screen over the fireplace?'

temperature would fall, causing the underfloor heating to kick-in. The house would then warm to the point at which the air conditioning would come on; the owner says it left her with burning feet and a frozen face. That was when the heating was functioning. "The boiler looked

like something from the inside of an ocean-going liner, yet it took four minutes for hot water to get up to the taps in my bathroom," she says. "When the heating system broke down I couldn't get it repaired for four months because only one person knew how to re-program it.

"Almost every London apartment over £4 million these days has climate control, Lutron lighting and a swimming pool as standard," says Robert Bailey, of Robert Bailey Properties, a buying agency. "Developers install high technology gadgets because they help to maximise the pounds per square foot that they can ask for the properties. Unquestionably gadgets do impress buyers and help to sell property." Yet the new owners' enthusiasm tends to fade, he says, when they come to use the gadgets. "The buyers for multi-million pound houses are older people, in their 50s," he adds. "They are not kids, and they are not used to the technology. I've seen it happen so many times. They move in and find that every evening they have to sit on the sofa and read through a



Not the cheap seats The home cinema of this seven-bedroom house in Barnes, London, includes a two-metre fixed screen and projector. There are sockets in all rooms allowing for networked computers or integrated phone system with 10 external lines. The price is £8.5 million through Knight Frank

manual to find out how to operate the blinds. I have a number of clients who have bought million pound houses, then have spent more money having them remodelled and simplified. One buyer spent a couple of hundred thousand turning his home cinema into a library."

One area where technology has been creating a stir is Wycombe Square, a group of neo-Georgian apartments and town houses in Kensington costing from £675,000 to £6.25 million, with fixtures and fittings to match the price. The developer, St James Homes, seeks to improve the quality of life for its "stressed out, time-poor purchasers": "From

architectural sensitivity to opulent specification, landscape layout to well thought-out practicalities," reads the marketing blurb, "there is nothing that the developer has failed to include in pursuit of its residents' pampering." The development won an award and sells well, but while most buyers are delighted with their new toys, not everybody was enamoured with taps operated by infra-red beam and swimming pools equipped with ionisation filtration systems. One apartment owner put a list of complaints in his window, in full view of prospective buyers visiting the show flat next door. Needless to say, the developer

quickly addressed his grievances. "Our development features a state-of-the-art specification, says Bob Crompton, a director of St James Homes. "Inevitably, as is the case with so many innovative systems, adjustments have been necessary."

But it seems for every technophobe, there are a clutch of buyers - especially pied a terre hunters from overseas - ready to snap up the best in electronic wizardry. The developers Candy & Candy, for instance, have won over Hollywood film stars and Russian tycoons with their gradiose style and high-tech taste. The young brothers have kitted out Belgravia and Mayfair

apartments, typically ranging from £3 million to £10 million in price, with trademark gizmos: automatic awnings which cover terraces at the first sign of rain, an "intelligent" bedroom mirror which videos your image from behind and plays it onto a plasma screen, and champagne fridges - for keeping 94 bottles perfectly chilled.

So if you do fancy a home stuffed with the latest technology, says Robert Bailey, insist upon a full log of all the devices and who has installed them. And if you're the sort of buyer who has only just mastered their mobile phone, it's likely that the new generation of homes is not for you.

TOP TECHNOLOGICAL MUST-HAVES

(or must-not-haves, depending on your opinion)

Pre-set lighting controls: Allows lighting to be programmed in several favoured formats, for example a "dinner party" setting or a "watching television" format. Lights can also be set to dim over time.

Fingerprint entry systems: Footproof in theory, though some users have complained the system can be temperamental.

Fully-programmable audio system: Allows you to store your favourite pieces of music and to play them throughout the house using a hand-held unit. All the rage until the iPod came along and did pretty much the same job for a fraction of the price.

Induction cooker hobs: Produce heat only when a saucepan is placed on them.

Swimming pool with ionisation filtration system: Avoids the need for chlorine and its associated smells, which allows swimming pools to be incorporated more closely into the living space.

Infra-red taps: Turn on and off in response to heat produced by the hands; no need for dirty fingers to touch the taps.

Automated blinds and curtains: Blinds open and shut according to pre-set pattern; fools burglars into thinking you are at home when in fact you are on a beach in St Lucia.

Home cinema: Increasingly popular in upmarket developments; a good use of a dark basement.

CCTV relayed to your mobile phone: You can see what is going on in and around your home when you are on the other side of the world.

Coming soon:

Automatic re-stocking fridge: Scans barcodes and could be programmed to re-order items when you are running low, and arrange delivery via an internet grocer.

Automatic diagnosing toilet: An innovation, confined as yet to science magazines, which analyses effluent and contacts your doctor if necessary. Could spot trouble early, but not everybody wants a doctor spying on them.



Gadgets or no gadgets A conventional four-bedroom house, left, with garden in South Kensington, is on the market for £1.2 million through Douglas & Gordon, while a two-bedroom property in the same area, right, that has been fitted with the latest in mood lighting and a range of other technologies, is for sale at £1.5 million through Farrer & Co.



More for your money A four-bedroom house near Notting Hill, London, right, fitted with internal fire detection systems and external motion detectors, plus air conditioning and underfloor heating, as well as a range of home automation systems, is on the market at £2.5 million through Knight Frank. A similar-sized property, left, is a better buy for the market for £2.2 million with 4 months to Christmas.

