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The best tech for the backyard

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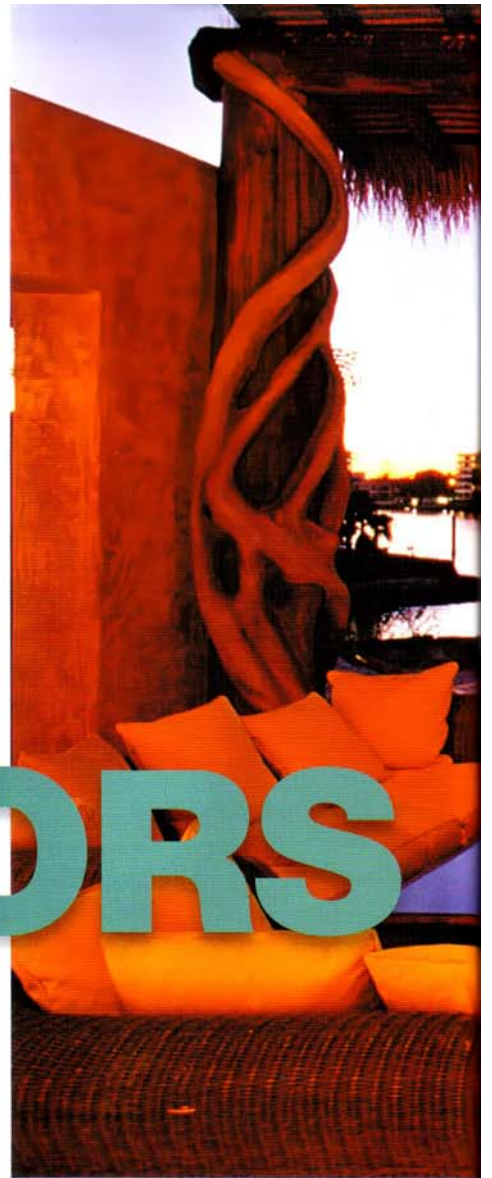
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ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE CONNECTED HOME INDUSTRY

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Home automation technology is helping bring the comforts of home to the backyard, reports **Paul Skelton**.



The Sunday barbecue is a long-standing tradition in Australia – it's a chance to catch up with family and friends, drink beer and enjoy the serenity.

Australians spend a lot of time outside entertaining others, and luckily we have the ideal weather for it.

Home automation technology is quickly spreading throughout the home, and with the amount of time we spend in the back yard it should also be considered part of the typical Aussie residence.

Home automation technology is helping more and more Australians embrace the laid-back lifestyle they enjoyed while growing up.

"Given the tropical nature of the Queensland climate, where entertaining outside reigns supreme, it makes sense to bring technology to an outdoor setting to enhance the whole home automation experience," says 5thCorner director Kelly Weijers.

"We regularly use devices for seamless outdoor living, like Bose Lifestyle system

waterproof keypads to control music and video while you're kicking back in the pool or spa and Bose weatherproof speakers for outdoor music.

"Plasmas in pavilions and front projection systems are also becoming more popular."

The team at 5thCorner in Brisbane recently completed a project known as the Bali House at Sanctuary Cove on the Gold Coast. This two-storey property was designed to reflect the arts, culture and lifestyle of the Balinese people through its adoption of raked ceilings lined with woven bamboo.

The property features a C-bus lighting control system with a touch screen to ensure central control of all utilities. Outdoor technology products range from AV components through to motion sensors, which detect movement and turn on the lights.

"We like to integrate music distribution technology into the outdoor area of a property," Kelly says.

"People want more of the creature comforts from the indoors, like large displays and

surround sound systems – especially for high-end properties with resort-style outdoor areas.

"Integrating speakers into this environment was very difficult because they come in black, white and silver – not exactly the colours of bamboo. In-wall speakers weren't an option, so we certainly had to get creative with their placement."

Kelly says moisture is a problem for most AV components, so equipment lifespan may be affected.

"We have encountered some brilliant outdoor innovations though – waterproof keypads help overcome some moisture issues."

AMX Australia, for example, is doing its part to ensure connectivity extends to the great outdoors. The company has developed a water-resistant bezel set for its AXD-CP4/A 4-inch flush-mounted colour touch screens.

The new bezel set covers the screen with a thin, transparent water-resistant film to protect the bezel, touch screen, sensor lens and



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pushbuttons. It also includes a rubber-foam gasket that seals a potential gap between the bezel and the wall.

With weather protection under wraps, so to speak, other external factors need to be considered when integrating technology in an outdoor environment.

"Our biggest problems were to do with light levels," Kelly says.

"Visual displays perform best in low light condition, so this presents challenges for outdoor viewing."

"It's tricky to solve the lighting problems for outdoor screens. The best thing to do is have a

dual display system using plasma for everyday viewing and a motorised projector at night."

Rain, wind and light sensors are also growing in popularity, as they help to create a smart house that adapts to all conditions. Rain sensors can be linked to irrigation systems, wind sensors to the opening and closing of external awnings, and light-level sensors to the operation of motorised blinds.

Clipsal has a versatile sunset switch with light-level sensor, the 31VSSR, which incorporates a configurable timer and a circuit that allows control of a 10A load current (relay output) in a two-wire configuration.



Clipsal's 31VSSR sunset switch automatically turns on the connected fluorescent or incandescent load when the ambient light level falls below 10 lux around sunset and switches off when the light level exceeds 30 lux.

The 31VSSR automatically turns on the connected fluorescent or incandescent load when the ambient light level falls below 10 lux about sunset. The load remains on until the next morning when the light level exceeds 30 lux, unless manually overridden.

Alternatively, the Clipsal C-Bus light-level sensor is used for measuring and regulating lighting in the range of 40-1,600 lux. The 5031PE light-level sensor is powered from a C-Bus network and requires 18mA at 15-36V DC for correct operation. The system can be used to achieve bank switching or continuous dimming, while the installer programs the target light level as well as the margin on installation.

With a large percentage of the population living in inner-city apartments, RF interference can play havoc with custom installations.

Urban Intelligence director Dr Lior Rauchberger says his company has completed several outdoor installations in penthouses or apartments close to the CBD.



"Given the tropical nature of the Queensland climate, it makes sense to bring technology to an outdoor setting," says Brisbane's 5thCorner director Kelly Weijers.

"In several of these installations we have experienced a lot of wireless interference, which may have originated from mobile phones towers, wireless networks or many other potential sources.

"This interference can impair the functionality of remote controls that operate outdoor lights, sound systems, pool pumps, pool cover and heaters. To overcome this, we use wireless hardware that provides for a

range of wireless frequencies then selected a frequency with no interference."

Lior often tries several wireless channels to get optimum performance.

"In some cases we perform spectrum analysis of the wireless band, establishing categorically over which frequencies interferences exist, and then we'll specify hardware on interference-free frequencies."

"Placement of equipment outdoors is always a challenge, as sound diffusion in a large open area needs to be considered to ensure the sound doesn't get lost. This can be solved by the quantity and location of loudspeakers. Multiple speakers are required in many outdoor locations."

In the bushfire-prone territory of Plenty, Victoria, Happy Hollow (see *Connected Home Solutions*, March 2007) features a Bose outdoor entertainment setting integrated into an HPM iCONTROL system.

"It blows me away every time we use it," says Edge Build director Michael Watts.

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"It creates this almighty surround sound, which doesn't split between left and right speakers.

"The excitement from the inside of the house extends out to the pool area, where you will find two pairs of the unique Bose Freespace 51 Environmental Garden Speakers. The impressive bass response and 360° sound dispersion of the Bose FS51 speakers deliver impact sound to the entire pool, and lower deck area.

"Bose suggested placing four outdoor speakers under the deck near the pool, and that has turned out to be my favourite thing about the installation."

Back north, in the exclusive Gold Coast suburb of Isle of Capri, a mansion featuring handcrafted sandstone baths and basins, imported Indian handrails and refinished rosewood and cedar doors also takes technology outdoors. Custom integration outfit AV Central provided a full Clipsal C-Bus automation system for this unique mansion.



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The inclusion of C-Bus in the home accents its surreal exterior design of T-shaped pool with artificial coral reef. Bluegum logs wrapped in concrete vines support the three-storey home, and concrete walls have been specially rendered and treated to create a smooth, variegated glass-feel finish.

A 'party mood' lighting scene activates balcony and exterior lights as well as dimming kitchen and hallway lights to 50% to easily guide guests to the bathroom. Two-way control of these lighting moods also been made available via the C-Bus touch screen and C-Bus switches.

The integration of outdoor entertainment areas can go a long way towards making a house complete. With entertainment and comfort, back yard installations make the back yard Australia's favourite room. ■

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