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GO & TOUCH

Where can you get **hands-on** and personal with the latest wonders of home automation? Mmm, good question...



ABOVE: Part showroom, part private venue, the 5thCorner Technology Lounge applies smart technology and home automation to avant-garde interior design

Here's the problem. You're building a home, or planning to retrofit an existing house with smart-home systems. But whereas with conventional hi-fi and AV gear you can put on your shopping shoes and head to your neighbourhood specialist, it can be far harder to get an overview of the possibilities of an integrated home.

The trouble with a top home installation is that you can't see it. The best home automation systems leave nothing to view except a snazzy touch-screen. Speakers can be hidden in walls and ceilings; plasmas rise from custom cabinetry; equipment racks roll out from secret control rooms. The room, if not the cupboard, is bare.

The professional installers we speak with all tell us the same story. It's hard for a client to understand how everything works unless they experience it first. And that means hands-on playing with control panels and touch-screens — not just to pick a nice design, but to make sure the system will meet their specific needs and desires as a family.

But where can you do that?

The answer is the 'show-home'. Savvy installers have begun working with builders and architects to include home automation in the show-houses they build to demonstrate new build options. And larger dealers are finding it effective to convert part or all of their shops into pseudo 'home environments' in which potential customers can play with those touch-screens and control pads, raise blinds and ▶



TOP AND BOTTOM IMAGES: 5thCorner Technology Lounge, Brisbane; see also main image p57

CENTRAL THREE IMAGES: Surround Sounds, Nedlands, Western Australia. Top is the 'McIntosh Room' or lounge; centre is the bar, with custom director Mark Jeisman presiding; below is the intelligent bathroom display



activate water features, instigate one-touch macro movie theatre magic, and experience the many other life-enhancing possibilities that today's integrated electronics can achieve.

SIX INTO ONE

One of Australia's prime examples of the new direction is Surround Sounds in Western Australia. The company formerly had six retail stores operating with the usual selection of demonstration rooms, but the decision was made to fold all six into one single enlarged "smart show-home" store at the group's Nedlands headquarters. The new premises has over 1000 square metres of space, including more than 10 rooms in which customers can see and experience the technology in action. The entire installation is managed by a Crestron Home Automation system which enables sophisticated control over many aspects of the home's environment.



"Customers are amazed that somebody has actually created something like this to showcase the technology," says Mark Jeisman, Surround Sounds' custom director. "The quality comfortable surroundings in the store allow the client to feel at home; it's interesting how their disposition changes when they're here. They're much more comfortable, their dialogue changes, they're more focused on how things will look and how it will suit their lifestyle."



The show-home's rooms include a home theatre, a formal lounge, dining room, home office, family room, master bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and bar! Special features include a TV entombed inside a waterfall, a motorised retractable TV from the ceiling in the main bedroom, and a kitchen mirror that bursts into life as a TV at the flick of a switch.

"My favourite room in the place is what we call it the McIntosh Room, but it's really the lounge room," says Jeisman. "It's just a beautiful warm room to sit in with your favourite CD and listen to some beautiful B&W speakers and McIntosh amplification.

"Second to that room is the bar," he laughs.

CORNER CLUB

On the other side of the country in Brisbane is one of the snazziest demonstration facilities yet — 5thCorner Technology Lounge. The Lounge is designed to serve a dual purpose.

"We wanted to create a place for customers to experience the benefits of audio-visual and automation products, and also to have a boutique venue for functions and product launches," explains Kelly Weijers, co-owner of 5thCorner. All 450 square metres are fitted out to appeal to architects, designers, specifiers and anyone else with a penchant for "slick design fused with smart technology."

