

- Wired for the Future -

Rachel O'Rorke explains the BIDA's belief in educating the interior design industry about the importance of smart home technology



BIDA

The British Interior Design Association (BIDA) exists to promote best practice within interior design and professionalism throughout the Industry as a whole. The Association therefore has a responsibility to educate interior designers and their clients about advances in smart technology for the home, both now and for the future. To this end, we are hosting a day-long seminar on smart home technology and systems integration for designers, architects, project managers and specifiers, aimed directly at educating delegates in this field of interior design, to ensure that they remain abreast of market trends, new product launches and building regulations. Designers have a duty of care to their client to specify only from an educated position, rather than leaving the client to the mercy of a series of untrained manufacturers with no over-arching, holistic design strategy.

As the design industry evolves, so too does the need for interior designers, project managers and specifiers to keep informed about all elements of specification for a design brief. Increasingly, a client will expect an interior designer to be as confident and well-informed about specifying technology for an interior design project as they would about specifying custom built furniture or carpets. In short, a client would expect an interior designer to have the expertise to source and supply the client with non-standard audiovisual and systems technology installation that was not necessarily available to buy on the high street. You would not go to a couturier to be fitted with something that you could buy yourself on the high street. Similarly, purchase through an interior designer and a client expects to be buying into the very best advice and expertise.

Equally, for a design project – whether a refurbishment or a new build – a client will employ an interior designer with the expectation that they, or an professional adviser employed on the project, will have the knowledge, expertise and foresight to ensure the appropriate cabling has been laid to facilitate systems integration throughout the property from the outset. The designer is responsible for ensuring that the house is wired to accommodate possible changes in room function and advances in technology in the future.

With the leaps forward in portable systems and reliance on communication portals, so too have the social dynamics of home life changed to incorporate the equipment that was previously shut away behind closed doors. Where once a computer was simply an aide for work, it is now a central facet to many home automation and entertainment systems, relieving shelves of their heavy music and video collection burdens. But this shift in attitude is not always accompanied by a shift in user accessibility.

In addition to the functional requirements, the role of the interior designer should take into account aesthetic considerations, and to combine form and function successfully. After all, an interior designer is employed with the purpose of ensuring integrity of design. Every client has a personal style or taste and a perception of how the finished design will look, but they expect an interior designer to coordinate all facets of the design, to ensure a polished and integrated outcome. When technology is used with experience and confidence in the home, the outcome should be neat, discreet and very efficient. It is therefore the designer's responsibility to bring technology to the attention of their client and to suggest a viable, better alternative to something the client might themselves have considered.

For example: A client requires a top end distributed audio system and goes to an AV outlet to acquire this. They come away with a very cool but dominant pair of speakers. Had the interior designer planned for this in the overall design of the room? If so, the client could have been advised of alternative AV equipment e.g. by integrating the speaker units into the ceiling, using motorised speakers that are retractable and discreet, or the use of artwork to disguise speakers within the wall. Without such discussion and pre-planning at the conceptual stage of a design project, inevitably a situation will arise where there is a conflict of interest between the clients requirements and the aesthetics of the room design. Dialogue between the client and designer from the outset of the project is therefore vital and the designer has a responsibility to the client to make an educated decision about what product would meet the clients needs most appropriately.

The interior designer needs to embrace the concept of introducing their client to possible products and services that are not necessarily available through regular retail outlets. Many clients with a large budget would not be aware of an alternative solution that would offer them ease of use and which would fit within their budget. If the client hasn't employed a systems integrator and is relying on the Architect/Designer, the client would not necessarily know how best to utilise their budget with optimum effect unless informed by an expert on the options available to them. Wiring a property for the future is therefore a fundamental part of a design brief and as such, education in this area is vital if the public are to grow confidence in the value of employing an interior designer.

The BIDA recognise the importance of collaboration between systems integrators and designers for the design of future, both in residential and commercial projects. Designers have a duty to up-hold the reputation of the interior design profession by knowing what they are talking about and advising the client from a position of knowledge. Education of both parties will facilitate communication between client and designer, allowing less of a margin for conflict or lack of fulfilment of the design brief.



Designing Tomorrow's Homes...
 Today' Smart home technology and system integration in conjunction with CEDIA, the RIBA and idFX magazine on 23rd May 2005 at the Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chelsea Harbour, London.
 Contact BIDA for booking information

The following BIDA Corporate members will be involved with the conference:

- Leax Lighting Controls www.leax.co.uk
- Lutron Lighting Controls www.lutron.com
- The Westye Group Europe Ltd www.sub-zero.eu.com
- Martin Kleiser Limited www.martin-kleiser.com
- i.life Solutions www.ccomm.co.uk
- Light IQ Ltd. www.lightiq.com
- John Cullen Lighting www.johncullenlighting.co.uk
- Gibson Music www.gibson-music.com

Demonstrations of Leax's seamless home automation consoles courtesy of Light IQ

