Tomorrow’s Home Today

His dream home on Sydney’s North Shore almost complete, David Richards’ smart house is full of automation technology. Here, he gives a run-down on what automation will mean to the future of housing and how even those on a meagre budget can afford some aspects of tomorrow’s homes.
Home owners are now starting to put apertures in walls where TVs can be hidden when they are not in use.

Security cameras can be remotely controlled utilising a portable device like a smart phone.
When putting together automation solutions, getting James Billington from Smart Home Solutions on side would be a good start. Not only does his company specialise in kitting out smart houses, but also gives them that energy-efficient, green edge.

At a recent install, energy efficiency was one of the main design planks given to Billington’s team. So what exactly is a green install and what are its practicalities?

“It means Energy Management control,” says Billington. “Basically, you have cable coming in from the street that goes to a circuit board and then it goes into our lighting control system. This means we can now regulate the power throughout the house because that is a Commercial Grade energy management control system. It is used in hotels, clubs, stadiums, universities, even Luna Park.”

The first step was to get an energy efficient configuration up and running.

“One of the first things programmed was that we only allowed 80 per cent of power to go in,” says Billington. “Before anything else happens we have reduced the electricity throughout the house on all of the keypads. We also programmed other functions to come into play with power savings in mind.”

Such as? “We used motorised blinds. We programmed the panel so that every afternoon when the sun comes around to the west-facing windows, the blinds automatically shut even when they weren’t home,” says Billington. “This did two things – it
reduced the amount of energy used by the air conditioner because the house is not going to be as hot. It also—and this is not an energy issue—stopped the furnishings from fading. “But there were other, more subtle ways that Smart House Solutions made sure energy savings were kept down. Lights were programmed to soft start. “On a normal light switch, if I press a button, 100 percent energy goes through, even if I drag it back and dim it. 100 percent still goes through in the first place,” says Billington. “A soft start is where it ramps up slower than normal.
Then we have a fade finish where it fades down when you switch it off. It saves the filament in the bulb. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, your lamps go when you switch it on because it’s like driving a car from 0-100 in two seconds. This way bulbs last up to four times longer.”

The energy-efficient trend continues with the client’s water reticulation system, which can be controlled remotely. “We get over-riding power and we give Internet access,” he says. “This means they can control the system via their telephone, or whatever.”

Billington points out that it’s not like people are full-on greenies, it’s just a respect for the environment that more people are becoming aware of. This is almost a matter of course, as opposed to people feeling they have to do it. With this house, there were also the smaller power-saving ideas that came into play.

“Most people now pay some respect to their environment if they know how to do it,” says Billington. “In many cases it is not affordable but in some cases where it is affordable clients go to great lengths to be energy efficient. This family was conscious of energy efficiency particularly the water reticulation and blinds as mentioned. However, their home theatre was only a plasma screen and not a large screen projector, which was a decision made partially due the green factor.”

So, if you want to lessen the impact on the environment when building your home, then Smart Home Solutions can find ways to make sure you make the most of your energy efficiencies.