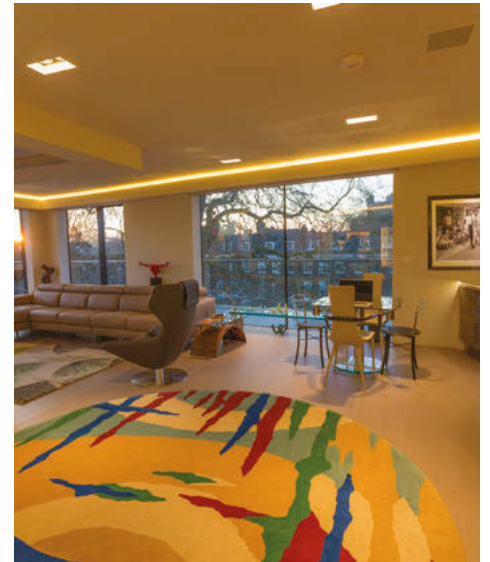




An Exeter home kitted out by local home automation and audio-visual consultants Intelligent Abodes



GROUND CONTROL

KAREN CHUGG of Exeter-based Intelligent Abodes helps unpack the latest developments in tech for the home

It was not that long ago that a smart home was considered aspirational. However, now, with so many new and affordable products on the market, it is a possibility for everyone. But what does 'smart home' actually mean – and how do you create one? It's simple. Having a smart home just means connecting your devices and appliances together, giving you seamless control over all aspects of your home.

"I have seen a huge change in home control over the last few years," says Karen Chugg (pictured right), managing director of Intelligent Abodes in Exeter. "Music and TV were, initially, the priority for most people, as they liked the idea of a multiroom system enabling you to listen to the same music in every room – great for entertaining or letting each member of the family listen to their own music from their own phones or tablets in separate rooms.

"Systems like Sonos and Nuvo, have really changed the way we access and connect our music in the home, and, even better, the equipment is all hidden away in one discreet location. More recently, we have seen the demand for lighting control, automated blinds, heating control and smart security really increase too. The challenge for many of our clients is knowing which product to select and how to connect them together, which is what leads people to our door."

These days more and more people have devices that can be controlled with an iPhone; from thermostats, like Nest and Heatmiser, that are intelligent enough to know what temperature it should be based on your usual needs, to security systems that send alarms to your iPhone. In a smart home, you may have several apps to control a variety of activities or devices such as lighting, heating, curtains or blinds, music, TV, security systems and door entry. Home control solutions bring everything together in one easy to control app on your phone, tablet or watch.

There are a variety of home control solutions available and, in order to determine the ideal solution for you, it requires a decision about what you want to control, the level of control, your level of involvement in setting up the solution and, importantly, your budget.

"One of the things I love about home control solutions, like Vantage and RTi," says Karen, "is that they offer one-step solutions. With the press of one button you can transform a room into your perfect relaxing environment, with dimmed lights, closed blinds, TV switched on – and even initiate the water feature in the fish tank!

"Amazon, Apple and Samsung all have easy-to-use home control systems, linking various products together like heating control

systems, Nest and Heatmiser and lighting control systems like Lutron and Philips Hue.

Says Karen: "dimming of lighting has never been easier with off-the-shelf products like Philips Hue, as they provide light bulbs and strip lighting that can be dimmed. For those people that like a more sophisticated lighting control, the Lutron system is very popular, as it provides smooth, controlled dimming of several lighting circuits with any light fitting, including low watt LEDs, which is the main source of lighting now with the halogen ban next year. Lutron is great where you require task lighting, perfect for those multi-functional living spaces where you entertain, relax, watch TV, cook and dine, and Lutron can be integrated with Apple Siri and Amazon Alexa so you can have voice control of lighting, heating and blinds!"

Home security is something that most of us are increasingly concerned about. Our homes are full of valuables such as music and TV systems, treasured furnishings and ornaments. It can be surprising how much of great value we pack into even the smallest home.

"There's a huge range of security systems available to people these days," Karen reassures. "Home alarms are helpful, but increasingly we are installing more CCTV systems which accurately monitor external spaces and we can check on loved ones and pets internally too!

"We combine CCTV with geo-fencing so you can distinguish effectively from intruders and animals, and those combined with lighting control can deter any would-be burglar. Door and gate entry systems can be controlled using a smart phone or tablet. So you can answer your door and no one will know if you are at home or food shopping at the local supermarket. Avoid missing deliveries – when you get that call, advise them where to leave your parcel safely!

"Of course, most of these systems, whether streaming TV, music or accessing your home remotely, all require a robust, reliable network. The ideal solutions wirelessly link together, to form an invisible mesh throughout your home, allowing signal steering to give better connectivity where it is needed.

"I particularly like Ruckus as it not only offers 'best in class' performance, it also provides the ultimate security, so your system is protected from unwanted users and you can access your home safely while away." **EL**

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