

**Karen Chugg**

is a woman in a predominantly man's world. As MD of Intelligent Abodes, which specialises in the design and installation of home automated systems, she has an in-depth technical understanding of the latest home technology.



Together with her husband, Tim, she set up the company in 2008 after seeing a need to raise awareness and encourage interest in home automation. Projects range from luxury homes and hotels to single smart installations, mostly in the south-west. Karen describes home automation as "fun", "de-cluttering", and "energy saving". We asked her more.



An open-plan bedroom in a new build showing flush-mounted colour touchscreen.

# Smart SOLUTIONS



**Left:** An integrated switch turns on the lights and opens the door to a temperature controlled wine cellar in a new build in Lymptone, a project completed with Tony Pollintine from Exeter-based Grainge Architects.  
**Below:** A living area with integrated music, TV and lighting control with wall mounted colour touchscreens and iPad control.

## HOW CAN IT IMPROVE YOUR HOME?

I think the term IT can confuse people; it is often associated with over-complication and difficulty. Home automation is just a fresh approach to the entertainment that people already have in their houses. For example, music and TV systems can be sited in one central location, avoiding the need for unsightly equipment in each room; even TV screens can be discreetly hidden behind artwork and speakers plastered into the walls to preserve a clean, contemporary design. There is also the flexibility to manage a home from afar – I recently stepped off the plane and turned up our heating, so when we arrived home in the middle of the night, we could move little ones from a warm car to a warm bed. Likewise, lighting can be controlled at the touch of a switch to suit the task, whether it's cooking, entertaining, or simply relaxing! The beauty of home control solutions is it brings all these areas of technology together so that your home can be both a functional workspace, as well as a place for relaxing and entertaining. With one application on your smartphone or tablet you can modify lighting and heating, adjust music and set your TV, offering control that is simple and fun.

## DESCRIBE SOME OF YOUR PROJECTS

We work with a number of mainly south-west-based architects, developers and designers. We are currently working on a new penthouse with Woodford Architects in the centre of Exeter. It is on the top of an older building and it has been great to work from the early design phase so we can discreetly incorporate lighting, security, and audio visual systems that complement the architecture. Although it's not essential, we like to be involved from the design phase, working





A renovation project of an old stables with music and lighting control in kitchen, living room and mezzanine.



closely with the architect, lighting designer, interior designer, electrical contractors and, of course, the project manager to ensure we are all sharing to the same vision. This was the situation with a recent home project in Lymstone, Devon. The clients wanted a sophisticated home control system that was simple to use. They enjoy socialising, with their home frequently filled with friends, so having a system that everyone could use with ease, enhancing the entertainment and fun, was essential. We installed RTi as the home control solution which was totally designed around the client's needs and incorporated Lutron lighting, an audio-visual solution and networking. The lighting was also used to enhance some design features in the garden and the water well in the house. The client requested the ability to control the wine cellar door via the Lutron keypad which was easily achieved and avoided the need for further switches.

#### DO YOU HAVE ANY PET HATES?

I sometimes feel disappointed when people can't see the vision of what home automation could offer them in the years to come. Having built a home ourselves, we are fully aware of escalating costs and the need to prioritise – so naturally people focus on the build. However, once the clients move into their home it is the interior and comforts that become paramount; consequently one of my goals is to help people design and install a cabling infrastructure that will support their needs now and in the future. I also don't like it when people aren't given the respect and time they deserve. There's a solution for every project and budget.



#### HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY NEW TRENDS?

Yes! 4k TVs/ blu-ray players offer the latest in technology for improving image definition. Many visual systems (TVs, blu-rays, projectors) claim to be ready, but may not incorporate all the components. Most programmes don't yet broadcast in 4K – so it will be mainly useful for streamed programmes and blu-ray, but even then the TV will upscale to give you a better picture than most existing TVs. It really does make an amazing difference to the definition of programmes!

#### ANY IT TIPS FOR SELFBUILDERS?

Always consider carefully how you will use your home, and imagine how you would like to utilise the space – what music, visual, networking and lighting requirements you have so the right products can be matched to your needs.

#### CAN IT BE INSTALLED RETROSPECTIVELY?

We work on many renovation projects and all home automation can be installed sensitively in existing homes – most of it can be controlled wirelessly.

**Above left:** A water feature was integrated into the lighting control in this garden in Devon, providing a warm glow outside when dining.

**Above:** A living room showing smart living integration to preserve contemporary designs.

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