

Trib

Renovate!

E-HOME:
THE CONNECTIONS
YOU NEED

FAVORITE THINGS:
GOING GREEN WITH
ED BEGLEY JR.

STYLE AND DESIGN:
ECO CHIC DECORATING

NEWLYWED REHABBERS' SURVIVAL GUIDE



DARE TO REMODEL

Two homeowners
take the plunge

REARRANGE IT

Designer Shelly Handman
gets fresh





A tech guru's guide to upgrading your home

Eric Wolfram is chief tech officer and co-founder of Integrisys, a Chicago firm specializing in innovative home technology, whether you're building condos, future-proofing a mansion or retrofitting a bungalow. He's much sought-after, so listen up. You're getting this free with the Sunday paper.

DIGITAL VIDEO: "The days of physical DVDs may be numbered," says Wolfram. He recommends looking into the options for streaming video directly into your television, like AppleTV, the Netflix player or VUDU's high definition movie player. "I hear Blockbuster is coming out with a box, and you can get movies on an Xbox 360. You could end up with five or six boxes hooked up to your TV." Wolfram recommends picking one solution based on the streaming quality and whether the movie library matches your family's preferences. "Netflix rises above the rest—for now. They have a wide range of movies, their box is relatively inexpensive, the streaming videos are close to DVD quality and they'll be offering HD streaming soon."

STRATEGIC WIRING: "It's a myth that everything will be wireless soon," Wolfram says. He strongly recommends that home renovators place speaker wires in the walls of every room. "There aren't many wireless speakers that don't have interference and noise problems and, on top of that, if the speakers aren't plugged in the power has to come from somewhere—like batteries that you'll have to replace monthly." And if you're opening up your walls, Wolfram says, you shouldn't miss the opportunity to install CAT 5 wiring as a "guarantee of quality." He explains that CAT 5 isn't just about a fast Internet connection. "It can even help you centralize your cable and video boxes in one location so you can send video over the wires to any television in the house. You can't do that wirelessly."

HIDDEN TECHNOLOGY: "There are a lot of options coming along that will let you hide your technology out of sight," Wolfram says. "We can install speakers that are totally invisible; they get installed along with the drywall and can be treated or painted just like the walls and ceilings." Another favorite trick is to install TVs and iPod docks recessed into the walls, sometimes with motorized artwork that rolls down to cover them when not in use. New TV mounts can tilt and swivel at the touch of a screen or a remote control, and you can hide your bathroom TV behind a mirror. When it's off, you see only your reflection.

HOME AUTOMATION: The automated home—where a one-touch screen controls your TVs, video boxes, sound system, lights, thermostats, security—has never been more affordable. At Integrisys, they especially like the home automation products by a company called Control4. "Their stuff allows you to control your home from touch screens scattered through the house, or even remotely—right down to whether the drapes are up or down—from anywhere you can access a Web browser."

SMART LIGHTING: Wolfram says the energy savings from installing an automated lighting system can be significant. "A system that allows you to press one button putting the whole house into 'sleep' mode or 'away' mode not only saves energy, it also extends the life of your bulbs." He notes that lighting accounts for 20 percent of all electricity consumed in the U.S. and that 50 percent of that is wasted either because the lighting is inefficient or lights are left on in unoccupied rooms. "You can even control your landscape lighting based on automated calculations of sunrise and sunset," he says. "Things like that will save you money."

DOORBELL PHONE: Doorbells integrated with cordless phone systems that allow you to buzz someone in from your home phone have been around forever, but they're still worth doing. "Plus, if you added a home automation system you could push a button on your touch screen, pull up a camera image of who's at the door on your TV, and decide whether you really want to buzz them in."

SECURITY INTEGRATION: Anyone who's remodeling should at least think about installing a security system, advises Wolfram, who also notes that this is one area where wireless really is better. "The new systems have a much higher degree of reliability and aesthetics these days—the sensors completely disappear. Up-to-date burglar alarms can be expanded to include options like a 'help situation' if the homeowner has a health problem. They can even be programmed to notify you if you've got water collecting in your basement." □