



Courtesy of Total Home Technology
available through Webster & Company

potentially add to it, it adds value. Sometimes, the desire is that the components be invisible, the end goal is that you not see anything."

Although Bang & Olufsen (which sells both its own brand and others) has worked with designers for many years, moving into the Design Center has made it easier for designers and customers to include their specific technology needs with their overall design solution, Pennington said. That solution might be a system that will dim the lights, shut the shades, turn on the CD system to a specific cut, and adjust the heat, all with the push of a button. Ease of use is particularly important, Pennington stresses, because if it's easy to use, people will use it more often. With the use of one control panel, technology integration can create different sensory moods and the proper backdrop for any home occasion or situation.

David Ducharme, president of Total Home Technology, which is distributed through Webster & Company, has worked on homes that have integrated the Jacuzzi, the alarm, the pool, heat, air conditioning, lights, television and sound on one common interface. Many homes will have different zones for heat, air conditioning or music. One home in Milford, MA, featured 16 different rooms, and each room was its own zone, featuring not only different temperature settings but also featuring different music, at different volume levels, with the option of turning on the television with the sound playing over the speakers in that room. In most cases, the speakers were hidden in the ceiling.

"It was a very exciting project," said Ducharme, who sells various brands and types of technology. "One person could be in the kitchen, listening to the Beatles' *Help* and someone else could be in the basement listening to Nirvana.

Ducharme said he has integrated all types of technological components into one network, including at-home computer net-

works. He and Pennington both clearly get excited about projects that have posed particular challenges, and their creative solutions.

For instance, Ducharme designed an integrated technology system for a Winchester family whose kitchen opened into the family room. In the family room, Total Home Technology installed a home theater with surround sound which could be seen and heard in the kitchen. With the flick of a switch, however, the speakers in the kitchen could pipe in music from another source, and the sound of the TV would be isolated in the family room. What made the project even more challenging was a mixture of hard surfaces, such as a tile floor and hardwood floor.

"Acoustically and technically it presented challenges, but that's what we do," Ducharme said. "It (the technology) was perfect for that space."

For a movie fan in Brookline who didn't want a dedicated theater room, Bang & Olufsen designed technology components that created a great viewing environment in a nicely appointed living room. With the touch of a button, the lights went down, a skylight shade closed, a screen came down from the ceiling, and a DVD started, played at the appropriate volume. "This lovely room was now transformed into a theater," Pennington said.

One of the more recent trends for home technology integration is tied to a modern lifestyle trend. As empty nesters and others leave large homes in the suburbs for apartments and condos in the city, it presents challenges for both designer and technology specialist. "They want the same accoutrements, but tied into a smaller environment," said Pennington.

The smaller environment may also come in an older or rehabilitated unit with odd angles, fireplaces and windows that pose acoustic issues.

For both design and functionality, the *Beosound* music systems which offer huge and sophisticated sound in a tiny package and other compact sound systems promise to be the audio equivalent of the flat-screen plasma television. Like a high-quality flat-screen TV, they provide excellent performance and can fit well into a designed interior. Some models also come with a



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self-calibrating feature that will measure the sound quality in different parts of the room, and adjust accordingly for wood, carpets, reflective surfaces, and a spacing of the speakers that might not be exactly perfect for a traditional sound system. "They're pretty amazing," says Pennington. "They really offer results for meeting room challenges."

Pennington recalled an encounter with one sound aficionado who stopped into the showroom, curious about the new style of speaker. A real audiophile, he already owned a well-equipped listening room in his home, and wasn't looking to buy. Of course, after a few moments, he changed his mind. So he bought it for his kitchen.

"He said, 'You know where I spend my time? The kitchen,'" Pennington said. "In the real world he still wanted good sound, and he was in the kitchen all the time."

When it comes to working with designers, the technology integration experts say that some are more curious than others about the opportunity technology presents, and how they can use it in the best way. But both say that more and more designers are considering audio, visual and other components as part of the total design solution. And as that happens, more are turning to specialists to be sure that their gadgets and gizmos resemble something off the set of James Bond, and not Austin Powers.

By David Rattigan