

TRICKS OF THE TRADES

From interior designers to electricians, it takes a team of experts to get technology into your home.

A home systems contractor is an electronics connoisseur. He knows which systems are best for your home and understands how to install them in a way

that'll benefit you and your family. Most home systems contractors also understand that it's important that technology mesh with the design and architecture of your

home. For this, he often relies on the expertise of other tradespeople such as interior designers, architects, lighting designers and cabinetmakers. Consider hiring

these folks if it's in your budget. The following explanations of duties will help you decide which experts you should hire for your project.



The Architect

It's the job of an architect to turn your design ideals into reality by drawing up blueprints that incorporate every item on your wish list—including electronic systems. An architect who recognizes the need for a networked home office, the convenience of a whole-house music system, and the appeal of a dedicated home theater, for example, is able to design a structure that best accommodates those amenities. For example, he might include a bigger hallway closet in the blueprint in order to house the many black boxes that make up a whole-house music system. He also might exclude windows from a room to create an ideal home theater environment. The sooner you inform an architect about your plans for technology, the sooner he can coordinate with your home systems contractor to weave them into the design of the house.

The Interior Designer

An interior designer can ensure that the systems you have installed in your house look as good as they perform. By working with your home systems contractor, she can introduce ways to downplay the visual evidence of technology so that it can coexist peacefully within the design of a room. For example, she might suggest painting over the faces of keypads and built-in speakers so they blend in with the wall surface. Or, she might suggest wall colors and furnishings that'll help make the video on your big screen pop. If you'd rather use design to showcase some of the electronic items in your home, an interior designer can suggest ways to do that, as well.

The Lighting Designer

Lights can be used to accentuate the architectural details of your home, to play up the colors and textures of the interior design, and to showcase special decorative items. Achieving those effects requires the eye of a lighting designer. He'll know which kinds of fixtures to use, how to position them, and at what brightness levels to set them to evoke a particular effect. Then, by collaborating with your home systems contractor, he can place those settings under the command of a lighting control system, so that you can engage a particular lighting scene by pressing a button on a keypad.

The Cabinetmaker

Most entertainment systems are composed of an assortment of ambiguous black boxes that can clash with the design of a room. A cabinetmaker can fabricate special housings for all that gear so the only thing you notice is a beautiful piece of cabinetry. The furnishings built by a cabinetmaker are designed so that every component fits perfectly inside, so it's important that he work closely with your home systems contractor. The cabinet maker will need to know the dimensions of each component, special ventilation requirements and cabling inclusions. In addition to designing cabinetry for your A/V components, a cabinetmaker can build a soffit to conceal a video projector, a proscenium to hide away home theater speakers, and a footboard for stowing a flat-panel TV in your master bedroom.



The other trades are a critical component to achieving our customers' goals. Jobs without the necessary collaboration of skills will not go well. We strongly encourage early communication and planning.

—Scott Varn, home systems integrator, Harmony Interiors of Asheville, NC

Teamwork between builders, interior designers and home systems integrators was the key that turned this ordinary basement into a sensational home theater. A new wall was built to house a 92-inch Draper screen, three Tannoy speakers and a Velodyne subwoofer. Systems design and installation by Harmony Interiors, Asheville, NC