

# Technology's big test

*Rental home's technology system proves that complicated can be made simple, even for new users who arrive every week*

By Rob Heselbarth, editor

Most families would enjoy an escape to a luxurious, secluded home overlooking the ocean, accessible only by boat, plane or helicopter. For the right price, any family can share this experience by renting one of several custom homes at the Sonora Resort on Sonora Island off the west coast of Canada.

Sonora Resort's newest custom home, named the Sea Lion, is a 10,000-sq.-ft. luxury house completed this past spring. The site chosen for the Sea Lion sits on a wooded peninsula. The owner's goal was to build the home without disturbing the land.

A secondary goal for this project was to provide those who live within the home with both the beauty of the resort's natural environment but also the comfort and conveniences of the best in home technology. The technology's big test is how easily each new group of guests can use it.

## New users every week

The mandate from the owner was simple: Put plenty of great technology in the house, and make it easy to use. Easier said than done, unless the technology installer, architect and builder worked together from day one to determine where the electronics would be placed and how to hide certain elements.

From the user perspective, Greg Rector, system designer/installer, London Drugs Custom Works, decided to place a few

### PROJECT SPECS

Location:  
Sonora Island,  
British Columbia  
Size:  
10,000 sq. ft.

### HOME TECHNOLOGY

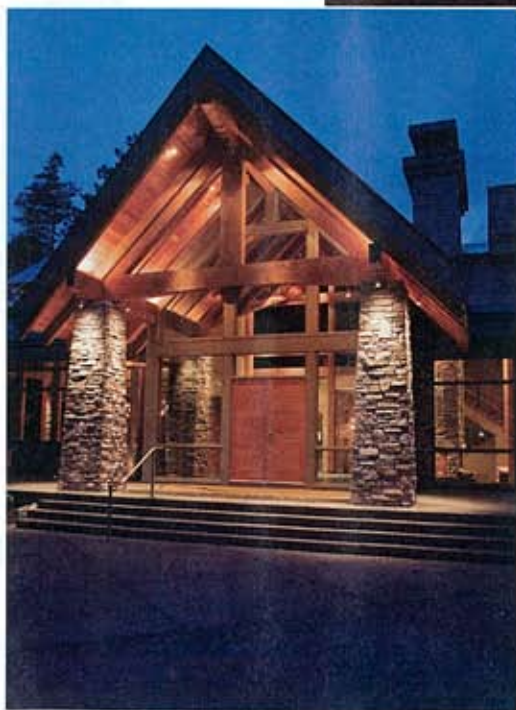
Home control system: Vantage Controls  
Lighting control system: Vantage Controls  
A/V distribution: Elan Home Systems/James Loudspeakers  
Home theater products: Panasonic 50-in. broadcast display; Omnimount Mount; Middle Atlantic Racking; Monster Cable Power Conditioner; Monster Cable Voltage Stabilizer; DVDO Video Processor; Bell ExpressVu HD satellite receiver; Panasonic Blu-ray; James Loudspeakers; RTI remote control; DLO iPod Dock

*The great room accomplishes the owner's goal of wowing visitors. The 30-ft. fireplace, massive poles and large, open spaces contribute to a room where many people can gather in an intimate and inviting environment. Packed with technology such as lighting control, audio/video systems and much more, this space combines comfort with convenience.*



The theater room occupies a loft space on the second floor. Careful planning hides the electronics needed to power and control the theater, while even more careful programming creates an intuitive, user-friendly Vantage touchscreen remote that anyone can pick up and use on the first try.

The Sea Lion house is the newest rental house at the Sonora Resort on Sonora Island, British Columbia. The only way in or out of the property is by air or sea. In an effort to protect the environment, trucks were banned from the immediate jobsite. So, a crane was used to hoist material onto the site.



Vantage touchscreen panels in common areas where a high level of control might be needed, such as the kitchen and great room. In the theater room in the second-floor loft, a Vantage hand-held touchscreen remote control unit, also referred to as a tablet, controls the multiple systems in the space. The surround sound effects weren't easy to create in a loft.

"We were able to put rear surround speakers on some decorative posts the builder added especially for us," Rector says.

Each of the four guest suites features a Vantage lighting control system, audio/video systems, a theater system, distributed audio, computer network and a digital phone/paging system. Each suite can tap into the whole-house audio system, or can break off for the ability to play specific music only in the suite thanks to iPod docks. However, while keeping their iPod plugged into their room's docking station, guests playing pool in the game room can tap into their iPod and control it from the other side of the house.

"We use the Vantage products almost exclusively because they are robust, with easy-to-program software and are customizable to fit with almost any interior décor. [Their] Design Center software is easy to move through and intuitive. Vantage has taken the time to build in some complex programming that used to take us time on site to do. But with Design Center it is a

one-step drag-and-drop. Vantage is good in this house because it allows the clients to have the ease of use they desire, very little wall clutter, and it allows us to troubleshoot any problems that may occur from remote locations via IP," Rector says.

An electrical room dedicated to housing technology equipment provides central access to the brains of the house, including the Vantage software that ties all the systems and products together. "I was working on a consulting basis with the builder and archi-





*A lighting designer's skills create interesting yet functional lighting scenes in this hallway and throughout the house.*

tect to make sure our equipment had enough room," Rector says. "We worked with the lighting

designer to determine how many different lighting loads there'd be and how many panels and



space it would require."

A central location was chosen for the electrical room to minimize the amount of wiring through the walls, says Tim Sjoström, president, Construction Consultants in Campbell River, British Columbia. "We had never dealt with this amount of wires before. Pulling wire was definitely an issue for a few reasons: the home's timber frame nature means the exterior walls are not needed for support. As a result, much of the exterior walls are made of glass leaving no room to run wires. Therefore, a lot of the interior walls are actually structural. It's tricky to run wires in a structural wall, and you definitely don't want to hit wires in those walls when you're nailing, so yes, the wiring was a big concern. It took a lot of time, effort and coordination to do it right," he explains.

### Success through teamwork

Concerns about space for all the technology in the house were addressed successfully thanks to careful planning by the design/build team. Technology requirements didn't affect the original design of the house since everyone knew about them from day one, says Tony Kloepfer, architect, Scientific Architecture, Vancouver, British Columbia.

From an architect's perspective, the technology is unobtrusive and intuitive. "Because there would be so many different users coming and going, the intent was to offer few choices but to make them clear. The technology provides the opportunity to make 27 scenes, but we gave them only three really good options," he adds.

From an electronic integrator's perspective, Rector kept himself aware of Kloepfer's architectural intentions. "If they're designing the house to have a certain flow, then we try to follow along with it. For example, if they expect people to come in the house and go directly to a closet on the left, we wouldn't put a panel on the right. Or, if there's an 18-ft. fireplace on one side of a room, and we put a big touchscreen on the opposite wall, that would take away from the effect [the architect] wanted with the fireplace," Rector notes.

Good design is the first step toward creat-



*An entire wall in the electrical equipment room is needed to house all the panels required for the multitude of home technology systems integrated in this home. The electrical contractor stumbled upon this dead space and claimed it for the electrical equipment.*

ing an intuitive, user-friendly home technology system, but the real test is how people who have never used it can work themselves through the system. Rector asked resort staff to test the technology and inform him how they would make it more intuitive; he also asked some older couples to do the same. Finally, the owner stayed in the house for a few weekends and provided useful feedback to Rector. The end result is a home packed with technology that is designed simply enough for anyone to control on the first try.

### Protecting nature

Concern for protecting the home's surroundings was so high the owner banned all machinery and vehicles from entering the immediate jobsite. All materials were hoisted in using a crane. Therefore, the side of the

house farthest from the crane was built first, followed by the side closest to the crane.

"We had one-half of the house dry-walled before beginning the structure of the second half," Sjoström says. "There were environmental and scheduling reasons for using the crane. If we were waiting to get the whole building done before beginning the drywall phase, we never would have met the schedule."

Sjoström points to the home's timber frame structure as another reason the home was not built in traditional order. "For example, the windows were ordered first. Because our roof panels were behind schedule, we had our windows on-site first so we put those in before the roof was on. But because this building has three or four overhangs, in hindsight it was the better way to do the process," he adds.



*Vantage touchscreen controls are placed throughout the house in areas needing the most control. Simple and intuitive total home control is possible thanks to programming designed for first-time users.*

The home proudly boasts what the designer calls a West Coast style, with plenty of local Douglas fir, large roof overhangs, and many windows for enjoying the glorious view,

divided into public and private areas, he says. "All rooms are interconnected. But there's separation of the private bedroom suite areas. We have four master suites. All

four are equal with a king bed, private sitting area, large bathroom, private deck and hot tub, a bar area, entertainment area and big-screen TV. Each suite is designed with a different view. They're also very private. You could stay here with all the windows open in total privacy," Kloefer adds.

At 10,000 sq. ft., the house is grand in scale. The owner wanted the interior to reflect the grandeur of the nature outside. The great room is the prime example of how Kloefer captured the enormity of the surrounding environment yet created intimate gathering areas within the room's space. "The design of that room was supposed to be a grand statement of luxury. The overall intent with the house was to provide, through timber frame and lots of glass, a sense of shelter and structure with a strong inside/outside connection," Kloefer says. ▀

Kloefer

says. Inside, the home is