

Smart homes bring sci-fi fantasy to life

By David Nankervis Sunday Mail, Adelaide, S. Aust.

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MOVE over Mr Spock, the Jetson family and James Bond -- South Australians are about to move into a world based on the science fiction better known in Hollywood movies. Technology has recently been developed which will revolutionise the way we live, work and play over the next decade, according to science experts.

By 2005 many homeowners will be able to afford the technology that enables them to put the kettle on, draw the curtains and even water the garden from anywhere in the world by using the new broadband Internet service.

A technologically switched-on ``smart'' house which uses the new technology is already undergoing trials at Jackson's Landing in Sydney.

Built by a conglomerate of companies on the cutting edge of technology, the ``smart'' home boasts gadgets people would be more familiar with on a science fiction movie. Features include:

- * BLINDS that open automatically as the morning alarm goes off.
- * LIGHTS, heaters and air-conditioners that can be operated via the Internet from anywhere in the world.
- * SOFTWARE that keeps stock of what's in the fridge and can order food deliveries via the Net as they are needed.
- * MINI-VIDEO cameras to keep an eye on youngsters anywhere in the house via the television
- * SPECIAL security cameras that can contact police if a disturbance is detected.

The cars we drive will also undergo the biggest revolution in a century with the internal combustion engine set to lose its place as king of the road.

Up to a third of all cars on the road by the end of the decade will be hybrid models, which combine petrol with electric motors, cutting fuel bills and pollution levels in half, according to the RAA's Technical Support manager, Alby Martin.

Other advances include an electronic Pre Crash Sensor System based on a micro-optical laser. This device will be able to measure the space between vehicles and automatically slow down a car if it encroaches within a safe distance of other vehicles, thus reducing accidents.

Consumers shopping for mobile phones will soon face a range of new models reminiscent of the gadgets James Bond and Dick Tracey used. Mobiles with in-built cameras and screens that can play video images in sync with a personal computer have just been developed.

Although predominately produced for its entertainment value, science fiction has proved an inspiration to generations of scientists over the years, according to Derek Abbott, Adelaide University professor of electronic engineering said.

`` Scientists and engineers were kids once, too. We watched those science fiction shows and they often inspired us to pursue our life's career," he said.

`` Going to the moon was a dream once but, with enough effort and resources, it has been proved we can realise those dreams."

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