



Lake House Goes High Tech, Naturally

For most of the year, the 4,000-square-foot custom lake house stands quietly, a tranquil respite nestled between southwest Colorado's San Juan mountain range and Electra Lake. Its owners visit the vacation home occasionally, typically during the summer months when it's scorching at their primary Florida home.



In the winter, it sits and waits patiently for their return, doors armed and locked, shades pulled tightly across windows, every light fixture dark and thermostats set back to conserve energy.

What resides behind the placid facade, though, is a powerful home control system that enables remote access, affords a simplicity the homeowner and builder demanded, and allows its occupants to better commune with nature.

Home—Away from Home

It's a lonely existence for the house during the cold winter months, but that can change in an instant. Conveniently from the computer at their Florida residence, the owners can log on a secure website to "wake up" the house from its winter nap. Navigating an interactive control menu with their mouse, they can activate certain lights, adjust the thermostats and raise the motorized window shades.

Usually, though, they'll leave all those electronics alone, using their Control4 4Sight remote monitoring software to simply check up on the house while they're gone. Should a houseguest on a ski weekend forget to turn off a light or the music system, for example, the owners can switch those devices off remotely with a quick point and click.

The owners' requests are communicated via a secure Internet connection to a Control4 automation system. The system's robust processor manages the home's lights, thermostats, radiant floor heating system, whole-house audio system, motorized window shades, and security system. The Control4 system also responds to commands issued by cell phones, so the homeowners can get the house ready while they're en route.



Simplicity is Bliss

As they approach the 10-acre property, engaging the preprogrammed WELCOME HOME command sets the lights in the mud room, kitchen, great room and dining room, adjusts the thermostats and activates a series of MechoShade motors that lift the shades away from the glass. In an instant, the house looks and feels as if they never left, says Rick Gaskell, founder and president of custom electronics installation firm Cobalt Automation in Durango, Colo.

As the owners settle in, they can listen to their favorite music. And like everything else, control over the tunes is quick and convenient.

Cobalt installed numerous Control4 keypads throughout the residence, which provide the owners with one-touch access to all the key electronic systems in their house. To operate the whole-house music system, for example, the owners press the LISTEN icon and choose the source they want to hear: iPod or satellite receiver. There's no cover art or alphabetical listing to scroll through when choosing a song, a common selection procedure of many whole-house audio systems. They just listen to whatever happens to be queued up at the time.

It's a pretty basic setup, Gaskell says. After all, simplicity was essential in this project, and since many of the materials used in the house were chosen with deference to the environment, Gaskell didn't want to overdo it with the electronics.

Blending Technology into Nature

The music travels to in-ceiling Boston Acoustics speakers serving six listening zones, including the covered deck outside. The outdoor speakers were aimed downward rather than into the yard so the audio wouldn't disturb the surrounding wildlife.

The exterior lighting is just as kind to the environment. Per instructions from the Control4 system, they ramp up to a soft lighting level gradually at dusk. "Set low, the lights don't interfere with the stars in the night sky," says Gaskell. Dimmable lighting was carried through to the interior, with every Control4 light switch programmed to keep the incandescent fixtures at a low intensity.

The owners are free to adjust the brightness levels from a keypad, or they can simply select one of the lighting "scenes" that they and Gaskell created while the Control4 system was being installed. Again, they didn't overdo it. Just an evening scene for the master bedroom and a couple of entertainment scenes for the great room would suffice.

"They know they can add scenes anytime they want," says Gaskell. Not only that, the couple can expand the lighting system to cover more rooms. Currently, none of the guest bedrooms are on the system, but they can easily join the network by swapping the existing switches for Control4 models.



Expanding Horizons

The facilitation of simple, hassle-free post-installation add-ons is a specialty of the Control4 system, and one of the main reasons Gaskell recommended it to the homeowners. "They could start with the system and expand it as their needs and wants change," he anticipates.



In addition to greater lighting control, Gaskell suspects the couple will eventually replace the standard wall-mounted keypads with Control4 touch screens. The touch screens will provide a larger interface that can display several control options on a single page. Plus, the owners will be able to view cover art and metadata about the songs on their audio system—information their current keypads are unable to show.

Additional TVs and speakers will probably make their way into the home at some point, too. Right now, there are just

two TVs—a 46-inch Hitachi plasma in the great room and a 42-inch Samsung in the master bedroom. A partially finished space in the lower-level is a likely recipient of new gear, having been prewired by Gaskell as a game room.

As important as the two TVs are to the homeowners' entertainment needs, like all other electronic gear, they were designed and installed to not intrude on their enjoyment of the lake and mountains. The Hitachi set literally sinks into the woodwork, having been mounted into an alcove where it's nearly impossible to see it from the side. A retractable Sanus wall-mount allows the set to be extended two feet from the alcove when the owners want to watch a satellite program or a DVD. This TV also serves as the couple's biggest home control interface. Here, they can view all the home system commands and navigate the menu via a handheld Control4 remote.

Granted, this home may not have all the bells and whistles of most automated residences, but what it does have has made a huge impact on the homeowners' lives. With the ability to monitor the house from afar, they're blessed with the peace of mind that all is well at the lake. And with simple controls at their fingertips, they waste little time setting the temperature, lights and music during their vacations at the house. Most importantly, with few big-screen TVs, massive, bass-pounding speakers and flashy A/V components to distract them, they're free to enjoy the surrounding beauty of the outdoors.



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