

Living the iLife

A 2,650 square-foot, two-bedroomed, penthouse apartment on the 22nd floor of the former MI6 building on Westminster Bridge Road in London, offering breathtaking views of Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament and the London Eye, sounds like a home that would meet anyone's aspirations. For the successful software entrepreneur and accountancy firm founder couple who purchased the property, it took nearly seven months and £1.3 million spent on renovations after purchasing the apartment, before it met their exacting standards.

At the heart of this, now, hi-tech, contemporary home is an AMX-based home control system, which was designed and installed by iLife Solutions of St Albans. The award-winning installation integrates every element of control into one single system, managing everything from the extensive entertainment systems, including a fully 'spec'd' home cinema, to one-touch control of lighting, heating and air conditioning, and the opening or closing of the electric blinds. The system also provides total management of the secure door entry/CCTV system.

Complementary Simplicity

When selecting the home's technology, the couple knew they wanted to incorporate a control system. As they explain: "We wanted an integrated control system because we wanted a very simple interface for what would otherwise be a complicated process. In other words, we wanted to incorporate lots of technology, but wanted it to be easy to use and installed in a way that would complement the design and feel we were trying to create for our home."

Control of the system is effected from any of the three AMX G3 wall-mounted touch screen panels and two AMX Modero wireless panels positioned around the apartment. The four-inch G3 panels are situated in the kitchen, study and guest bedroom, while the Modero MVP8400 wireless panels provide complete freedom of movement around the apartment when removed

from their wall or desk docking stations, which are located in the main living space and master bedroom. The docking stations facilitate the recharging of the panels' batteries.

In addition to the touch panels, a further two AMX eight-button keypads are located in the apartment entrance and at the foot of the stairs. These keypads offer simple control of a number of specific functions, such as controlling lights and music volume.

Command and Control

The hub of the system is an AMX Netlinx NI4000 controller, which translates commands from the touch panels into the correct language and protocols required to operate each individual piece of equipment.

All media - audio and video - is delivered digitally from four centrally located media centre PCs serving each room. Films and music from the PCs are normally accessed and controlled from the Modero panels, again, via the AMX Netlinx NI4000 controller to which the PCs are connected.

The controller also operates 48 lighting circuits, 28 black out blinds, in wall video screens, motorised TV screens hidden in the ends of the beds, a DVD player and two Sky TV satellites, and an externally-mounted CCTV camera with pan, tilt and zoom functionality.

This camera affords amazing views of the London skyline and provides the ability to display Big Ben's clock face on any of the apartment's four LCD TVs, 42" plasma display or the 100-inch projection screen situated in the main living area.

Intuitive Operation

Because the apartment's owners do a lot of entertaining, it was important that the system was easy to control with little or no instruction, especially for guests who are not 'technologically savvy'. AMX touch panels are designed to be totally intuitive, featuring consistent, icon driven menu screens offering simplicity of use. To make operation even easier, the owners asked for a high degree of automation to be built into the AMX system to

reduce the number of menu options.

For instance, when the “Watch a Movie” icon is touched in the living space, the blinds close, the panelled wall slides back to reveal the projection screen and the lights dim to a pre-determined setting.

Worldwide Access

A final, important feature has also been built into the system to suit the owners’ lifestyles. By installing AMX’s Web Control software with their system, they can remotely control their equipment while they are away from home. Whether at work, visiting family or friends, or travelling abroad, the homeowners can access their entire system from any computer via an Internet connection.

Summing up their experience of the system, the couple conclude: “Achieving true home automation is the key reason for incorporating a control system into a home. Programming one-touch operation for everyday operations like lighting is a huge convenience. We no longer have to fuss with the lights and audio sound levels before dinner or walk around the home to be sure everything’s turned off before leaving. Without a doubt, the AMX system in our home has positively impacted our quality of life.”