

High-tech home takes planning

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When D. Storms Duthie bought a 100-year-old, two-story stone house in Grey Forest, he met a lot of air conditioning contractors.

"At last count there were 23 different contractors that actually came out and looked," says Duthie. "There's no place to put the duct work.

"We wound up going across the roof, and we built a room for the duct work and the central air exchanger. Instead of trying to hide it, we just decided to go with it," he says pointing to a tube that runs across the ceiling.

Duthie encountered other problems bringing his home wiring up to date. Reportedly, the house didn't have electricity until the 1940s or a telephone until the 1950s. The kitchen only had one electrical outlet.

Rewiring the kitchen and room next to it cost about \$2,700.

"Phone wires came into the middle of the wall," says Duthie, who now regrets not installing them inside a cabinet.

"Don't wait to decide where the wall switch is going to go when the electricians get there," he says.

According to Rudy Niño, president of the Remodelers Council of the Greater San Antonio Builder's Association, the average American home is more than 34 years old. That means wiring that preceded intricate home-lighting systems, programmable thermostats and computerized alarm systems.

Telephone wiring systems present new challenges. Homeowners want a phone jack in virtually every room, plus cable TV, computers, modems, multiple phone lines and — well, you get the picture.

Oli Gulyas at Innovations in Home Theater says, "The most expensive item you'll ever purchase is your home, yet everything but your home is computerized.

"The most automated thing in

your home is your garage door and your thermostat — it's kind of silly."

According to Gulyas, most homes are wired with Category 3 wire that can't handle the speed demands.

He recommends Category 5-enhanced wire for optimum service.

Home automation experts recommend future-proofing your home while remodeling. For Gulyas, that means installing two Category 5-enhanced and two high-speed coax cables.

"Then, you're covered for cable, modem, the DSL and you have a couple of extra wires left to do your local area network or Ethernet. Plus, you have an extra coax for satellite and extra conductors that are high speed to handle that kind of band width," he says.

"If you're going to remodel," Gulyas says, "you might as well run this thick cable to computer areas, appliance areas and home theater areas. It's about a fifth of the price to do it while the walls are already open."

It isn't cheap, however.

"For the bundled cable — the four wires," says Gulyas, "it runs around \$125 to run a bundle from a master control box to a room for pre-wiring.

"Then there's the fee to put the special plates on the wall and trim out the panel. That can run \$1,500 to \$2,500 depending on networks, surge protectors — those kind of things."

Even if your home already has Category 5 wiring, it may have been installed like older cable. That won't work, says Gulyas.

"You need to create a little master area with homerun wiring. That means everything that has a wire goes back to one central control area," he explains.

When considering future wiring needs, it's wise to consult experts before you build or remodel.

And, says Gulyas, "We prefer to be in the first line with the architects who know the client's lifestyle."