Can smart technology be stylish?

With the rising trend of clever gadgets entering our homes, do our interior décor schemes have to change too? Yvette Murrell takes a closer look

Ah, smart home devices. Helpful, yes – but are they pretty, too? Not always. I'm sure a few people welcome the space-age kind of look which seems to come with a lot of high-tech products, but I reckon most of us would prefer for our homes to be a cosy and stylish space in which we can relax and unwind.

Smart televisions, appliances, lighting, speakers, control hubs, and more are gaining huge popularity – and while they are aimed at improving everyday life, not all blend into our interiors as seamlessly as we might like. Sure, we can hide unsightly wires and place these helpers in unassuming corners, but if the future of our homes is set to be smart, I think brands need to make products we are going to want to put on display.

Fortunately, this notion seems to have been picked up by some companies. Samsung's Frame television shows artwork when on standby and even comes with customisable bezels to disguise the edges, turning it into a mantelpiece feature. Similarly, Ikea has collaborated with Sonos to create a range of homeware called Symfonisk – smart speakers that double up as a table lamp and a bookshelf. Looks (and sounds) pretty good.

Amping up the wow factor even further is Nanoleaf, which offers light panels you can customise via a smartphone app. A form of statement wall art as opposed to merely a practical solution, you can adjust them to fill your kitchen or bedroom with colours from subtle hues to bright tones, depending on the mood you want to create. The panels can even be synced with your music, creating a visual display – great when entertaining. Sounds like just the kind of technology I would want to show off at my house.

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And even more developments are coming. At Milan's Salone del Mobile furniture fair earlier this year, Panasonic unveiled a transparent OLED concept TV screen. Resembling a glass cabinet with a wooden frame, it is see-through when not in use so blends into the background. Indeed, materials such as wood and fabrics seem to be a common trait in products attempting to move away from the typical hi-tech look of grey, white, or black plastic. Japanese start-up Mui, for example, showcased a control hub made from real wood at CES, a global technology exhibition in Las

1 Panasonic unveiled a transparent OLED screen at the Salone Del Mobile exhibition in Milan.
2 Nanoleaf's colourful light panels, £179.99 for nine plus Rhythm upgrade, can create different moods and be paired with music.
3 Mui is a new smart home control hub made with natural wood. It is available to preorder.
4 The GXZOCK smart Wifi essential oil diffuser, £26.59 from Amazon, works with both Google Home and Amazon Alexa.

Vegas back in January, which saw so much traction it has already gone into production and is now available to order.

But there are smaller ideas, too – the vase-shaped GXZOCK wooden essential oil diffuser, for example. Controlled via an app, its pleasing organic shape looks very different to most other smart home devices.

It appears there is hope that smart tech products will become more aesthetically pleasing. One day it will be the new norm to have them, and I believe blending in with the homes we are all comfortable living in is key to make that happen. **KBB**