



## Smart homes: then and now

How have technological advancements changed the way we operate our households – and what is still to come? Yvette Murrell takes a look

Cast your mind back to 1983 – moonwalking, questionable haircuts, and, possibly most importantly, the formation of the internet as we know it. A dial-up connection (remember the screeching sounds?) was gradually rolled out to homes worldwide and, by the early noughties, we began hearing about gizmos and gadgets with online capabilities – also known as smart home technology. And yet, fast-forward to today, the concept is still very much talked about as a *new* phenomenon. Why is that?

“Smart home technology started as a plaything for the rich and famous, available only for those looking for the next expensive gadget or luxury they could spend their money on to impress others,” remembers John Shermer, founder and chief innovation officer at smart home control brand Lightwave. “Back in the 90s, it certainly wasn’t accessible to all or designed for convenience and home improvement,” he suggests.

Indeed, not much out there enhanced everyday living in a useful way. It wasn’t until 1999, when home appliance brand

Electrolux announced it would be releasing the first breakthrough design – the Screenfridge intelligent refrigerator – that smart kitchen technology began to take off. Available to buy the following year, it had a touch screen and was connected to the internet – so you could complete an online grocery shop – plus had a built-in library of recipes, even if it was limited by today’s standards.

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Did you know?  
More than  
12.5 million UK  
households now  
own some form  
of smart tech\*



– but the queues stretching outside Apple stores whenever the brand launches its latest innovation today prove how popular it has become. Having apps that could help you control lighting and heating opened entirely new opportunities. By 2015, Hoover had launched the first full range of connected appliances, named the Wizard collection, including ovens, hobs, hoods, a fridge-freezer, and a washing machine which could all be controlled and monitored via an app on your phone. No longer just for the rich and famous, right?

Much more is in the pipeline, too, as Steve Macdonald, freestanding division business director at Hoover Candy UK, tells me: “The home technology industry is bursting with innovation right now and what is currently still a work in progress is having one central hub to connect all of your smart appliances, allowing them to interact with each other as well

1 The Electrolux Screenfridge from 2000 was one of the first smart appliances.

2 Today’s Vision oven, £1499, from Hoover, allows you to view recipes.

3 Lightwave’s lighting starter kit, £185, turns your illumination smart.

4 Whirlpool’s FSCR12441 Supreme Care washing machine, around £899, can be controlled via an app.

as with you. This could be the fridge telling the oven what ingredients are available and suggesting recipes – expect to see this functionality widely adopted over the next few years.” I’m all ears.

Some of the newest prototypes even include car connectivity, which allows you to upload your shopping list into the cloud for your car to find the best route to the nearest shop. Wow. We’ve come a long way since the 80s, haven’t we? **KBB**