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AWARD WINNER



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# Confessions of a Reluctant Techie



It was a wake-up call; no doubt about it. “You’ve got to get over your suspicions—people want this stuff,” my editor urged. “It’s not going away.” Data breaches at the Office of Personnel Management, Citibank, and Blue Cross Blue Shield were making headlines, and I was being asked to write a full-length feature on what seemed at the time like my worst dystopian nightmare: home automation.

But keeping you up to date on our industry is what we do at *Professional Builder*, so I immersed myself in the world of smart homes. This was not an easy stretch, for I am a reluctant techie. Though I own a smartphone, I prefer reading print and talking on a landline. When I want to speak to my neighbors, I walk across the street and knock on their door. (If they don’t want to see me, they won’t answer.) I mail handwritten notes because I love paper, pens, and postage stamps and enjoy making marks on paper. I believe that writing by hand helps me remember things better.

In reporting this month’s tech story, I grilled builders and suppliers alike about security. Guess what? My cynicism lifted. I learned that a smart home isn’t a frivolous add-on or an invasion of privacy. (It turns out the information in security cameras is encrypted so early in the pipeline that even the tech-support people can’t read it.) It quickly sunk in that smart homes can offer peace of mind, security, energy savings, and, of course, convenience.

I realized, too, what a blessing smart homes are for a rapidly aging nation. Perhaps you’ve cared for parents getting old. I have.

How I wish I’d had a device that sent a text if there was no motion in my mom’s house by 8 a.m. or that shot me an alert if she walked out the door in the middle of the night. I sure would have slept better.

But some of my dubiousness is justified. (What is a journalist if not a paid skeptic?) My editor was right, as usual: I was the best person on staff to report the story because I was such a hard sell on the upsides.

I’ll still step outside to talk to neighbors, send thank you notes by mail, and rely on my nose (not my fridge) to tell me when it’s time to buy fresh milk. But the idea of home automation no longer fills me with Orwellian dread. It’s desired by many and isn’t just for expensive, fancy houses anymore. Smart homes are entering the mainstream. Home automation is a smart way to sell houses, and buyers of all ages are opting in.

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