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Home, smart home

Meet Doug Fikse, his wife, Polly: The couple unveil their new home, which will include the very latest technology, much of which has yet to arrive in the United States.

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Ray Reynolds | Special to The Roanoke Times

Doug and Polly Fikse's three-story, 10,500-square-foot home at The Water's Edge will incorporate American and European technology throughout.

The Jetsons' time period is still about 50 years away, but a family from Pennsylvania is having a retirement home built on the lake that will have a futuristic feel.

The space age cartoon "The Jetsons" took place in the 2060s. Their Sky Pad Apartment featured an assembly line that bathed and clothed them and Rosie, their robotic maid.

Doug and Polly Fikse's house at The Water's Edge will feature European and American smart technology, from lighting to sprinkler systems. They recently invited area homeowners, contractors, architects and Virginia Tech students to a presentation about the new technology in their home.



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Doug Fikse, president of On-Q, demonstrates some of the new technology he'll have incorporated into his retirement home.

"I've been working in the [smart technology] industry for 15 years," said Doug Fikse, president of On-Q, a home systems company.

The France-based Legrand, parent company of On-Q and other American and European companies, specializes in data networks and electrical installations. Many of their products are not yet available in the United States.

But because of Fikse's tie to Legrand, he's able to install the latest technology in his new home before it hits U.S. markets.

"I know a lot about the technology coming out," said Fikse, who added that his insider knowledge is making it easier to select technology for his

three-story, 10,500-square-foot home. "I'm like a kid in a toy store."

Fikse is working closely with Danny Goins, president of The Highlands Group, the project architect; and Robert Fetzer, president of Building Specialists, the project builder. Both are located in Roanoke.

"Doug and Polly have probably been one of the most knowledgeable clients we've worked with," Fetzer said.

"We've really learned a lot from them."

One of the features the Fikses are including throughout the home is the Vantage lighting system with BTicino Axolute wall plates.

"You look at a lot of high-end luxury homes and they still have 39-cent toggle light switches," said Doug Fikse. "We haven't really evolved in the U.S."

One of the Vantage systems includes six buttons. Fikse said he will be able to set each of the six buttons for different light settings, such as full-bright for reading or half-dim for evening socials.

The BTicino wall plates are designed as home accents, with material selections including wood, slate, marble, leather, metal and glass.

"It has phenomenal aesthetics appeal. Of course, the Europeans are way ahead of us in this sect of the market," Fikse said. "In Europe, they think as much about the aesthetics as they do about the function."

But the Vantage system isn't just about aesthetics. Light sensors placed throughout the home will detect the amount of natural light entering through the windows. The interior lighting will become dimmer or brighter to meet the desired settings based on the amount of ambient light, an electricity-saving tactic.

Another hands-free light system Fikse may incorporate is a pad situated underneath the carpet that can trigger lights to come on in certain rooms.

"Say this sits under the carpet on either side of the master bed," he said. When the pad senses weight from a person getting out of bed at night, "the bathroom lights come on 30 percent."

In addition to smart lighting, Fikse said smart intercom systems will be included. The On-Q system will allow people inside the home to call to specific rooms or to call all rooms at once.

"The intercom is hands-free," said Fikse. "It stays on for about 15 seconds."

Fikse said the system also has a monitor function, eliminating the need for a baby monitor, by allowing people to monitor a baby's room through the entire house.

"We planned this house around a future of grandkids," said Fikse, who has four children, adding that the intercom also would be useful when his elderly mother is visiting.

Security cameras will provide further monitoring capabilities, allowing the Fikses to see who pulls into the driveway and who is down by the dock. The driveway also will have a sensor that detects when someone has pulled in to alert the Fikses that they have a visitor.

Other smart technology systems Fikse plans to incorporate are stereo access in every room, with keypads allowing people to listen to different stations or CDs; automated window blinds; and sprinkler systems to provide protection in case of fire.

All the controls, including music, heat, lighting, security and blinds, also are accessible through hand-held or wall-mounted LCD touch screens.

The touch screen intrigued one of the Tech students who attended the presentation.

"I've thought about that so many times," said Andrew Chester, a senior building construction major from

Roanoke. "Somebody beat me to it."

Chester said he attended the presentation for the opportunity to make contacts in the community and to see where the technology is going.

"It was intriguing ... the amount of technology and the cutting-edge applications that were shown today," Chester said.

Perhaps most intriguing for the younger generations, however, will be the signature door tones, available in a variety of songs or sounds, similar to those available for download on MP3 players and cellphones.

"We wanted to create something that was a little more interesting," Fikse said. "They're like ring tones ... We do customized door tones for your house."

One of the downloadable door tones is the one that sounds when visitors ring the doorbell on that popular futuristic cartoon -- The Jetsons.

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