Tour Bill Gates’ House of the Future

The Gates house is across from Seattle on the shores of Lake Washington. It was conceived as a home that typifies the Pacific Northwest’s casual style. It’s also a place where groundbreaking technology is being applied in new and fascinating ways to make the home more livable. Innovations developed here are likely to be common features of the typical home someday. The home is built into a hillside to minimize its presence on the site and to improve energy efficiency.

There is a great deal of wood in the home, as well as glass windows and rooves, and at least seven varieties of stone. Most of the wood is recycled Douglas fir that came from an 80-year-old Weyerhaeuser lumber mill that was being torn down nearby. Most of the glass faces west, over the lake towards Seattle to take advantage of the sunset and the Olympic Mountain views. Another key building material is silicon. A hundred micro-computers and the software that controls them will let you experience the home without having to pay any attention to the technology at its heart. Once inside, you’ll wear a special pin that uniquely identifies you and connects you to the home’s electronic services, which will automatically adapt themselves to you and your taste. As you move through the home, the pin that you’ve programmed allows you to hear your choice of music on the information appliance nearest you, even as people in different rooms listen to their own favorites. You won’t have to miss a minute of the movie or television show you were watching – it can travel with you. The room temperature adjusts itself to suit your preference. And high-resolution displays will know you’re nearby and present electronic versions of your favorite art. The lights ahead of you gradually come on, while those in the rooms you’ve left behind turn themselves off. And if you get a phone call during your stay, only the phone nearest you rings, to avoid disturbing other people. The home does all of this for you, automatically, with the help of the pin you’re wearing.

Outside of the library, you can see another advantage of setting the home into the hillside: the home’s pavilions blend into their surroundings. The home is equipped with energy saving instruments as well. So, if it’s bright outside, the lights inside will match the brightness of that of the outdoors. House temperatures inside decrease when you’re asleep or not present. Of course, there are manual switches, just like today’s homes, to override the computers’ decisions. Although the actual living space is quite modest, larger areas like the Reception Hall will accommodate special events. This room switches into an entertaining mode, automatically reconsidering the lighting, room temperature, background music selection, audio volume and video displays. The large video hall you see is made up of large individual projection screens. The screens can be combined to show images of artwork, computer graphics, videos or a television program selected from cable, video disc or satellite. The Gates home is a home of the future. Look for these technologies, and many more like them, to positively change the ways in which we live at home.



**Could this remote control program your entire house?**

When you're not home, nagging little doubts can start to crowd your mind. Did I turn the [coffee maker](https://home.howstuffworks.com/coffee-maker.htm) off? Did I set the [security alarm](https://home.howstuffworks.com/home-improvement/household-safety/burglar-alarm.htm)? Are the kids doing their homework or watching television?

With a smart home, you could quiet all of these worries with a quick glance at your smartphone or tablet. You could connect the devices and appliances in your home so they can communicate with each other and with you.

Any device in your home that uses electricity can be put on your home network and at your command. Whether you give that command by voice, remote control, tablet or smartphone, the home reacts. Most applications relate to lighting, home security, home theater and entertainment, and thermostat regulation.

The idea of a smart home might make you think of George Jetson and his futuristic abode or maybe Bill Gates, who spent more than $100 million building his smart home [source: [Lev-Ram](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2006/12/01/8394983/index.htm)]. Once a draw for the tech-savvy or the wealthy, smart homes and home automation are becoming more common.

What used to be a quirky industry that churned out hard-to-use and frilly products is finally maturing into a full-blown consumer trend. Instead of start-up companies, more established tech organizations are launching new smart home products. Sales of automation systems could grow to around $9.5 billion by 2015 [source: [Berg Insight](http://www.berginsight.com/ReportPDF/ProductSheet/bi-sh1-ps.pdf)]. By 2017, that number could balloon to $44 billion [source: [CNN](http://money.cnn.com/2014/01/02/technology/innovation/ces-connected-home/)].

Much of this is due to the jaw-dropping success of smartphones and tablet computers. These ultra-portable computers are everywhere, and their constant Internet connections means they can be configured to control myriad other online devices. It's all about the Internet of Things.

**The Internet of Things** is a phrase that refers to the objects and products that are interconnected and identifiable through digital networks. This web-like sprawl of products is getting bigger and better every day. All of the electronics in your home are fair game for this tech revolution, from your fridge to your furnace.

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The CD-rom tour of Bill Gates's dream house, rising on a hillside on Lake Washington, says it "typifies the Pacific Northwest's casual style."But the $35 million house (with a garage worth $1 million) of recycled Douglas fir with 100 computers does not sound casual. It sounds regimented and bossy.

"Once inside you'll wear a special pin that uniquely identifies you and connects you to the Home's electronic services," says the female guide to the house of the high-school nerd turned king of the hill.

"As you move through the Home, the pin that you've programmed allows you to hear your choice of music on the information appliance nearest you, even as people in different rooms listen to their own favorites ... the room temperature adjusts itself to suit your preference, and high-resolution displays will know you're nearby and present electronic versions of your favorite art."

I don't want a house that knows everything about me. You can shoo out a bossy-boots from room service, but you're going to be with your house a long time. It would be nice to keep the element of surprise.

Nonconformists of the world, unite in Seattle!

Maureen Dowd

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Gates may be brassy in business, but he's all polished wood and vaulted ceilings at home. Miles of fiber-optic cable are strung inside the walls and crawl spaces. Video screens capable of displaying computer images, standard television or high-definition TV are everywhere. But the technology is unobtrusive -- even the electrical outlets and phone jacks are hidden away.

What visitors remember after leaving are the classic touches -- like the towering old beams of Douglas fir salvaged from a lumber mill, then sanded and rubbed to a satiny finish and braced across the ceilings with iron bands.

"I wanted craftsmanship but nothing ostentatious," Gates wrote. "I wanted a house that would accommodate sophisticated, changing technology but in an unobtrusive way that made it clear that technology was the servant, not the master."

In all, the new home says a lot about Bill Gates as this singular power on the American landscape moves into his forties. But the "Gatsby" quote inscribed in the library may not be entirely apt.

A children's author, Daniel Pinkwater, in a much-loved little book titled *The Big Orange Splot*, put it nicely. In the book, a man defends his decision to make his house different from the others on his look-alike street.

"My house is me and I am it," he explains. "My house is where I like to be and it looks like all my dreams."

Houses are a statement, and a sign of yearnings -- especially when the owner can have any house he wants.

Elizabeth Corcoran and John Schwartz

Be prepared to answer these questions so that we can discuss them in class. Make sure that you know what all of the highlighted vocabulary means.

1. Do you ever have nagging doubts when you are away from home that something is amiss there, that maybe you forgot to do something important before you left? (They can be little or big, and they can crowd your mind or hang around in one of its corners, refusing to go away.)
2. Are you able to quiet these worries now? How could you?
3. Do you consider yourself tech savvy? Are you wealthy? Can you enjoy any of the advantages that a smart home has to offer right now?
4. Why did home automation use to be a quirky industry? What frilly products did it churn out? Can you come up with any examples? (There is one good example in the article you read for last week, “We’re Already Living in the Smart-Home Future”.)
5. Can you think of anything besides smartphones and tablet computers that has had jaw-dropping success recently? Is this what you are hoping that your graduation qualification paper will bring you?
6. Do you have myriad high-tech devices that you can use without having to lift a finger?
7. In the longer tour of Bill Gates’s home it was called a “sprawling mansion”. Here the Internet of Things is referred to as a “web-like sprawl”. Why? (Do you ever sprawl out on your sofa when you are relaxing at home?)
8. What other electronics in your home besides your fridge (most of us don’t have a furnace) are fair game for the tech revolution that is made possible by the Internet of Things?
9. What do you think? Does Bill Gates’s epic mansion seem regimented and bossy? Would it bother you if your house or apartment knew everything about you and could anticipate your every need? What is “a bossy-boots from room service”?
10. What is inside the walls and crawl spaces of his home? What are these spaces?
11. Gates salvaged a lot of the wood that is in his house from a lumber mill that was being torn down. What would probably have happened to it if he hadn’t done this?
12. He wrote that he wanted “craftsmanship but nothing ostentatious”, that his abode should “accommodate sophisticated, changing technology, but in an unobtrusive way that made it clear that technology was the servant, not the master”. What do all of these big words mean? Do you think he was successful?
13. “My [home] is me and I am it. My [home] is where I like to be and it looks like all my dreams.” Is this true for you? In what ways? “[Homes] are a statement, and a sign of yearnings.” Assuming that you can have any home that you want, what are your yearnings? Would you like it to be smart?
14. We have gone inside four different homes – Monticello, La Casa Azul, Fallingwater and Xanadu 2.0 – each of them extraordinary in its own way. Which of them impressed you the most?
15. What is good about smart homes? What is not so good about them? List all of the benefits and drawbacks of living in a smart home, keeping in mind that some features can be both.