

Sree's Thoughts on Smart Homes

By The Tech Guru

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(New York-WABC, December 5, 2002) — Having recently set up a Manhattan apartment, I am keenly aware of how expensive even simple home improvement can be. We would have liked to be part of the "smart home" trend that's popular right now, but we did well to just upgrade our kitchen (the microwave is the smartest thing in it - and that's not saying much).

But to learn what's out there - and to dream about the possibilities — I went to visit Gabriel Karlis of JD Audio & Video Design of Ft. Lee, New Jersey.

The store is essentially a showroom for those thinking about smartening up their homes. And what a showroom it is. There's a home theater in there that's far better than anything you'd find in a multiplex. So I sat in one of the recliners and ate some popcorn and was dazzled by the giant-screen projection TV and sound quality as I watched part of "Lord of The Rings." Sitting in that recliner, I listened to Gabriel explain the features - the custom-designed furniture, the sound baffling drapes and the high-tech equipment. I was impressed and jealous - though the theater was almost the size of my apartment.

Gabriel's father, Dimitri, had started the business as a small electronics repair shop in Tenafly, N.J. JD now boasts celebrity clients and specializes in setting up smart homes. While they do top-end work that can cost tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars, Gabriel was quick to emphasize that it is possible to "smarten up" just small pieces of your home - bringing down the cost, too.

They took me to the home of one of their current clients and I was even more impressed by what I saw. This was no sterile showroom, but a fully occupied place where technology had been incorporated seamlessly and made every day activities easier and more fun. From the airconditioned wine cellar to the super smart stereo and TVs to wireless controllers for almost everything, it was an example of how to smarten a home without turning it into an electronics store. That took six months and much more money than most people can afford, but I could see how even those on more normal budgets could adapt some of the features on a smaller scale.