

Need A Panic Room?



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PANIC ROOM, THE 2002 HOLLYWOOD THRILLER STARRING SCREEN ICON JODIE FOSTER, BROUGHT TO THE FORE THE IDEA OF A HIGH-TECH HIDEAWAY NESTLED DEEP IN YOUR HOME.

BUT WHILE THE CONCEPT OF A 'SAFE' OR 'PANIC' ROOM MAY BE NEW TO MOST HOMEOWNERS, IT HAS BEEN IN USE FOR MANY YEARS BY THE RICH AND FAMOUS, CORPORATE EXECUTIVES AND POLITICAL FIGURES AROUND THE WORLD.

According to US expert Chris McGoe, "Most security experts use the phrase Safe Room rather than Panic Room to describe the concept of having an ultra-secure location within a residence. "Think of a safe room as a box with only one opening. You simply fortify the six sides to the box and the single door leading into it," says McGoe. And the most common reason the average person would want a safe room is, he says, out of "fear of assault from a home invasion robber or abusive spouse. And the most common reason for corporate executives to construct a safe room is fear of kidnapping for ransom, as well as fear of robbery for the wealthy".

THE PANIC ROOM DOWN UNDER

Many would be surprised to know that in Australia the concept of having a safe or panic room (strong room is another term) is not as uncommon as one may think. In fact, some of the country's top home automation installers are virtual veterans in the design, building and installation of such a facet into a home.

According to David Dale, marketing manager of the boutique Sydney-based home automation company AVD, the installation of a panic room is a "lot more common than most people realise", as well as being part for the course in some of their larger installations.

At the same time, this type of home install is not without its difficulties. As Dale points out, "We like to think of difficulties as challenges. This way the job remains exciting and becomes more of a game to win rather than just another installation.

But, as always, it's all about the planning. "If we get it right in the design and engineering phase, inevitably the integration process flows smoothly," Dale says

And in one recent install of a panic room, Dale says that the particular client came up with a set of features that were not only a must-have, but also presented a whole new set of challenges for AVD.

GIVING THE CLIENT WHAT THEY WANT

"From the outset, the client wanted to ensure that all aspects of his retreat could be controlled and monitored from anywhere in the world," notes Dale. "To achieve this, the client engaged the services of AVD to undertake the entire home automation system. We brought to the project 20 years of experience in advanced home automation to achieve the result within time and within budget."

Furthermore, he notes that the actual planning process was more or less the same as any typical medium to large-scale home automation job.

"To enable the design, integration and implementation of a fully functioning Home Automation System, AVD undertook a Scope of Works Development, Systems and Infrastructure Engineering & Design, Documentation of Electrical and Electronic Systems, Lighting, Cabling and Switching Schedules, Infrastructure Project Management, Product Selection, Installation & Project Management of Systems, Control System Development, Programming and Testing, and a Final Commissioning and Handover."

In terms of the final result, Dale says, "Obviously the strong room/panic room is set up to deal with a home invasion and all the equipment is purposely designed to cater for this event."

And without going into too much detail, for obvious security



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reasons, this strong room/panic room has a unique entry point with two securing doors, with one door to the entry of a hallway, while the other is in the floor.

"The first door protects the entrance to the strong room/panic room and stalls an intruder. This is done with a G2-rated blast-proof door shutting off a hallway in under two seconds. Next, the floor doors rise up and then open outwards in a butterfly movement. Again these doors are G2 rated blast-proof doors opening in under two seconds. Once the occupants are within the room, the doors are sealed shut. They can then begin to monitor the property and await the arrival of the police."

IN-BUILT AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY

In terms of the technology and electronic integration, Dale says, "To bring together a house with such an advanced level of electronic integration required a control system that was capable of communicating seamlessly and reliably with each of the standalone systems.

"The AMX product we used allowed AVD to develop a custom Graphical User Interface (GUI) that met exacting design and functionality criteria. This was critical in order to achieve easy operation of the house."

"At any one of the many 15-inch Modero touch screens, the owner is able to control every aspect of his home, from the initial control of the base and global functions through to drilling down to the finest detail of each system. The control system consists of 182 custom designed GUI screens, but only about 20 of these are needed to be used on a daily basis to achieve the majority of daily functions," he adds.

And although this particular room was built literally from the ground up, Dale says that retrofitting is also possible for such a design.

"At the end of the day, we will do whatever the client wants."