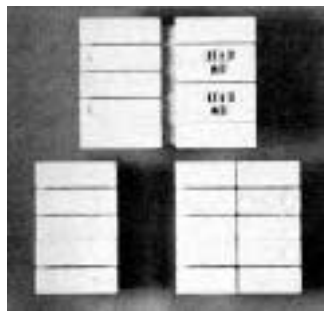


Sound Switch Design

by Sal Alfano



These wiring devices may look like piano keys, but they have features others don't. For starters, in all *Piano* devices, the mounting screws are hidden by the fixed upper and lower "keys." Next, the rocker-type switches can be wired as single poles or three-ways (four-way switches are not yet available) using side-wire or back-wire terminals. And finally, a single device can perform up to three functions in a single 2x4 wall box and up to four functions in 4x4 and 4x6 boxes. All of the common functions are available, including receptacles, cable and phone connections, slide dimmers, and GFCIs. The high-gloss plastic keys come in eight colors and are interchangeable. An anodized aluminum version, called *Grand Piano*, is finished in satin aluminum or brass. Retail pricing starts at \$6.99 for a single *Piano* switch, \$10.99 for *Grand Piano*. For more information, contact U.S. Switch, 4949 S. W. 75th Ave., Miami, FL 33155; 305/661-2889.

Hidden Sprinkler Heads



Residential sprinkler systems are now required by some municipalities, increasing the need for equipment that not only meets the code, but fits homeowners' interior decor. The *Aquarius* series of fire

sprinklers presents a very low profile when installed in ceilings or walls. The button deflector — the part you usually see in a commercial sprinkler head — is concealed inside the housing, and the whole assembly is trimmed with a push-on escutcheon. All that's visible is the heat collector on the fusible link assembly, which pops off when the head is activated. The sprinkler heads are UL-listed for rapid response, and are designed to operate with the lower flow ratings of small-diameter pipes commonly found in residential plumbing systems. The heads operate at about 10 psi and are rated for coverage areas from 12x12 to 20x20. *Aquarius* sprinkler heads are more expensive than ordinary heads (list price is about \$15 each), but residential customers may be willing to pay a premium for a pleasing appearance. For more information, contact Grinnell Fire Protection Systems Co., 3 Tyco Park, Exeter, NH 03833; 603/778-9200.

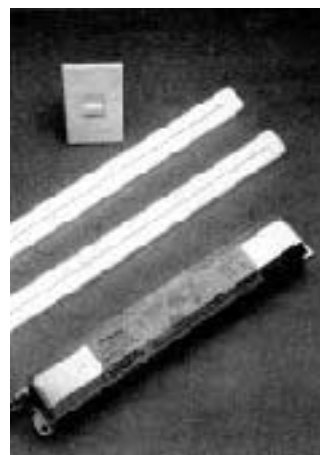
Switched-On Windows



Liquid crystal technology similar to that used in digital watch and calculator displays is what makes *Varilite Vision Panels* change from clear to frosted and back again. The panels are suitable for interior and exterior use in both wet and

dry locations, and are installed and controlled like a lighting fixture. As long as ordinary house current is applied (about 1 watt per square foot of glass), the crystals align to transmit light, and the glass stays clear. But when the power is switched off, the crystals realign randomly, scattering light and turning the glass translucent white. The technology works with clear or tinted glazing and low-e coatings. The installed cost of about \$100 per square foot is out of range for most homeowners, but the technology, which is primarily used in commercial installations, may meet special residential requirements. For more information, contact Taliq Corp., 1277 Reamwood Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94089; 800/626-1334.

Fluorescents On Dimmers



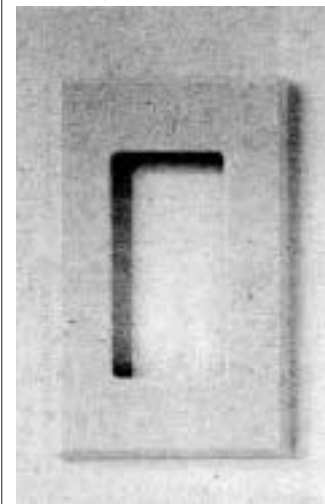
When clients ask if their fluorescent lighting can be put on a dimmer, tell them yes, for a price. According to the manufacturer, *Hi-Lume* electronic dimming ballasts offer quiet, reliable intensity control between 5% and 100% for twin-tube 40w/120v fluorescent lamps. The solid-state ballasts can be used in a variety of fixtures, including 2x2 ceiling fixtures, uplights, cove lights, and wall sconces. Each ballast will operate two lamps and costs about \$100, plus the appropriate controls. To find a supplier, contact Lutron Electronics Co., 7200 Suter Rd., Coopersburg, PA 18036-1299; 215/282-3800.

Wireless Three-Way Switch



Upgrading a single-pole switch loop to a three-way circuit used to mean cutting into finished materials and fishing wires through partitions. The two components of the *Wireless Add-On Switch* accomplish the same thing without the mess. A wireless receiver switch replaces the existing single-pole switch and maintains house current to the fixture. A transmitter switch, housed in its own box and powered by a 9-volt battery, can be surface-mounted up to 50 feet away to complete the three-way circuit. Three RF channels are available so that more than one *Wireless Add-On Switch* can be used in the same house. According to the manufacturer, the crystal-generated RF signal is very accurate and is not likely to interfere with other electronic components. A *Wireless Switched Outlet* is also available from Heath Zenith REFLEX Brand Group, 455 Benton Harbor, MI 49022; 616/925-6000.

Look Ma, No Screws



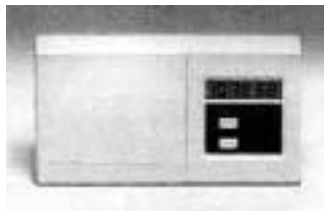
If you've ever had a client make a fuss because the coverplate screws weren't all aligned, you'll recognize the value of the *Zodiac Wall Plate*. A hook on the back of the plate slips firmly over one of the mounting screws, while a slide-on hatch cover conceals the other. The plastic wall plates have a smooth surface and come in four colors: white, ivory, brown, and gray. The hatch covers are available with a smooth finish or vertical grooves, or they can be embossed with one of the twelve signs of the zodiac. Custom imprinting is also available. The wall plates come in one-, two-, or three-gang configurations, and retail for about \$3.50. Currently, only large-cutout (GFCI-style) receptacle plates are available from Texim International, P.O. Box 6068, Irvine, CA 92716-6068; 800/942-4249.

Wide-Angle Peephole



The *DoorScope* peephole uses a series of prisms and plano-convex lenses to provide an unusually large viewing angle. A person standing as far away as 7 feet from the door can get a true image of someone waiting outside. It is especially useful for children, since you don't need to look straight into it to see outside. The advanced optics also prevent anyone outside from looking in. It's big — $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter — and fits wood or metal doors up to 2 inches thick. Retail prices range between \$69 and \$99, and several finishes are available on plastic or aluminum housings. To find a distributor, contact Burton Products, P.O. Box 10393, Tampa, FL 33679; 800/365-7267.

High-Tech Thermostat



You don't need a lot of money or a degree in computer science to use a programmable thermostat. The *Hunter Set 'n Save II* sells to the trade for under \$40, has a clearly written instruction booklet, and even includes self-sticking labels to mark the existing wiring. Simplified programming instructions are included on the inside of the thermostat cover as well. The thermostat works on most heating and air conditioning systems with 24-volt controls and relay currents. It holds as many as four weekday and two weekend temperature settings. It also has two manual overrides, one for short-term and one for extended-period settings. It monitors and displays energy usage in terms of the hours and minutes the system has run over a 24-hour period, as well as total usage for the season. Two 1.5-volt (AA) batteries prevent loss of programming during a power outage. For more information, contact Hunter Fan Co., P.O. Box 14775, Memphis, TN 38114; 901/745-9222.

Lav/Toilet Combo



Cramped for space in the bathroom? The *Wash Basin/Toilet Combination Fixture* has a small lavatory and faucet on top of the toilet tank. When the toilet is flushed, fresh water flows from the faucet into the lav, then drains into the tank and refills it for the next flush. Total water usage is only 1.6 gallons, and the company hopes to attract a share of the retrofit market. The fixture lists for \$140, and will be available in the first quarter of 1992 from Toto Kiki USA, 415 West Taft Ave., Unit A, Orange, CA 92665; 714/282-8686.

Air Quality Tester



Faulty or poorly vented water heaters, stoves, or furnaces can cause dangerously high concentrations of carbon monoxide (CO). Even small amounts of the colorless, odorless gas can cause headaches, nausea, and fatigue. In larger doses, CO can cause permanent injury to the brain and heart, and, ultimately, death. The *Heads Up* carbon monoxide tester visually indicates the presence of the deadly gas. A spot in the middle of the $1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch card is coated with a chemical reagent that changes color in less than six minutes when exposed to levels of CO that are dangerous to humans. Each detector has a working life of about six months, and should be replaced every heating season. The testers mount with an adhesive strip on the back, and sell for \$3.95 plus shipping from Heads Up Product Co., P.O. Box 3126, Evansville, IN 47731-3126; 800/726-3379. ■