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Future Vision The Road to the New Millennium

12 industry experts, 12 visionary ideas.

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by Richard Lebovitz



The connected car

While the car has been regarded chiefly as a means of transportation, it also has played a significant role in connecting the different facets of our everyday lives. It has provided an indispensable link between our homes and a variety of local destinations, including schools, offices, stores and any number of services, from day-care centers to doctors' offices. It also has bridged the distance between our homes and faraway destinations, linking us to vacation spots as well as to the homes of friends and family. Moreover, the interior has evolved to reflect this role.

But despite the network of streets and highways providing these links, our desire for more immediate connectivity and more productive use of our in-transit time has resulted in the creation of new links via earthbound wireless transmission towers or satellites hurtling through space.

The wireless connection

It is clear from the scenarios presented in the special "Future Vision" section on pages 22 to 30 of this issue that telematics, the term used to describe in-vehicle communication systems combining wireless voice and data capabilities with Global Positioning System satellite technologies, will play a vital role in future car interiors. Not only will these technologies provide us with information, entertainment and communication while we are in transit but they will also transform the appearance and layout of the interior.

As many of the "Future Vision" concepts suggest, interiors will evolve into simpler, safer, more comfortable arrangements, reflective of the comfort and security we experience in our homes. They also will be flexible and adaptable to business, entertainment or other functions, depending on the need of the moment.

Taken to an extreme, the car could integrate with our daily lives in a way heretofore unimaginable, as the design

team at Johnson Controls depicts in its scenario of a car serving as the technological centerpiece of a futuristic row-house development.

Intermodal thinking

Parallel to the development and introduction of these new electronics technologies is emerging a rethinking of the car's role in our society. Forward-thinking vehicle designers and urban planners envision the car as only one of several means of transportation.

Rather than creating more urban sprawl and further dependence on the automobile, pioneering planners are challenging the wisdom of single-family residential zoning regulations and proposing communities in which residences, businesses and appropriate industries co-exist, much as they did before our society became so dependent on the automobile. Such communities will not eliminate the automobile but will eliminate or lessen many of the problems associated with it, including congestion, pollution and injurious accidents.

Furthermore, as Eyoub Khan, another contributor to our "Future Vision" section described for me in a phone conversation, intermodal facilities, combining rail, transit, air and automobile conveyances, will play a pivotal role in this new way of thinking about our transportation needs. Such facilities already exist in major European cities like Paris and Frankfurt and are on the drawing boards in the United States.

It will be some time before such integrated transportation systems become commonplace, but when that moment arrives, the vehicles we use every day themselves will undergo a radical transformation, and once again, as the dozen concepts in our "Future Vision" section show, the interior will evolve in ways that we can only imagine. ♦

We welcome your letters and on-line comments. Please address your e-mail to rlebovitz@autointeriors.com.

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