

DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME:

*Building Security into
the Home Project*





Did you know that burglaries of residential properties account for 74% of all burglary offenses? Through decades of vibrant relationships with other leaders in the luxury residential industry, the Night Light team has gained invaluable insight into the security challenges facing single-family homes in Chicagoland. Night Light approached a group of alliance partners, with indispensable industry knowledge in their respective fields, to uncover what Chicagoland's homeowners need to know to design for enhanced security. Times have changed, and so must everyone who hopes to stay above the rising waters. As crime rates climb, design-build firms continue to weave improved security measures into the original construction of homes and their landscapes.

These partners share how to best keep families out of danger, from the conceptual phase through the execution of the most minute details. A classic security system is only one isolated element of a holistic security strategy that deters break-ins and burglaries. G. Michael Verden, former Secret Service agent and current owner/CEO of the strategic security consultancy firm, The Lake Forest Group, advises that preventative risk mitigation is the key to any comprehensive security plan. And Keith Fisher, home security authority and owner of Keyth Technologies, adds, "Homeowners ought to follow a procedure for a predictable outcome." A cohesive team of industry partners can execute a home project with elements and features that simplify efforts and eliminate costs down the road, leaving a finished home project truly complete.

1

DETERMINE YOUR RISK PROFILE

Every family must first determine its risk profile based on: lifestyle, net worth, frequency of travel, societal position, accessibility of valuable collections, volumes of cash or expensive jewelry, and possession of firearms, among other factors. A home's size plays a major role as well, because the larger the home and property, the more difficult it is to monitor. Compounded factors exponentially increase the overall threat.

If determining your family's risk profile sounds daunting, consider hiring a security consultant who will sit down with you to assess your needs. You will need to build an exhaustive list of everyone who has access to your home or property on a regular or semi-regular basis. Some suggestions include: mail, grocery and laundry delivery people, landscapers, cleaning professionals, contractors, dog walkers, nannies, the cable guy, and the power meter reader. The accumulated number of strangers who find themselves at your doorstep—and inside your home—may surprise you. Nothing is inherently



wrong with the increasing interplay between homes and the outside world, but that interaction certainly poses a threat if homeowners overlook the risk of a higher volume of humans coming and going on their property. Ultimately, however, this awareness does not provide a sufficient barrier to potential dangers, so consider the following.

2

MITIGATE INITIAL RISKS

One component in addressing risk is exercising due diligence. Ask the companies who work on or visit your property to communicate expected times for their calls and plan to be onsite while strangers are present. If you know when to expect a crew, representative, or delivery person, executing this easy step will implicitly identify those who have no business at your home. Additionally, consider requesting contractors' background screening policies before hiring them. You have the right to request this data, and a firm's refusal to procure it may be a sign that things are not as they should be. As modest as these steps may appear, Verden identifies them as effective measures for preemptively reducing the risk of break-ins.

In contemporary American culture, technology has admittedly pervaded in everyday functions. Many people share life events on social media. Did you write a quick post when your husband

bought you those tickets for a Caribbean cruise in February? Or did you upload photos from your family reunion in Ohio, in real time? If not, your children almost certainly did. People with the will to uncover when your home is unoccupied often have a way of extracting that data. Assess your privacy settings, but more importantly, evaluate what information you routinely volunteer without hesitation.

Social media is a broad category that demands most people's caution, but maybe you are not one of those people. Maybe you regularly have to begin relaying a news story to your spouse, about some high-profile scandal, with, "What is it called again? Instaface? Snapgram?" If you think a "feed" is food for birds, and a "tweet" is the sound one makes, listen in. A magical cloud engulfs your home and property, allowing you to look up the nearest Indian takeout joint, pay your bills online, and access your email account. In many cases, this cloud extends all the way out to the street. It is called Wi-Fi. When anyone enters this cloud, they open a metaphorical door into your life. So, lock it up as tight as you would your physical front door, with password protection.

3 PLAN FOR SECURITY

Much more can be said on the topic of exercising due diligence, but that is only the beginning of a complete security makeover. Are you, or do you know, someone who (a) is in the process of building their family home, (b) plans to begin a landscape or home remodel, or (c) purchased property to build a second home? If so, a team of trusted contractors is your number one resource for designing security into the project. Keith Fisher, owner of Keyth Technologies, notes that every plan balances three major factors: (1) cost, (2) security/peace of mind, and (3) convenience. One of these will inevitably drive the others, and priority should be assigned before beginning a project. This article aims to equip the curious with resources to minimize both time-related and financial costs, while maximizing convenience and peace of mind. No factor need be sacrificed. For this, Night Light turns to their trusted industry partners.



A couple of major advantages to a preventative approach is discretion and budget protection. Mark Benner, owner of Mark E. Benner Architects, Ltd., speaks from the perspective of the first cog in the planning wheel, the architect. He works through the most fundamental issues facing his clients, because "architecture's most basic purpose is protection and shelter. Without first satisfying safety and security, all of our other goals and concerns are a wasted effort." Architects enter the project early enough to design elements such as *safe rooms* into a home's original layout. These rooms are not full-fledged panic rooms but function as typical living spaces until they are needed in an emergency. If the time comes to use them, they are stocked with food and water, equipped with independent lines of communication, and sealed from within.

Fisher notes that a burglar alarm is a fifth-level response for police, reinforcing Benner's definition of security as "about buying time." However, deterring intruders from entering the home is his first priority. One way of addressing this issue is the inclusion of a *receiving closet*, to manage a home's increasing interaction with the outside world without allowing access to the home. He advises thoughtful outdoor lighting application because "dark spots... cause vulnerability." Outdoor lighting exposes activity to both the homeowner and their neighbors. The architect's unique positioning allows him to save his client the exorbitant time and monetary expenditure of building in awkward appendages to an existing home post-construction. He offers a plethora of customizable, discrete solutions to common issues facing the high net-worth families and individuals he serves.



"Burglar alarm is a fifth-level response for police."



4 MAKE YOUR HOME A SMART ONE

Home automation specialists choose techniques to blend peace of mind with convenience. As Joe Barrett, owner of Barrett's Technology Solutions, attests, "your smart home is a safe home." He regularly integrates networked security cameras with remote-access controls to give his clients the capability to set alarms and check cameras from afar. Did you rush out the door on the phone, juggling coffee, a bagel, and your briefcase? Are you wracking your brain to remember if you set the alarm? Set it from your phone as soon as you get to work. Then, check the cameras for activity since you left. Barrett also routinely installs smart locks. With keyless controls, your wife never has to dig through her tote in the rain to find the chronically missing keys hiding at the bottom. If your children arrive home from school and cannot find their house key, remote access allows you to unlock the door from wherever you are. Smart locks also include a monitoring feature, so you can check the history of their use.

None of the other trades represented in this article relate exclusively to security systems and do not claim to preclude their necessity. The purpose of the other residential professionals' efforts is to increase security systems' effectiveness and unburden them of unnecessary inefficiencies. Fisher lends insight to this conversation: "Security is done in layers... there is no one bandage that fixes all." He defers to experts of other trades to discern their most advantageous contributions. For instance, "outdoor lighting is a tremendous advantage. Many like to live with the shades open." Utter darkness outside makes people anxious when they walk past their windows. Yet, video surveillance and motion detecting lights can produce excessive false positives, yielding "erosion of trust," on their own. An animal, or unruly bush or tree in the Midwestern wind, may easily trigger a motion detector. When a light outside your back window switches on regularly because of a dangling tree branch, it dulls your response to that light and the credence you place in its efficacy.

*"Security is done in layers
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Ninety-two percent of break-ins occur on the ground floor, so sensors fixed outside the front and back door, base floor windows, garages, and basement entrances need to be reliable. More sophisticated technology can improve recognition accuracy, but only live operators can attribute the cause to plant matter, an animal, or an intruder. Fisher believes that video surveillance will continue to dominate. Cheap, do-it-yourself solutions are on the rise, but he warns that you get what you pay for. He warns that energy companies and offerings such as Google Nest sell your personal information to one another. In addition to potential breaches, do-it-yourself options disregard the human element that every surveillance system ought to include. Inexpensive solutions may utilize technology, but they don't benefit from confirmation by a round-the-clock surveillance team. You get what you pay for.

5 EXECUTE THE PLAN

Members of the construction stage contribute a different layer to the conversation. They are tasked with implementing the work completed in the conceptual stage. Barry Sylvester, owner of Sylvester Construction Services, Inc., applies decisions made for architectural, security system, and home automation design during his phase of the home project. His job is to keep the site secure and execute the plans given him. Last-minute add-ons result in expensive change orders and lengthy scheduling delays. He cautions that after the drywall phase, little can be done to alter the design without exceeding the budget. Furthermore, spending skyrockets when adding stories or rooms to a home *after* project completion. Most of these issues are avoidable through proper planning with the advice of an industry professional, so do not wait to consider your most high-leverage options!





Interior designer and principal at Michelle's Interiors, Michelle Rohrer-Lauer, speaks to some of the indoor security features that she recommends to clients, depending on their preferences and lifestyle. For those who prefer the privacy of shielded windows, she designs motorized shades or drapes for the outer rooms of a home. If she needs to set aside space for jewelry or gun safes, that step ought to take place after the trades are no longer onsite. Sylvester advises that if the original drawing calls for a built-in safe, make sure that they are not stocked until the project is complete.

Many homeowners opt for audio and video recording devices built into spaces where caretakers spend time with children. These grant parents peace of mind while away, and allow for monitoring when they detect suspicious activity. Rohrer-Lauer may also include automated interior lighting that mimics the schedule of an occupied home, for a family to set while out of town. Even experienced burglars have a difficult time recognizing the feigned nature of these imitations of realistic habits. The combination of these options helps deter break-ins. Your needs are specific to your surroundings, lifestyle, and risk profile. An interior designer will customize a blend of elements to most aptly benefit you and your family.

"Your needs are specific to your surroundings, lifestyle, and risk profile."

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DON'T FORGET YOUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE!

John Dini, owner of Electronic Entry Systems, concerns himself with the perimeter of the property. His work comprises the first line of defense, customizing a plan that utilizes appropriate fencing and smart gates. Twenty-six years' experience with electronic entry systems has taught him to troubleshoot every imaginable issue and proactively cocreate cutting edge solutions with his clients.

That said, "we only offer and utilize the 'latest technology' once we have verified that it works," comments Dini. "It needs to work well in all types of weather, and for the long term." He employs remote-operated Bluetooth controls with diagnostic capabilities, as well as battery backup for possible power outages or severe weather. Dini also encourages clients to opt for a service contract to monitor the proper

functioning of their gates, to eliminate the potential for malfunction in an emergency. His particular commitment to this niche and 'do-it-right-the-first-time' attitude demand that he only recommends methods and technology that he knows to be dependable.

Landscape architect David Van Zelst, owner of Van Zelst, Inc., notes that people are spending more time at home, and his clients are increasingly concerned not only with aesthetics and functionality of a landscape, but security. "One concept that is often overlooked in design is that of sight lines. People tend to plant shielding driveways, windows, and corners." Attention to sight lines guides Van Zelst's creative process, placing trees and plant material in such a way as to allow homeowners to survey their properties effortlessly. Trees tend to provide



hiding places for trespassers, but with careful decision-making and aesthetic lighting you can minimize the risk of concealed lurkers. Access points to the home need to be kept clear of plant material, or carefully maintained, to avoid shielding intruders or setting off motion sensors unnecessarily.

Night Light pays fastidious attention to landscape illumination. The capacity to survey one's property from inside the house is crucial. Well-designed, aesthetic outdoor lighting eliminates the *black glass effect*. The black glass effect refers to the sensation homeowners experience when they look out a window after dark, and cannot see anything but their own reflection. Uneasiness bubbles up out of the compounded effects of feeling both conspicuous and blind.

Well-designed, aesthetic outdoor lighting exists to create a nighttime oasis for men and women who work all day and wish they could enjoy their landscapes in the evening. One integral measure in achieving that end is relieving the psychological weight of the black glass effect. As Van Zelst mentioned above, notable hiding places for trespassers can be eliminated with lighting. Landscape illumination designers also light entries and the ground level of a home with an exceptionally attractive alternative to the blinding flood lights one would typically envision. There is no reason to be 'the dark house on the block' because you believe the solution to be worse than the problem.

When husbands travel for business, they often feel helpless to defend their loved ones left in a home with no light to deter intruders who lurk in the shadows. Communicating constant presence at the home is part of a comprehensive security strategy. So, the systems Night Light installs run on a preset digital timeclock, switching on at a set time each evening or in concert with home automation controls. Installation in and around landscape and hardscape can be tricky if illumination specialists are not involved early in the outdoor portion of the project. To eliminate time and budget strains, make certain to select a well-integrated team.

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MAXIMIZE PEACE OF MIND

To protect homeowners and these trusted advisors’ valuable industry knowledge, this article offers only a smattering of the best practices and technology they leverage on behalf of their clients. People’s homes come into more contact with the outside world than ever before, so don’t wait for an incident before pursuing security risk mitigation. From conception to construction, preemptive measures in every phase of home planning can seamlessly maximize peace of mind and convenience while eliminating the headache of expensive post-construction solutions.

Once you determine your relative risk profile, put together an integrated team to execute a concerted effort towards a comprehensively secure home. The collaborators represented in this article believe that doing so will *dramatically* reduce your family’s vulnerability upon project completion. A cohesive team of contractors will integrate discrete, high-leverage security measures for your family without disruption to the lifestyle you have worked hard to establish. Ask for help, and take control of the process! The cost of waiting – and worrying – is not worth paying.

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For those who appreciate the difference...

At Night Light everything we do we believe in challenging the status quo. We believe in thinking differently. The way that we challenge the status quo is by providing products and services that are the most efficient, well designed, simple, longest lasting and tailored to the specific needs, values and budgets of our clients. We just happen to provide design-build landscape illumination for those who appreciate the difference.



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