

# Domestic air conditioning is coming home



**Andy Stanford, Managing Director of Wave Air Conditioning, explains why domestic air-conditioning is now affordable, attractive and very marketable – if you can cope with the public.**

**While the domestic air conditioning market is not going to break overnight, the conditions for its growth, wrongly forecast for more than a decade, are better than they have ever been. Products are better suited to it, prices are lower and the climate has become warmer. All these factors have combined to make it start – just start – to take off.**

One big leap forward has been the advent of small inverters that can be used with single phase, 240V systems, without causing power spikes. Another is the introduction of the true multi-split, where up to four indoor units can run off a single, discreetly sited, outdoor unit. Previously, if householders wanted to cool a number of rooms, they were faced with the prospect of a garden full of condensers.

## IT MUST LOOK GOOD TOO

Indoor units are also much more home friendly. As appearance has become a more important part of office and shop design, so air conditioning units have become slimmer and increasingly stylish, making them much more acceptable in a domestic setting. They have become something you can live with as well as work with. A prime example of this is the LG Artcool range, designed to fit in with and enhance decor.

A further factor in the UK is the explosion of conservatories throughout the suburbs. To use them year-round they have to be heated and cooled and homeowners have learned that a heat pump air conditioning unit can do both economically. For many people, the conservatory is their first experience of an air conditioning unit in the home. Once they find out what it is like, they want the same comfort in other rooms.

## NEW BUILD OR RETROFIT

One thing that has always held up the domestic air conditioning market is the low rate of new building in the UK; we make our housing stock last decades longer than other countries. The easiest way to air condition a home is to install a ducted system while a house is being built, rather than trying to retrofit an older building.

However, most opportunities are for retrofitting, and installing a system in someone's home is completely different from the sort of work most installers are used to in shops and offices. In commercial buildings, there are usually false ceilings, a flat roof or a yard where pipes can be run and equipment can be installed without too much concern. There is also the safety net that most refurbishment projects will be completely redecorated to solve problems with ripped wallpaper and damaged carpets.

When people have already forked out on air conditioning, they do not want to redecorate as well.

Nor do they want exposed pipe-work and there are few false ceilings with which to hide problems. External units have to be sensitively located, and, inside, dustsheets are needed, holes have to be neat and worried householders have to be handled with sensitivity.

Some contractors cannot cope with working in this way, so those installers that can handle the home environment, are finding that they have a specialist niche all to themselves. With business being found largely through recommendation, these contractors are doing very nice business.

## HEAT RECOVERY

The best potential for retrofitting lies in the top 10% of the housing stock, heavily biased towards the south. The owners of these are the people who can afford it and for whom it is also likely to become a must-have status symbol, like a swimming pool.

The rest of the stock is most likely to come into play when it is replaced with new build. One thing that is likely to give this sector a boost is the trend towards building energy efficient homes; particularly Super E. These are so air tight that they have to be fitted with a ventilation system. So as not to ventilate heat to the outside world and suck in cold, these systems have to be fitted with heat recovery equipment; something in which our sister company, Wave Heat Recovery, specialises.

Ventilation systems like this need ducting throughout the house, so it is a simple matter of installing one central air-conditioner. If you make this a heat-pump unit, which is only about 10% more than a standard unit, you can heat the house at the same time.



**Outside view of a Berkeley Homes Super E housing development in Kent. Wave Air Conditioning's sister company Wave Heat Recovery supplied a Lifebreath unit to each of the 147 new homes in the first phase of construction. The contract was worth as £180,000.**