

BEATING THE ODDS: 10 SUCCESS STORIES FOR 2001

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AT Home

Safe Bets





*The finest safes combine
brawn with beauty.*

BY DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

IT'S 7:52 PM. YOU'RE GOING TO BE LATE for an 8 o'clock dinner engagement. You dash home, frantically throw on your tux, and run a comb through your hair. All you need is that special limited edition watch that never fails to make a good impression. That's when you stop short: You have absolutely no idea where you hid it, or even exactly when you last saw it!

"We hear this story time and time again," says Rene Balin, executive vice president for the Americas at Stockinger Safety First Class, a Munich-based safe manufacturer. "People hide their jewelry so well, they can't find it anymore."

And after a night of high-powered socializing, who has the energy to trek down to the basement to stow those valuables in a safe? Access is paramount when it comes to home safe installation. "A safe doesn't do anyone any good if it's difficult to get to or the locking mechanism isn't convenient," says Sheela Murthy, owner of New York City's Traum Safe. "The only way your valuables are safe is if they are actually *in* the safe."

Security and convenience continue to be the primary forces driving installations of home safes and vaults. Technological advances have produced lightweight safes that can be installed anywhere in the home and electronic locking devices that are a snap to use. The days of leaving your jewelry and

collectibles locked up in a bank vault are long gone. Today, people want to enjoy their special pieces, not just visit them occasionally. "Bank hours are extremely limited," says Bill Blanchard, co-owner of A-Max Security Solutions, a Portland, Ore., distributor and installer of Meilink safes. "You can't just grab your pearl necklace for a last-minute engagement."

Home safes and vaults use a combination of old and new technologies, primarily drawn from experiences with installations at professional jewelry stores and major banks. Many of the smaller, basic models use layers of conventional steel paired with combination or key locks. Some of the more advanced units incorporate electronic locks that can be linked with a monitored home alarm system.

"When it comes to home safes, strength equals security," says Kermit Swift, owner of swiftsafes.com, an Internet safe retailer in Renton, Wash. Swift recommends Oregon manufacturer Graffunder for its handmade safes, which use extremely high-density steel, as well as its custom vaults and vault doors, which are as attractive as they are strong.

Gone are the days of leaving valuables locked up in a bank. Today's advanced home safes, such as those from Traum (opposite), offer convenience, accessibility, and brute strength, all in a pretty package.

AT Home



Traum Safe uses materials developed in aeronautical and space research in its home safes, says Murthy. "We don't use conventional materials that can be easily compromised with readily available instruments—our safes are constructed using multiple layers of high-resistance armor plates."

Swift notes an interesting trend in the construction of safe rooms, which are built to house art and antiques, and are also being used in the Midwest as tornado shelters. "Clients request 10-inch-thick steel-reinforced concrete walls, floor, and ceiling," he says. "Then we install a Hampton vault door, which is normally installed on a bank vault—the door itself weighs 3,800 pounds."

Modular vaults with stainless steel bank vault doors are another option, according to Jim Schuler, director of sales for Allied Security, a Seattle retailer of custom safes and vaults. "It is very easy in new homes to pour a concrete room and hang a bank vault door," he says, "but we're also seeing an increase in people who want this type of protection for existing homes, so we design modular vaults that can be installed."

Stockinger safes (above) offer custom finishes that can be made to match furniture, as well as individually designed drawers.

For some, installing an entire vault is overkill when a freestanding home safe is adequate. Today's advanced home safes incorporate lightweight industrial materials and special locking systems, including time-delay locks and special relocking barriers that are activated if there is a problem with the primary lock. The new technology has also freed safes from the confines of the basement.

"Conventional safes are not only unattractive, they are also extremely heavy and therefore have to be installed in a cellar," explains Stockinger's Balin. "Our safes are made of lighter-weight high-tech materials so that they can be installed on any floor, in any room."

As safes take their places among decorative furnishings in the home, there is a heightened emphasis on their appearance. In fact, the biggest trends in home safes are fashion and customization. "All of our safes and vaults can be completely customized," says Swift of swiftsafes.com. "We can construct silver- and gold-plated interiors and install velvet drawer liners, special ring cases, custom-built jewelry cases, and even humidity-controlled environments."

Balin describes Stockinger safes as works of art. "We work very closely with our customers to match the colors and decor of their homes," he says. In addition to a rainbow of color choices and exotic wood finishes, Stockinger designs the drawers individually to



This Stockinger Sphinx II safe (above) features a custom high-gloss lacquer finish with a brass interior and ostrich leather-lined drawers.

accommodate each piece of jewelry and lines them, as well as the shelves, with velvet or ostrich leather.

Traum also caters to the stylistic whims of its customers with a choice of 5,000 exterior lacquer colors and interior options that include fine wood inlays or 18-karat gold plating. Each interior tray is custom designed to fit the client's particular needs and hand-made with Italian leather and velvet in a Swiss workshop. "Each piece of jewelry has its own place in the safe," says Murthy, who adds that the company has made safes that incorporate self-winding functions for watch collections and has designed special compartments to showcase coin collections. Another option is a separate cash or document compartment.

She points out that Traum's customers choose safes to complement their lifestyles. "Our clients pay a lot of attention to their homes," she says. "They entertain friends and family there, and they want their safes to fit seamlessly into their beautiful homes." ®

Contributor Donna Boyle Schwartz looks forward to the day when she has enough fine jewelry to warrant installing a home safe. Until then, her mattress will have to suffice.

SECURITY BRIEFING

Purchasing a safe or a vault is not an everyday investment. Here are a few ratings from Underwriters Laboratories to help determine which design provides the right amount of protection for your needs.

Safes are rated separately for burglary resistance and fire protection.

Burglary ratings for quality home safes are generally TL-15, TL-30, and TL-30x6 (six-sided protection). A TL-15 rating means that a safe is tool-resistant for 15 minutes, while the highest rating, TL-30x6, means that it takes a team of experts 30 minutes to drill and break into a safe from any of six sides.

"The average criminal would take four hours to break into a safe with a 30 rating," explains Bill Blanchard, co-owner of A-Max Security Solutions. "But the average burglar only spends about eight minutes inside a home."

In terms of fire resistance, all high-quality home safes should have at least a one-hour fire rating, which means that if the exterior of the safe is exposed to 1,700-degree heat for one hour, the interior of the safe will remain below 350 degrees. Paper chars at 400 degrees. Special data storage safes can be built inside the primary safe for other media: Photo negatives char at 220 degrees, and computer disks, at 125 degrees. —D.B.S.

