

Modern living: Household appliances you can really talk to

Iris Benaroya, [Special to National Post](#)
Aug 18, 2022 • 5 days ago • 4 minute read



Last month, the baker Anna Olson and her chef-husband, Michael, were pulling out of their driveway to go to a cottage when a beep sounded.

“My app alerted me that I hadn’t fully closed the freezer door,” says Olson. “It could have been a disaster.”

Olson, who’s a brand ambassador for LG Electronics Canada Home, describes smart technology in the kitchen as a natural extension of the ways we’re using it elsewhere.

“We use technology to play music through voice command and to check the weather,” says Olson. “Why shouldn’t we connect with our appliances and tell them to make more ice when we’re having people over? Or tell us when we need to change the water filter, or run a dish cycle?”

In addition to the InstaView Refrigerator that alerted Olson from her driveway, LG has released a suite of smart appliances that can be controlled through an app: the TrueSteam dishwasher; a ProBake Convection slide-in range with air sous vide and air fry; and a WashTower washer/dryer set.

According to a survey commissioned by LG, 60 percent of Canadians agree that household tasks are a burden and there aren't enough hours in the day to get everything done. For 20 per cent of Canadians, the weight of household tasks is so great that it's impacting their overall mood and stress and/or anxiety levels.

If sprinting away from conversation during a dinner party to get the crostini in the oven is adding to that burden, there's LG's ProBake oven, which flicks on with a voice command.

Other brands are also getting in on the action. Samsung and LG both have steam closets — the AirDresser and the Styler — meant for dry-clean-only garments and anything else you want to toss in there, including stinky sneakers. The appliances are Wi-Fi enabled, which allows for remote control.

Such a steam cupboard is often in use at Melissa Maker's house. Maker, the brainchild behind Clean My Space, a popular cleaning company, throws in everything that needs sanitizing, including her daughter's stuffies.

Maker is a fan of smart appliances “because my energy and water bills can be lowered,” she says. “(I can) manage appliances without having to physically be in the room they're in. I'll often remote-start the washer I forgot to turn on.”

Samsung's Bespoke appliance line-up, meanwhile, connects to Samsung's app, which allows users to set cooking temperatures and times or run a dish cycle remotely. It can also be hollered at using a voice assistant such as Samsung's Bixby or Amazon's Alexa. The “turn off the oven” voice command — that can be verified on the app — is a boon for neurotics everywhere.

Delta, meanwhile, has fashioned a VoiceIQ Faucet that pairs with a connected voice-enabled home device like Alexa. It can be called on to dispense exact amounts of water: one cup or six ounces, or the dog's bowl, while features like water warm-up and voice-activated on/off lend a hand if yours are tainted by raw chicken.

Bosch is another appliance brand investing in smart tech. Its proprietary system, Home Connect, is open source, and it's always being upgraded. “Other developers can write apps to work with it. Tesla, for example,” says Steve Preiner, head of Bosch's brand marketing.

“It's neat because the whole idea of connected appliances serves two functions: monitoring and control. If you're in line at the grocery store with a frozen pizza and want to preheat your oven so it's ready by the time you get home, you can do that from your phone as a practical-use scenario,” he says; that's the control part.

“The monitoring might come in for your dishwasher,” he says. If you're outside with guests, a smart model eliminates the need to get up and physically check if the clean glasses are ready.

“The same applies to laundry,” says Preiner. “If you live in a four-level townhouse, you don't have to run up and down to the washing machine, or listen for a buzzer. And you can play your favourite song to notify you when it's ready.”

High-tech appliances, however, have more systems that can break down. But as Preiner sees it, they're like a fibreoptic TV. "Should you ever need service, when you register your product we can connect you to it and run a remote diagnostic," says Preiner. "And if it's something really simple causing an error code, like the filter in your dishwasher needs to be rinsed out, perhaps avoid a service call."

Still, Nathan Lui, owner of the Toronto repair company Appliance Heroes, cautions against jumping on the smart appliance wagon without doing your research. "They're extraordinarily unreliable and complex and difficult to repair," says Lui, who adds that he's been called in to repair smart appliances that are just over a year old, after the warranty has run out.

That said, smart appliances aren't the majority of appliance types Lui sees, but he believes that's "because they're not as popular yet."

"You've probably heard modern appliances are unreliable and built for obsolescence. Every word of it is true," says Lui, who is frustrated by the environmental impact of today's appliances in general.

"The appliances I always recommend people buy are analogue, simple, mechanical," says Lui. "No fancy features. Just (fewer) things to go wrong. They just last longer."