

A robot that waters ferns, plays guitar and does household chores

How the times they do progress. iRobot, the company that makes funky human-like appliances, challenged the roboticists among us (are there any?) to build a gadget using the iRobot Create program. The nifty program comes assembled, so earnest developers can design new robots without having to build a mobile robot from scratch — now that's a skill worth flaunting at your

INNOVATIONS

next dinner party. The winning entry — entitled personal home robot — was designed to make life around the house more convenient and entertaining. Home robot can water plants, control lights and appliances, play music and remind owners to take medication. Entries were judged

on aesthetics, intelligence, utility, entertainment value, completeness and originality. To see the other entries, visit tomshardware.com/irobot. The robot's creator, Danh Trinh, 35, of Towson, Md., won \$5,000. Now if he could just learn how to work the DVD. *National Post*



CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Three design experts analyze this layout for a 790-square-foot one-level condominium unit

HEATHER DUBBELDAM

Architect



So much for form follows function. There is nothing practical about a triangular condominium unit — the shape makes each room awkward, hard to furnish and disorienting. The first impression upon entry is a view of a closed washroom door (or worse, if the door is open). The kitchen has no work triangle and is completely exposed to the living space. And what is the point of having a second balcony if it is completely unusable? So, what do you do when you live in a skew? If the entrance door were rotated to face the wall of windows, a galley kitchen with an island could be located where the current entrance is, facing the living area. The main bathroom could then be located between the kitchen and north bedroom, which also creates space for additional clothes storage for the bedroom. The south bedroom also needs more clothes storage; a walk-through closet could be incorporated if the bathroom were reworked to use the empty space adjacent to it. At least the south bedroom balcony has space for a chair; a lounge might be pushing it.

JEFFREY DOUGLAS

Interior designer



While the proximity of the toilet upon entry is certainly practical in an emergency, it isn't what you'd call a beautiful sight line! I would make this bathroom private with a thick wall separating it from the entry, and rearrange the tub across the width to make the bathroom feel less narrow. From the front entry, I would recess a shelf into the thick wall for a mirror and key shelf. The ensuite is a better place to create a private/public bathroom. While good for hide-and-seek, I don't think two doors to the second bedroom are necessary, so the one closest to the bathroom could become a new toilet/sink area, and add a door to the private area beyond. Move the shower to the mysterious space at the bottom of the plan, and a second sink could be along the same wall as the toilet. I'd split the closet by putting the bathroom entry in the middle. Sliding panels are über-cool, but they dominate this plan to the detriment of its efficiency.

DEE DEE TAYLOR HANNAH

Architect, interior designer



At first glance this plans seems extremely angled, some may even say affected but under closer examination isn't so bad. The long entry wall to the right when you walk in can be high-gloss lacquered denim blue (as in Gaultier Birkin Bag blue) to draw you into the space. How fun to use the entry and bathroom as foyer space. The slab marble entry floor should continue to the end of the tub; during a party, fill the tub with flowers and Champagne! The toilet is a tough one so I would use a screen in chinoiserie to hide the obvious. Will angled furniture or square seem more at home in the space? Neither — so I see curves and lots of circles. Once you have bumped into the angles of the glass you'll want some soft edges to ease the pain. Oh, the joys of a circular bed! But where to put the pillows? Your job is to create pause and reflection; a Michael Snow or Harold Towne piece of art on the walls will encourage you to stay in the space and ponder.

