

Security Details

By Debra Scott | June 5, 2014 - 1:39pm

If you read the police blotter, and who doesn't, you will have noticed that there is plenty of crime in the Hamptons. Recently there was a home invasion in Southampton Village in which a woman was stabbed. An arsonist set fire to a \$34 million mansion in Bridgehampton. A Springs heroin addict was just sent to prison after pleading guilty to burglarizing more than a dozen houses. And two weeks ago one man attacked another with a machete on a quiet suburban street in Springs.

It's not like the old days when a dog was all you needed, and you hid your key in a fake rock. Though there still are holdouts. "Some people who have been out here for generations do not even possess keys to their own houses," said Chris Chapin of Douglas Elliman. In other words, they leave their doors unlocked. "Because we are on a peninsula, we have few transients."

On the other hand, J.P. Foster, a dispatcher with the East Hampton Village police and an agent at Town and Country Real Estate, said, "You can never be too careful." He points out that all new houses being built today are equipped with alarm systems that can alert homeowners to all sorts of hairy situations from burglars, to fire, to low temperatures, and moisture. "Around here pipes bursting is the biggest problem," he said, especially for those with second homes who aren't here much of the time. "They need security systems and caretakers to check on things from time to time."

Curtis Cole, owner of Systems Design Company, a Southampton "home automation" company, said he is "shocked that a lot of people still hide keys and are fairly lackadaisical while not out here." He is also "amazed how easily people let companies in and out" of their houses. "A lot of thefts are crimes of opportunity," he said, explaining that sometimes workers might take something "they think wouldn't be missed" while on the job, or return later. Often even caretakers leave doors open to allow for plumbers, electricians, whomever, to get in and out. He cites an example of audio-visual personnel placing about 15 plasma TVs in the basement to allow floor sandersdunnit? Floor sanders? A.V. workers? They may never know.

The good news for all of us is that the technology until recently only available to the high end has gotten affordable. Most systems are integrated through smartphones, so you can "get a call on your iPhone and see image of who's at the front door" . . . as long as you have a camera mounted. "You can let them in and lock up after," said Mr. Cole.

Security systems on the South Fork range from a simple alarm system to armed bodyguards. Think: Ronald Perelman's estate in East Hampton.

Bellringer Security in Southampton offers a basic system, installation \$399, where it places alarms for detection of smoke, low temperatures, and intruders, for which it wires up to four windows and three doors. Doors are especially important. "According to F.B.I. statistics, 83 percent of break-ins occur through doors," said Ed Thompson, the firm's president. To supplement protection, Bellringer can add motion detectors to key traffic areas such as hallways and stairs. He estimates that about 20 percent of houses on the South Fork have security systems.

Another common security procedure is the use of infrared cameras to detect would-be intruders before they get to the house perimeter. Out here, no surprise, the movement that shows up on monitors is mostly deer. Asset protection is more specific. An item of value such as a work of art gets wired so that if it's moved a racket will ensue and scare the bejesus out of the potential pilferer.

At the "super high end is manned security," said Mr. Cole. This is where security personnel sit in an office on the estate watching monitors, whether the owners are in residence or not. "A lot of these people are concerned about someone sticking a bomb on the property when they're not there and having it go off when they are." What are also popular in the estates of high-profile residents are background checks on anyone who has access to their property.

Both Bellringer and Systems Design provide both guards and monitoring from central stations, which are manned 24/7. Human monitors call either police or owners, depending on the legitimacy of the threat. Which leads us to false alarms. "You're going to have new cleaning people who don't now how to use them," said Mr. Thompson. "One of our specialties is to educate the customer on how to prevent them." But still, many false alarms are called in to the police. "All municipalities have fines," said Mr. Thompson. "And every time there's a false alarm the fines increase. In a short time you could be paying a thousand or more." At Bellringer a monitoring fee starts at \$34 a month. Customers can also pay \$180 in advance for three guard responses, or around \$600 a year plus a fee for a guard visit.

Theft of copper gutters is "the biggest problem out here," said Mr. Thompson. He has recently begun to install special weatherproof contacts that will generate an alarm when a gutter is ripped off the facade.

Besides alerting owners to intruders, security systems also work well as deterrents. "No thief wants to get involved with a security system," said Mr. Thompson. "It could mean the end of his career."