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A glass staircase by Gustavson/Dundes Architecture & Design, installed by Stern Projects in a Manhattan penthouse.

## RENOVATIONS: STATE OF THE ART

*New York contractor Nicholas S.G. Stern weighs in on the latest options for updating your home*

**Q:** What are your favorite new building materials?

**A:** At Stern Projects, we're using glass as a structural element for design features like stairs, rails, balconies, and roofs. We like Glassos crystalized glass; it has a milk-white surface resembling Thassos stone. Glass tile is also popular and plays wonderfully with light. Both are affordable, but the nuances are in the details—invest in a skilled installation.

**Q:** What are clients requesting today that they weren't five years ago?

**A:** A television in almost every room. Now that TVs are razor thin, we can conceal them in the footboard of a bed or inside furniture, and access them with motorized arms and lifts. We've created a sliding pocket door that's embedded with a TV, lights, and bookshelves, with no visible wires or tracks. At the touch of a button, the door emerges to create a screening room for television viewing.

**Q:** What do clients want in leisure rooms?

**A:** There is no limit. We've built indoor swimming pools, basketball courts, dance studios, meditation rooms, golf simulators, karaoke areas, and cinemas, to name a few.

**Q:** Have any amenities gone out of fashion?

**A:** Concrete countertops and central-vacuum systems.

**Q:** Are there products that can take a renovation to the next level?

**A:** I like Lutron's HomeWorks setup to control lighting and Savant's home-automation programs. I also recommend HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning) systems. Most people focus on the need for air-conditioning in summer, but humidification in winter can be equally important for health reasons, as well as for proper maintenance of art, woodwork, and musical instruments.

**Q:** What advice do you give renovators?

**A:** Set the bar high for quality, as opposed to cramming in as many things as possible within your budget. Thoughtful design and solid craftsmanship are what give a home its soul.