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Design

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The Key Table (Overview)

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Key Table

The Key Table was designed to get a sense of people's emotions from the way they put their stuff on it when they come home. It seeks to read meaning into the simple act of setting down objects – your keys, wallet, mobile phone – and hopes to distinguish between a hard day at the office or a peaceful stroll.

A mechanised picture frame signals the Table's mood estimations. Emotional entrances cause the frame to swing out of kilter, warning other household inhabitants to tread carefully.

The Key Table uses load sensors to support its top surface. When an object is placed upon it, calculations are performed to distinguish the force of impact from the weight of the object. The result is sent wirelessly to the companion picture frame.

We knew the Key Table wouldn't always be right. People might even pick up and replace objects to convey just the right mood. But in emphasising the importance of emotional communication in the home, the Table was intended to raise awareness of the issue and encourages people to think how they use objects and spaces to express their moods.

We gave the Key Table to a London family to live with for about a month. To our surprise, their understanding of the device centred on the dog - 'Tobie', as they called it – pictured in the frame. To the family, interactions with the table wasn't just a matter of expressing emotions, but also involved playing with Tobie. Though unexpected and not entirely welcome, this result emphasised the potential for design to support a wide range of playful engagements and was one of the reasons for our continuing interest in design for interpretation.



A volunteer observes the picture frame tilting.



The Key Table in the home of a volunteer.

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