

Apple Tried Hard to Sell Me on the HomeView as a Seamless Smart Home Experience and Succeeded

I'm not easily impressed when it comes to smart home hubs; here's why the HomeView is different.

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October 14, 2026, 1:41 pm ET

7 min read



The HomeView has various dynamic screens and face recognition.

I test smart home devices for a living, but even I find it challenging to use and manage the ones in my home. I have Hue bulbs, Govee lamps, Drezo smart ceiling fans, TP-Link plugs, Eufy cameras, Whisker smart litter boxes and robot vacuums, among many other devices, all “bolted” together, with an Amazon Echo Show 8 and Alexa integration layer to interact with them. The result is... functional, which is the highest praise I can offer it.

Apple promises that its HomeView will be different. I spent over an hour at Apple’s Welcome Home event in New York City, where I got to view and interact with the HomeView across a variety of scenarios and environments. I’m not someone who’s easily convinced that a new smart screen is the solution to my problems, but after seeing the Apple HomeView in action, I’m on board.



No third-party apps required is huge: Everything goes through Apple Home



Yes, the HomeView has a clock view.

Ajay Kumar/CNET

The HomeView's biggest and most compelling appeal is that you don't need to download, install and set up an account with a third-party app for each and every smart home device you own.

With most smart home products, you're lucky if they integrate with the voice assistant you normally use. Once set up, in the best circumstances, you need only to interact with their app when its connection or functionality breaks (and it will), and then you'll need to dig into settings to find out why and fix it. Sounds awful, right?

If you're the average person trying to connect and navigate different smart home devices for the first time, the setup prospect is daunting, as the 10-plus third-party smart home apps on my phone can attest. It's hard to overstate how big a barrier to entry Apple has just removed by exiling third-party apps from this process.

In the case of the HomeView, I watched an Apple representative instantly find, pair and register a new smart home device on both her phone and the HomeView as she carried on a casual conversation with me, not missing a beat. Everything was managed through the Apple Home app. It seemed to work like pairing new AirPods or a HomePod. I didn't have time to dig into the process before being shepherded to the next demo, but what I saw was

one of the most compelling things I've seen in the smart home world: an easy, intuitive setup.

It should work with all the new Apple Home collection devices from LG and Schneider Electric, as well as Matter and Apple Home accessories. This isn't an exhaustive list, and I expect most devices, including those from Amazon and Google, should work as well.

Face ID recognition and personalized profiles make a big difference



From the side, the HomeView gives off strong iMac G4 vibes.

Personalized profiles for a smart home hub are an underrated feature, and their current implementation is pretty poor. Echo devices let you set up multiple profiles for family members and even guests, but God forbid you have to navigate the Alexa app to set what a guest has access to or trust that the voice print actually works. Despite having plenty of voice records for my wife and me, our Echo never seems to be able to differentiate between us.

With the HomeView, you have Face ID integrated, and in the brief time I had, it worked quickly without any bugs. An Apple representative showed me how they envision the HomeView being used in a nightstand setup in a bedroom, an environment where you want privacy and don't want a stranger having access to your entire smart home.

The HomeView registered the owner and the correct profile immediately and pulled up relevant information, such as a calendar, scheduled events, and preferred home screen and customization options. The same carried over to the other HomeView devices Apple had set up in its simulated home environment, with the exterior HomeView offering a security camera view while limiting access

for guests, while granting them certain features like temperature control or Safari access.

It can register up to six people by face and set up personalized profiles for each. While Apple didn't go into detail or confirm this, I imagine that these include child and family accounts where you can set up parental controls.

The 7-inch square Liquid Retina display works well for a kitchen setup



The HomeView can keep your coffee and grinder company on the counter.

I keep an Echo Show and an Apolosign smart calendar in my kitchen. One helps with recipes and timers, while the other lets my wife and me coordinate meetings, appointments and important events. Both take up too much space on our kitchen counters because we don't like how they look wall-mounted (more on that below).

The HomeView comes with a 7-inch square Liquid Retina display. I heard several people in the demo areas complain that it was too small. On the contrary, I think the size and shape are actually perfect for a smart home screen, especially one in my narrow galley kitchen with limited countertop space.

The square screen makes it easier to view and scroll through recipes, and it's also hands-free while you're cooking, adjustable and tiltable to suit your needs. You can easily share recipes from your iPhone directly to the HomeView by tapping it or accessing it directly through Siri AI and Safari. The recipes are also optimized to show you step-by-step screens that guide you through the process for those of us who aren't great at following directions. Timers are also easy to access and set.

The base also keeps the screen directly off your dirty countertops. Apple placed it next to a fancy-looking espresso setup in a demo kitchen, and it looked great without being overwhelming. By contrast, my Apolosign calendar looks like a giant eyesore and immediately draws the eye of everyone who walks in and shows them our full schedule.

Smaller footprint and better functionality in my kitchen? Sold.

Wall mounting looks remarkably good and not like you nailed a tablet to your wall



When you buy a HomeView, you can choose between one ready to mount on a wall or one with a speaker base.

I like the idea of a smart home hub on my wall, but I hate how it looks in practice. I briefly considered mounting our Android-powered smart calendar to our kitchen wall as a central hub for our devices. Not only was it unsightly, but it also looked like we'd just taken a tablet and nailed it to our wall, with an ugly, dangling power cable off the bottom.

Apple showed me several examples of mounted HomeViews in different settings, and they all looked great. In Apple's case, they're professionally installed with a hidden, wired power connection in the wall, which the company recommends if you're planning to use the HomeView as your main smart home dashboard for temperature control or as a security screen by your entryway, for instance. But if you don't want to cut into your wall, you can also use an external adapter and cable to a nearby wall outlet.

For a wired install, you basically have three options. You can use the Schneider Home Power PoE wired mount, which provides hardwired power and Ethernet for \$130, or a regular Power Mount AC Wired for \$80, with installation by a licensed electrician. The last option, if you want to self-install is to use a Power Mount with a USB-C Wall

connector and a separate 20W power adapter, for \$60, though this leaves an external cable dangling.

I like the look of a seamless wall-mounted HomeView enough to consider a professional install, especially since I plan to use it as my always-on smart home dashboard.

Don't underestimate the FaceTime panel for older family members



The HomeView can be used for FaceTime video calls.

I'm not a big video call person, but as my parents get older, they default to video calls. Those calls are often shaky and low-quality on the selfie cameras of whatever ancient device they're using. Apple's FaceTime demo for the HomeView makes its use case particularly clear. You can get your older relatives a HomeView, even set it up for them, and they can use Siri AI to video call you as needed without needing an iPhone or iPad.

I want to note that the audio on the tabletop version of the HomeView is significantly more impressive than I expected, with easily audible, room-filling sound for both video calls and music. Not the robust bass or clear lyrics I expected from a tabletop device. A full-size HomePod will deliver better sound quality, but it far outstrips an iPad for video calls or music.

It also has easy Find My integration. Apple representatives demonstrated the feature multiple times, showing how you can ask Siri AI to find a missing phone, remote or AirPods case. It worked without a hitch each time and notably, without requiring you to reach for a phone.

I also watched as the Apple representative demonstrated how the HomeView autoframed and autofocused on the video caller, and it did a good job of avoiding focusing on me as I lurked over her shoulder. (Hey, it's my job to test these things!) Again, this is the sort of small but important quality-of-life feature that makes the HomeView more usable than its older competitors.

The smart displays I've tested don't work that well. Is the HomeView really different?

I've used a lot of smart home screens that have promised a seamless home hub experience, including the Amazon Echo Show 8, Google Nest Hub, and various Android-powered smart calendar options like Apolosign and Skylight Calendar. While all of them worked, none did so well enough that I thought setting them up and managing them was particularly easy. Demoing the HomeView was a much smoother experience than I was expecting. Naturally, there were some hiccups — Siri AI didn't always cooperate or register voice commands, but

that may have been due to the loud environment, and nothing ever goes perfectly in a demo.

But overall, I was impressed with what I saw, and I can easily see the HomeView working for my own smart home. If it can pull off the miracle of integrating my disparate third-party apps and hodgepodge of systems together in one seamless interface for just \$299, well, that's an easy sell for me.

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