



The LuminAR fits in any standard light socket.



#### IMMATERIAL SCIENCE

## Lamplight Touchscreen

Transforming the surface of a desk into a touchscreen could be as easy as changing a lightbulb. A team at MIT's Media Lab has designed a wireless computer integrated with a tiny projector and camera, called LuminAR (AR stands for augmented reality), that screws into any standard light fixture. The projector shines a live display on an object or flat surface while the camera detects whether users are touching or swiping any portion of the display. Simple applications include turning a blank wall into a large screen for video calls, but the ultimate goal is broader: to blur the distinction between physical and digital objects. The bulb is only a prototype: Media Lab has no concrete plans for commercialization. — A.H.

TECH WATCH



### GLOSSARY

**COSMIC JITTERS** Astronomers can make big conclusions by studying very subtle differences in telescope observations of stars. However, such precise light measurements are plagued by what researchers call jitters—artifacts in the data caused by Earth's atmosphere, the star's own surface activity, and the telescopes themselves. In December a team of British astronomers published its analysis of nearly 6000 telescope observations of Tau Ceti, a star 12 light-years from Earth, and weeded out the noise by building a model based on the patterns of the jitters over time. The theory: The star's wobble indicates that there may be five planets orbiting Tau Ceti, and one is the right distance from the star to have surface water. It's not definitive proof, but it gives another reason to closely study the star and heralds an advance in the war on jitters. — JOE PAPPALARDO