

# Blending In

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By Eric Miiler

What if you could build a device that could mimic the way undersea creatures escape predators? It could be used as an artificial skin that changes its appearance to hide something (even submarines). As an electronic wallpaper, it could thwart thieves by catching them on a hidden camera. Or the new system could turn an entire wall into a TV screen. Now how cool is that?

These are among the goals of a new project funded by the U.S. Navy. The project's scientists are taking lessons from nature to create advanced electronics that may transform everyday objects. Their work also might allow us to better regulate the temperature of buildings and save energy.

Many far-reaching goals of this project are still a long way off. But scientists have begun making important strides. Their teachers are several underwater species with an amazing ability to hide in plain sight.

## Thoughtless camouflage

Take cuttlefish, some lesser-known members of the cephalopod (SEFF oh lo POD) family. Like their cousins, octopuses and squid, cuttlefish tend to have big eyes, arms with suckers, a bulbous head and the ability to disappear before your eyes. They resemble creatures from a late-night horror movie. Nocturnal hunters, cuttlefish feed by night. And their movements mystify: They can hover like flying saucers in the water, then zoom forward by rippling fins along the edges of their bodies.

But their real claim to fame: Cuttlefish are supreme masters of disguise.

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