

Fashionable **FIRE** for the home

A look at the many fireplace options on the market today.



By Deidra Darsa

The Napoleon Fireplaces Tureen is a direct-vent gas fireplace with contemporary flair.

Thoughts of a fireplace often bring to mind dancing flames or a romantic moment captured in front of the golden glow of a burning fire, its crackling symphony playing in the background. Many a homeowner has basked in the warmth of such a fire, knowing the hearth they have chosen is a stylish source of heat that, if carefully planned, burns brightly, cleanly and economically. And many a remodeler knows that a fireplace brings with it a unique flare to accentuate and add value to any home design.

DESIGN WITH PURPOSE

“Typically, a fireplace is one of the first features people ask us to price as an option,” says Darren Smith, design consultant for Sun Design Remodeling Specialists in Burke, Va. “It’s always a nice feature to add, and for a relatively minimal cost, people see the value in a fireplace.”

With the technological advancements, fuel options and bold designs in modern fireplaces, selecting a product can be an adventure as well as an education in placement, heating and design.

“When I’m designing a house with a fireplace, in addition to knowing whether it will be used for ambience or zone heating, I feel placement within the room is important as well as its location relative to the exterior,” says John Blackburn, senior principal of Blackburn Architects in Washington.

Wood storage is accessible from the exterior through hinged steel doors in this custom 4 foot x 6 inch x 5 inch wide wood-burning fireplace by Blackburn Architects. Photo courtesy of Blackburn Architects, Paul Schraub.



For instance, if the fireplace is placed on the exterior wall near the low slope end of the roof, the chimney will have a strong prominence on the exterior and may rise significantly above the roof and stand on its own (an important consideration in earthquake zones). Alternatively, it could be located where it is connected to the high end of the roof and not have to rise far above the roof or its ridge. In addition, Blackburn notes, the flue for a wood-burning fireplace must conform to local building codes and rise a specific height (usually about 3 feet) above any portion of roof within a specified distance (usually about 10 feet).

“Therefore, the fireplace becomes a design element on the interior as well as the exterior, and considerable thought needs to go into its placement,” he adds. “It impacts not just the room where it is located but the exterior as well.”

Inside the home, scale and size within the chosen room are critical, as the fireplace is the focal point in any room.

“If it is too large for the space, it can dominate the room, and if not located properly, it could seriously limit how a room can be furnished,” Blackburn says. “And unless the room is large enough, a raised hearth could impede furnishing a room or the circulation within the room.”

Whether located indoors or out, a fireplace will dazzle any homeowner with its style and warmth. But before frame-in, make sure the selected fireplace will fit the location.

“Don’t start the final design and specifications until the fireplace is selected and you’ve read and understand the manufacturer’s specifications and understand the set-backs,” cautions Marty Morse, president of Morse Remodeling in Davis, Calif. Recently, Morse Remodeling received the 2007 NARI Contractor of the Year “Judges’ Choice Award” for a project that included a fireplace in the master bedroom, which added \$5,000 to the home’s value, according to Morse.

Many fireplace manufacturers are developing products to meet the expanding remodeling market. At Monessen Hearth Systems in Paris, Ky., the focus is on high-end fireplaces geared for the remodeling market, according to Jess Baldwin, vice president of sales. “It will be a departure from the typical builder box,” Baldwin says. “This fireplace will be a feature-rich product, as opposed to some of the lower-value residential products used in new construction.”

GAS VERSUS WOOD

Fireplace specialty stores offer homeowners, remodelers and architects alike the latest fireplace models, which offer cutting-edge technology that burns brightly, heats effectively and enhances any room in the home design.

“Fireplaces are still in high demand,” says Greg Thomas, director of sales for Napoleon Fireplaces/Wolf Steel Ltd. in Barrie, Ontario. “We’re definitely following the trends and developing efficient, cleaner-faced units that are geared heavily toward contemporary European-style.”

Napoleon’s Tureen model, a 24,000 BTU vertical gas fireplace, stands 5 feet high and 3 feet wide. It features a stainless steel front and comes with a blower and a remote control. Although this fireplace is a heater, the smaller version, called the Torch, is decorative only and can be placed higher up on a wall. Its fronts are available in different colors, too.

However, the company isn’t shying away from contemporary styles.

“Change is upon us,” Thomas says about the new contemporary designs. In Napoleon’s outdoor gas fireplace lines, rocks are now taking the place of logs. “It makes sense to have flame coming through rocks outdoors,” he says.



TRADE PARTNERSHIPS INVALUABLE

A successful partnership is one in which each partner walks away a winner. For remodelers, who create the custom-designed home projects, and fireplace retailers, which bring a specialized knowledge and skill, working together makes for worthy collaboration.

In Davis, Calif., NARI members Marty Morse of Morse Remodeling and Mitch Heller of Custom Fireside Shops in Sacramento, have built a profitable relationship working on custom projects.

“We rely on Mitch’s expertise all the time,” Morse said. “There are always new technologies and mandated air quality restrictions, and Mitch is really up-to-speed on that. It’s important to have that relationship with a fireplace retailer in order to make sure we stay on the cutting edge of the fireplace industry.”

In addition to the expertise in products and installation, the professionalism of the staff at Custom Fireside Shops also impressed Morse. “We send our clients to their showroom and know they’re going to be respected and taken care of,” said Morse, adding, “and, we know that we’re going to get a follow-up communication after that meeting.”

Morse Remodeling and other remodeling clients shopping in Heller’s store consider Custom Fireside Shops an extension of their companies, Heller noted. “[Morse has] invited me to his staff meetings where I met with his project managers and discussed areas that can be of disconnect between my trade and other trades involved in completing a project.”

These types of trade partnerships are invaluable when created between your remodeling business and any trade. But if you’d like to develop one with a fireplace retailer/installer in your area, you can find NFI-certified ones on the National Fireplace Institute’s Web site at www.nficertified.org.

—Deidra Darsa



Jotul North America brings the Scandinavian look to American homes with the SCAN DSA5 wood-burning freestanding stove.



The Travis Industries pier (three-sided) gas fireplace adds heat and a degree of separation to an open floor plan.

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Black pebbles replace logs in the SoHo gas fireplace by Heat & Glo, a Hearth & Home Technologies' brand. Its compact, square and shallow design mimics artwork, and it sits high on the wall.

"We continue to increase the efficiency of the Heat & Glo and Quadra-Fire inserts, fireplaces and stoves," says Ross Morrison, dealer channel marketing manager of the Lakeville, Minn., manufacturer, adding that a heat-zone kit allows you to transfer heat to multiple rooms from one fireplace using flexible heating ducts.

As for the kitchen, the 26x26-inch arched Crescent gas fireplace has the unique feature of a pull-down glass door for warming breads or coffee. Its smaller version, the Crescent II, adds ambience and lighting.

In Gorham, Maine, Jotul North America is in the process of creating a realistic masonry fireplace flame in its gas inserts and fireplaces, says Bret Watson, company president. "We call it fire-on-the-floor technology," he says. "By putting the controls on the side of the firebox, the fire becomes taller and more portrait-like, rather than a landscape opening, so you don't have that louver or control door underneath the fire."

The manufacturer also is creating gas fireplaces that replace logs with glass and a rounded river rock look for the outdoor living area.

New to Lennox Hearth Products in Orange County, Calif., are the contemporary Radium and Scandium catalytic vent-free fireplaces that burn a ribbon of fire along its horizontal base. "We took their design from plasma televisions to give them a contemporary look," says Bob Dischner, director of marketing and product development. "When you're looking at loft conversions and things of that nature, the concept of hanging a fireplace on the wall is something different. Plus, the catalytic vent-free then returns the byproducts of combustion, cleaning the air that goes through the product."

To open a room and keep the heat, consider a see-through fireplace. Travis Industries in Mukilteo, Wash., offers a 36-inch two-sided clean-face see-through fireplace, as well as a three-sided pier fireplace that can separate rooms while heating both. "What's nice about these is that we came up with a heat exchange system to allow you to move the heat through the fireplace without gaps in the glass sides," says Perry Ranes, sales director.

An additional see-through fireplace will be introduced soon. This one will take a variety of face finishes, a light kit for ambience when not in use and an interior fireback that homeowners can select to match their interior designs.

For customers looking for extreme heat, look at Travis Industries 5 foot long Fireplace Xtreme. With optional light kits and firebacks, this 95,000 BTU fireplace allows for ducting to other rooms.

Style and design are front-and-center in the Wittus Fire by Design product line. The Pound Ridge, N.Y., firm now offers the award-winning Antonio Citterio-designed Shaker wood-burning fireplace, which is manufactured in Germany of high-quality steel and glass. It also is EPA-certified (as are all new wood stoves) and meets

European standards. “Our products must have a contemporary look and design,” says Alyse Wittus, vice president. “And they must be clean-burning and environmentally responsible.”

Both a wood-burning and gas stove, the CFM Vermont Castings brand has won fans with its style and color pallet of classic black, Vermont green and dramatic Bordeaux red. “Our Vermont Castings wood stove, with its Everburn technology, received the highest EPA rating, and we have also launched a new direct-vent gas stove with a FireCast burner that gives the drama and color of a natural-looking flame,” says Jennifer Coombe, director of marketing for the Mississauga, Ontario, company.

The masonry heater is perhaps one of the most efficient burners of wood, burning wood quickly at extreme temperatures and storing the heat in its masonry structure. Because it’s a low temperature radiant heat source, it tends to heat the solid objects in the house. And those objects, along with the masonry heater, then radiate warmth throughout the home.

“The only real similarity between a masonry heater and a wood stove or fireplace is they all burn wood,” says Douglas Hargrave, president of Mid-Atlantic Masonry Heat in Charlottesville, Va., and a Tulikivi U.S. representative. “For every one to two hours of fire burn, a masonry heater will give you 24 hours of heat after the fire is out. Eighty percent or more of the heat from a masonry heater is radiant heat. It uses the thermal-mass-stored heat energy of the house as well as the substantial thermal mass of the heater to stabilize temperature rather than allow fluctuations as the fire is stoked up or burns down.”

The Tulikivi masonry heater, which meets both U.S. EPA and European certification, can be placed anywhere in a room or through a wall. It is a modular unit, and a specialized installer, certified for masonry heaters, must put it together, Hargrave notes.

Although certification for masonry heater installation is managed by the Masonry Heater Association, the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA), a trade group representing fireplace and stove manufacturers, also offers certification through its National Fireplace Institute program.

“We have worked very closely with our members to develop a training program to educate fireplace installers to correctly and safely install a hearth product. All of us in the industry want our hearth appliances to operate safely, perform properly and provide

warmth and comfort for the homeowner,” says Jack Goldman, HPBA president.

IT’S ELECTRIC

For locations where fires are forbidden or installation of gas and wood appliances is difficult, consider an electric fireplace for both ambience and heat. “One of the major reasons customers like electric fireplaces is that in climates such as Florida or Nevada, where heat is not an issue, you can operate it all year for the ambience of a fire but without the heat. If you do want the heat, it’s easily turned on,” says Bill Caples, vice president of sales and marketing for Twin-Star International, Classic Flame in Delray Beach, Fla.

Twin-Star’s electric fireplaces come in a variety of models, including four that support the weight of a television. They come as free-standing models—some for corners—or as a builder’s box unit that can be permanently built into a wall. “The builder’s box is unique in that it can be installed either before or after rough-in, and it’s wired from the front so, should it need work, it doesn’t have to be taken out of the wall,” Caples says.

THE FINISHING TOUCH

Once the fireplace has been selected, the next step is designing the mantel, hearth and surround. One of the more dramatic finishes to a fireplace is stonework. Owens Corning Cultured Stone offers more than 100 colors and textures in its veneer product line, according to Bob Heath, market development leader.

“One of the interesting things about using cultured stone or manufactured stone for a fireplace is that it doesn’t require any structural alterations to a home. It meets building codes in terms of weight requirements and doesn’t require any footings, anchoring or brick ties,” he says. “And it’s able to go up over any prepared surface without any structural changes at all. It can go over basic dry-wall, plywood or any existing materials.”

With the surround and hearth complete, a fireplace or stove addition is likely to provide hours of warmth and family enjoyment for any homeowner. Whether gas, wood-burning or electric, framed in tile, stone or left with a sleek contemporary finish, a fireplace remains the dominant feature in any room. Careful consideration should be given to lifestyle, function and design when selecting a hearth product for the home.

Deidra Darsa is the public and media relations manager for the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association. For more information, please visit the HPBA builder’s web site at www.hpba.org.



Top: The CFM Corp.’s Vermont Castings wood stove is highly rated by EPA.

Bottom: The Tulikivi U.S. masonry heater adds old world charm and warmth to any home.