

Home is Where The Hearth Is

Turn up the heat by choosing the right fireplace for your home and your family.

BY JULIE JACOBS

You've heard that unmistakable crackle, smelled that deep woody aroma and basked in the glow of its flames. A fireplace is an intoxicating element of any home's decor, but statistics show that a fireplace can not only raise your home's heat, but also its value. The National Association of Real Estate Appraisers says asking prices of homes with fireplaces start six-percent higher than those without. "Dollar for dollar, a fireplace is one of the better values in home improvement," says Doug Rose, sales manager at West Deptford, NJ-based Rock Products, which sells pre-engineered modular concrete fireplace and chimney systems.

These days, a growing trend among many homeowners is to have multiple fireplaces: one in the living room, one in the family room and one in the master bedroom. Some people are even installing three-sided peninsula fireplaces and using them as bars, building colonial-style "walk-in" fireplaces in kitchens and setting units in specially made cabinets that hold plasma televisions above. Because fireplaces do not have to be on external walls and now come in many sizes and styles, there is one to fit any room in your home.

Wood Burning vs. Gas

After you've decided to put in a fireplace (or two), which is the better type: wood-burning or gas? While wood-burning fireplaces have become more environmentally friendly, "A lot of the heat goes up the flue and is lost," says Bob Wilson, who has owned Bob's Fireside Shop in Woodbury for 31 years. "They aren't very efficient. In comparison, gas stoves are convenient -- you just flip a switch -- and [they] give off much more heat. Plus, you don't have to worry about smoke, the new

models have that wood-stove look with decorative logs that glow, and they're cheaper to run."

In addition, gas fireplaces can be operated via remote control and in some instances are well suited to zone heating. They all incorporate oxygen-depletion sensors that monitor air quality and shut off the unit when oxygen levels fall too low. Most also come with an Intermittent Pilot Ignition system (IPI), which saves money by turning on the pilot only when the fireplace is on.

"Earlier technology required a standing pilot," says Alan Rosen, president of Star-Mitchell Enterprises, a new entity in Williamstown, NJ that unites well-established Star Distributors and the fireplace division of Mitchell's Decorative Hardware. "IPI is good, because you're not always paying for gas, and there are less components that may require service."

For those who want that traditional mantel fireplace that is more efficient and saves money, experts recommend a conversion to gas or an insert installation. Some conversions keep the masonry but



Photo courtesy Fire Rock Manufacturing, Inc. Atlanta, GA.