

Advertising Supplement to the Boston Globe

FALL Home Design



FIRE STARTERS

By E.T. Robbins

Nothing says "welcome" better than a fire in the hearth. Whether you're creating a mood or trying to save money on your oil bill (or both), there's a fireplace just for you. Gone are the days of wood-burning options only. It's time to learn about making fire in the 21st century.

Choosing The Best Fireplace "Fit"

Many experts say gas fireplaces, stoves, inserts, and logs are becoming increasingly popular choices for the home. This is due in large part to convenience, as they start and stop with a flick of a switch, with no worries about leaving hot embers in the fireplace, or leaving the damper open and the smoke out during the night. As the cost of gas fireplaces range from \$1000 to \$3000, they are competitive with mid to high-end traditional wood-burning fireplaces.

Because you can direct vent gas products on an outside wall, these types of fireplaces can be located almost anywhere you want. You can control them in a variety of ways, too – a switch, a thermostat, and even via remote control. Another option is burning gas logs in your traditional wood-burning fireplace – all the same ambiance without the hassle.

Sharon Washburn from Architectural Fireplaces of New England, Inc. in Franklin (www.arc-fire.com), which specializes in Heatilator (www.heatilator.com) and Heat-N-Glo (www.heatnglo.com) products, adds that you don't have to worry about having someone clean the chimney once a year. It is good practice, though, to have certain things – like pilot lights – looked at and cleaned annually.

And what about wood? It's important to do your homework since there are many wood-burning options. A good source of information is the nonprofit Wood Heat Organization, Inc. (www.woodheat.org). The website offers everything from frequently asked questions, articles like "10 Good Reasons to Heat with Wood" (reasons include the fact that wood is a "renewable energy source" and you can't beat the romance of real flames), and ways to stack firewood. It also discusses different wood technologies (such as wood-burning stoves) and wood safety tips.

Many retailers also have showrooms where you can see actual working units. Whatever you choose, though, be sure to have it installed by a professional. Most retailers and professionals will tell you that the majority of problems in the industry have to do with improper installation. And, if the homeowner installs it improperly, it is not covered by the manufacturer's warranty. It's worth hiring a professional to do the job right.

Hot Trends In Mantels and Fireplace Fronts

Whether you want maple, oak, or maybe something more exotic, you can have it. Mantels and fireplace fronts come in myriad styles and materials. Many different products can be found on Fireside Furnishings (www.firesidefurnishings.com), including a list of dealers in New England.

Today, "original" seems to be in. Many people want something different from their parents' or grandparents' fireplaces, and the market is driven by those interested in variety, whether that be gold or pewter, copper or natural iron for a

mantel. Currently marble, slate, traditional brick, and tile are all popular requests for materials to surround the fireplace, with black slate being one of the most in demand.

36-inch and 42-inch boxes or prefabricated fireplaces are popular. Many retailers report that more and more requests are coming in for fireplaces in the bedrooms, too – the prefab boxes make these requests possible since the boxes can be put almost anywhere.

Many retailers offer a design center, where you can walk in and see fireplaces in use, offering builders, decorators and homeowners the opportunity to see a working fireplace in order to help the customer visualize how different models would look in a home.

Pellet Stove Inserts -- The Industry's "Sleeper Hit"

The real "sleeper" in the industry is the pellet stove insert. Pellets are compressed sawdust, and one ton of pellets (fifty 40-pound bags) costs approximately \$165 during the off-season and \$200 during the coldest part of the year. One ton of pellets is equivalent to two cords of wood in BTU output. Considering that one cord of wood goes from \$240 to as high as \$280, there can be significant savings using pellets.

Pellet stove inserts simply slide into existing fireplaces (even older models from the 1950s and 1960s). The look is that of a regular fireplace, and if you want the ambiance of flames, you can have it – there is an option to insert a fake ceramic log set which truly ignites with a flame. Pellet stove inserts are approximately \$2100 and the typical insert is 40,000 BTUs, which heats 2000 square feet.

FIVE FIREPLACE TIPS TO REMEMBER:

1. It's best to have a professional install your fireplace. If you decide to do it on your own, make sure you're up to speed on building codes. Don't assume anything. For example, check if wood-burning stoves require a permit in the town that you live in.
2. If you're using a wood-burning fireplace, burn dry firewood and have your chimney cleaned annually.
3. Fireplaces aren't just for living rooms anymore – think outside of typical family areas: bedrooms, kitchens, and home offices.
4. When you're putting a marble surround on a fireplace, make sure you're not covering up any of the venting.
5. Don't cover sooty areas on brick with paint – this devalues your fireplace and your home. Instead, try a brick cleaner.