



HEATING UP THE BACKYARD

BY DEIDRA DARSA

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLACKBURN ARCHITECTS

There is something about fire that mesmerizes us, warms us and relaxes us. Outdoor heating appliances continue to be a popular year-round feature for those inclined to outdoor living. Across the country, whether it's a fireplace on a patio, a fire pit in a garden area or a patio heater near a swimming pool, folks are warming up to the outdoor flame.

In the San Diego area, homeowners use their fireplaces year-round, says Debbie Ewens, owner of The Warm Hearth Fireside and Patio Shop. "The outdoor room is an extension of your family room. Plus," she states, "it's fun to be around a fire."

But, cautions Ewens, placement of that fireplace is important. "We do make sure our customers understand that a fireplace or fire pit should not be too close

to a pool, or that they're not setting it on a wood deck. An outdoor heating appliance puts out heat, and homeowners need to make sure it's set on an approved-for-heat, non-combustible surface."

And, make sure your outdoor fireplace installation meets local building codes, says Denise Perry Williams, spokesperson for Arizona Fireplace in Phoenix, Arizona. "For example," she explains, "in Maricopa County, a vented gas fireplace needs to be at least 12 feet from a structure."

For some folks, an outdoor fireplace takes precedent. In California, Blackburn Architects of Washington, D.C., designed a home that was built around two chimneys, one of which was the outdoor fireplace. Open on both sides with one covered, the

homeowners can enjoy an extended outdoor season even if it rains. "It doesn't get terribly cold there," explains John Blackburn, adding, "It's basically a place to enjoy the outside."

Layout of the outdoor space is very important. For one house built near the water, Blackburn had to consider the winds coming from offshore. "The positioning of the house blocks the wind coming from the ocean," he states.

The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA) tracks shipments of fireplaces and hearth products and, according to their director of market research, "Over one-half million outdoor fireplaces were shipped in 2006, indicating that outdoor fireplaces are one of the new, up and coming ideas for homes."

Manufacturers are now using slate, marble and solid granite to trim-out fire pits. Some are adding a unique twist. "We've built one that can be converted into a coffee table," notes Hamp Tanner, president of Well Traveled Living in Amelia Island, Florida. "When not using it as a fire pit, simply cover it and use it as a table."

Sales of outdoor fireplaces have tripled for many manufacturers, including Lennox, according to Mark Campbell, product manager of their residential new construction. "We thought the outdoor room/fireplace trend was a wave that would crest, but it never did. It's here to stay," says Campbell. An Orange County, California, resident, Campbell enjoys his own outdoor fireplace year-round. "I use it a lot in the summertime. I love to use it on cold fall and early spring mornings on the weekends. It's a wonderful place to have breakfast," he says.

When heat waves are but a faraway memory, consider an outdoor fireplace or fire pit to keep the "embers" of outdoor enjoyment burning through the autumn and winter months—day or night.

For more information, visit *The Warm Hearth Fireside and Patio Shop*, 8748 La Mesa Blvd., La Mesa, CA 91941, (619) 465-0890 and 440 Enterprise Street, San Marcos, CA 92018, (760) 744-8680 www.ashwarmhearth.com. ❖



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Coffee table



PHOTO COURTESY OF WELL TRAVELED LIVING

Coffee table converted to a fire pit



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