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Evolution in Fireplace Design: New Designs, Material and Versatility Increase Consumer Options

Sitting comfortably in front of the fireplace is indeed a traditional way to spend time at home but there's nothing old fashioned about the looks, shapes and finishes of today's hearth appliances.

Huge strides in technology within the hearth products industry have greatly extended the role of a fireplace or freestanding stove in contemporary homes. Most new homes built in the U.S. today feature a fireplace. The ubiquitous appliance is not only making its way into nontraditional locations within the house but making a design statement of its own.

Consumer convenience is everything. The range of fuel and venting choices as well as unusual sizes, shapes and enhanced performance overall enables the hearth appliance of today to be customized and easily installed literally anywhere inside or outside of the home: bedrooms, bathrooms, basements, family, living and dining rooms – even hallways. And especially in the backyard, where outdoor hearth products are being used in record numbers.

The Ceiling (and the Sky's) the Limit

“One new hearth technology could become the whole house heating system of the future,” says Carter Keithley, president and CEO of the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA). “The direct vent fresh air replacement fireplace is not enclosed by glass, and uses fresh air technology in which hot air going up the chimney is replaced with cold air in the house that goes into a heater and then repeats. This is an enormous stride forward in that it not only provides heat but improves the air quality throughout the house.”

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Consider the Options

Homeowners should look at all that is available and keep an open mind about whether a woodburning, electric, gas or propane fireplace is best for their needs. Nonwoodburning appliances add flexibility by allowing installation and safe use without the requirement of a chimney. Direct vent technology enables the expulsion of gas fireplace emissions out the side of a house and electric and vent-free gas fireplaces provide fire with no need for venting.

What's New?

The family fireplace has come a long, long way. Today homeowners can have a **see-through unit**, usable from either side with a view of outdoors, a **fireplace that doubles as a mirror** when not in use, **weatherproof outdoor models**, **appliances where the flames flash in pebbles or glass beads** and oversized gas models with flames that dance nearly three feet high, **invisible glass** and vents that do not show. Nearly 25 percent of owners have a fireplace or freestanding stove in a place other than the traditional living or family room locations.

Home builders report that second fireplaces today predominantly go in master bedrooms, and a **'bed & breakfast' model** has met with great consumer acceptance. **Direct vent fresh air replacement fireplaces**, not enclosed by glass and using fresh air have made tremendous inroads in new home construction.

Dramatic outdoor rings of fire with a functioning water fountain in the middle are lighting up many upscale outdoor rooms, as are ceramic or metal chimineas, portable fireplaces, umbrella-type patio heaters and firepits.

Accessories, Materials & Design

Accessories are today considered 'the jewelry' on the front of a fireplace, and new material used in frames, doors and trim enable the appliance to fit beautifully within any design scheme in any room of any size. Laser cut metals and etched glass serve to upgrade the appearance of older homes as well as new construction.

The aesthetics of fire and the ambience it provides are enhanced in different types of surrounds: marble and granite for upscale, formal fireplaces ... fieldstone and mesquite cliffstone for casual

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contemporary installations ... customized ones and many that look customized ... tile, stucco, metal, black, copper – there is literally no end to the design concepts and choices available today.

Not Just Another Piece of Hardware

Hearth appliances have evolved from strictly functional to where they have become design factors in our homes. Much more than a place to light a fire they have become a major element in our quality of life at home.

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About the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA)

The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA), based in Arlington, Va., is the North American industry association for manufacturers, retailers, distributors, representatives, service firms and allied associates for all types of hearth, barbecue and patio appliances, fuels and accessories. The association provides professional member services and industry support in education, statistics, government relations, marketing, advertising and consumer education. There are more than 2,600 members in the HPBA.