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HEAT UP YOUR PROFITS

Fireplaces Add Value to New Homes

With interest rates still hovering around historical lows, new home sales continue to soar. In this competitive marketplace, smart homebuilders are looking for ways to increase profit margins. Adding a fireplace to the building plan; an upgraded hearth, a second fireplace in non-traditional location, or an attractive outdoor fireplace will add to a home's appeal.

According to a 2004 consumer survey conducted by the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA), homebuyers include a fireplace among the features they most want in a home. In addition, homeowners consider a fireplace a major design feature that positively impacts their home's value.

Many new home plans already incorporate a fireplace. According to the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB), nearly 60 percent of all new homes built today have at least one fireplace. The HPBA survey indicates that the builder makes 71 percent of fireplace installation decisions, so clearly, the ball is in your court. But are you maximizing your profit potential with this popular amenity? Do you opt for the most basic fireplace, or make the effort to "sell up" to increase homeowners' satisfaction and add handsomely to your own profit? To set yourself apart from your competitors, consider upgrading the upgrade!

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For a great room, consider one of the newer super-size fireplaces; some are almost 50 inches wide and 55 inches high. For direct-vent gas fireplaces, consider those with reflection-free glass, which makes the glass all but invisible.

Adding a mantel or cabinet can further enhance your offering. In some cases, it's even possible to incorporate the gas controls within access doors of either. Don't forget to consider the refractory design – from herringbone designs done in brick, to a polished stone background, the refractory adds a little something special to the look of the firebox.

In addition to enhancing the look of the fireplace, it's now possible to incorporate fireplaces that allow the homeowner to control heat output without diminishing flame height or quality. There also are those that will pull air from the room and turn it into warm air and radiant heat.

Electric fireplaces should be considered also. New flame imitation technology makes them more beautiful than ever. Many operate by thermostat remote control that allows the user to turn on flame and heat, or just one or the other. All electric fireplaces are perfect for operating year-round in any climate, and they're fuss-free. Most have life-like logs to help complete the illusion of a real wood fire.

This plug-in technology is particularly appealing to builders. Installation is fast and easy. They are less expensive, as there is no permit required, no piping and no venting. Also, there's no lost revenue from extended closing dates or installation delays. Liability decreases because there is no combustion, and no additional moisture, which means a reduced risk of molds forming. Versatility makes electric fireplaces attractive too. They install anywhere, there is no exterior wall access required and they can be installed above or below grade.

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For small rooms, bedrooms, or even bathrooms, new fireplace designs allow you to extend the allure of fire beyond traditional rooms. For example, a see-through gas fireplace can be built into an indoor/outdoor wall so it can be enjoyed from inside or outside the home. It's a great builder option because it essentially provides two fireplaces for the price of one.

For homes with a more modern look, portrait style fireplaces can be built into a wall to mimic hanging artwork. Or, corner models are available offering contemporary styling that produce flames from a "bowl." A freestanding fireplace is also an eye-catching option. A number of sleek, slim and stylish designs are on the market now.

Perhaps one of the most indulgent locations to insert a fireplace is above a bathtub. And don't forget the kitchen. Multi-tasking kitchen fireplaces can warm a room while heating an oven above the fire for baking. Talk about profitable finishing touches!

Regardless of the building style, there is a room for every fireplace, and a fireplace for every room. Technological advances in design and quality of fireplaces make them the perfect way to build profits. For more information about hearth products, visit www.hpba.org.

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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.