



Fireplaces are hotter than ever with homeowners

By SHEILA GARRETT
Special to the Record-Eagle

A cozy fire drawing the family together as the snow falls outside is the very picture of home life here up north.

"In northern Michigan, people want fireplaces for warmth and tradition," said Jeremy Chisholm, sales manager of Source Julien fireplace dealers in Traverse City. "A fireplace looks and feels good."

Most people prefer gas models, he said, because they offer greater efficiency and low maintenance.

"It's clean burning and efficient, and has an ease of operation," said John Knorp, sales manager of Phillips Energy, Inc. in Traverse City. "Some models can be controlled thermostatically."

Knorp helps customers decide on the type of fireplace they want by asking if they are interested in aesthetics or heat. Most say both, Knorp said, as "the romance of the fireplace has appeal for many people."

Some wood-burning fireplaces can be converted to gas as desired. These models can be used either way, Chisholm explained, and they are "better and better at producing heat every year. Also, they are invaluable if the power goes out."

Knorp said people in northern Michigan tend to choose low-profile black, rustic-looking models. "We're a woody area here," he explained.

There has traditionally been some interest in brass fireplaces, he added, and polished nickel is a new popular look. Prices for a fireplace with a vent begin about \$700 and can go up to several thousand, with many features that can be added.

Also available for wood fires are free-standing or mesh screens for mounting in the fireplace and gas logs.

Accessories for gas fireplaces include decorative brass, nickel and copper faces, wall-mounted and remote thermostats, and standing screens.

Wood burning stoves continue to be popular, too.

"There has been an increased interest in wood, for example, in

cottages used in winter. We still sell tons of gas models for this purpose, too," Knorp said.

Chisholm commented that wood burning stoves are most often chosen for a garage or basements — particularly unfinished basements where work is still being done. Older cottages usually have masonry fireplaces, but owners may decide to convert to gas.

A drawback in using wood, Knorp said, is that it is hard to regulate heat. The warmth is greatest near the fire, while other rooms may be cold.

For those who choose wood, he recommends dry hardwood that has been seasoned for at least a year.

"Wet wood creates creosote in the firebox. Dry, aged wood burns slower and hotter," Knorp said. "It is also important to have an inspection by the county mechanical inspector, whoever installs the fireplace."

Kevin Peabody, mechanical inspector for Grand Traverse County, explained that he makes sure that combustion air and venting requirements are met. If a fireplace is gas, he said, inspectors check to see that gas piping

is correctly installed and shut-off criteria met in the event of an emergency.

Inspectors also ensure that the hearth extension is correct. Manufacturers recommend the size needed for specific models, but hearths are normally 16 inches deep and 48 to 60 inches wide, covering the whole front of the fireplace. Mechanical inspectors also check wood-burning stoves.

Peabody advised homeowners who are thinking of doing their own installation to call a qualified contractor and be sure to obtain the necessary permits.

Kevin Dudd of Bellaire has been in the business of chimney care in northern Michigan for more than 20 years, and he believes people need to be educated about chimney safety.

The first rule, he said, is to keep it clean. But frequency of cleanings depends on how often the fireplace is used. Many people rely on an annual check, he said, but once every three years may be sufficient if you don't burn a lot.

It is most important that your cleaning be thorough, he advised, and that a chimney be complete-



Wood-burning stoves continue to be popular as a heating source in garages, basements and cottages.

ly cleaned behind the damper plate. He also said to be sure there is a cap on the chimney to guard against sparks flying out onto a roof. Caps also provide protection from animals and birds. While gas units do not become as dirty as wood-burning models, Dudd explained, if they are not regulated properly, they

can burn too richly and produce too much soot.

Dudd pointed out that gasoline should never be used to start fires, and that burning newspaper and any kind of cardboard can cause sparks.

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.



Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley

Most fireplaces are available with gas logs as well as the traditional wood-burning variety. However, more homeowners are opting for the fuel efficient gas fireplaces.



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This type of fireplace, with its rounded arch is currently the new favorite with homeowners.

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