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FIRE

Fireplace design today is equal parts art and function

By Abby Weingarten



Photo courtesy of Spark Modern Fires



Photo courtesy of Spark Modern Fires

INDOOR FIREPLACES



Photo courtesy of Spark Modern Fires

were once available in two categories: real or faux. The real ones were the cozy brick models that burned logs and necessitated soot-clearing chimney sweeps. And the faux ones—with their smoke-free, simulated flames and ceramic logs—were so unconvincing, they often ventured into the realm of tacky. ♦ Today, both styles still exist, but homeowners have enjoyed a much broader range of options for the past decade—from new eco-friendly mobile units to energy-efficient upgrades for their classic fireplaces. There are wood-burning, gas, electric and alternative fuel varieties now that there is a massive demand for versatile, interior fire features.

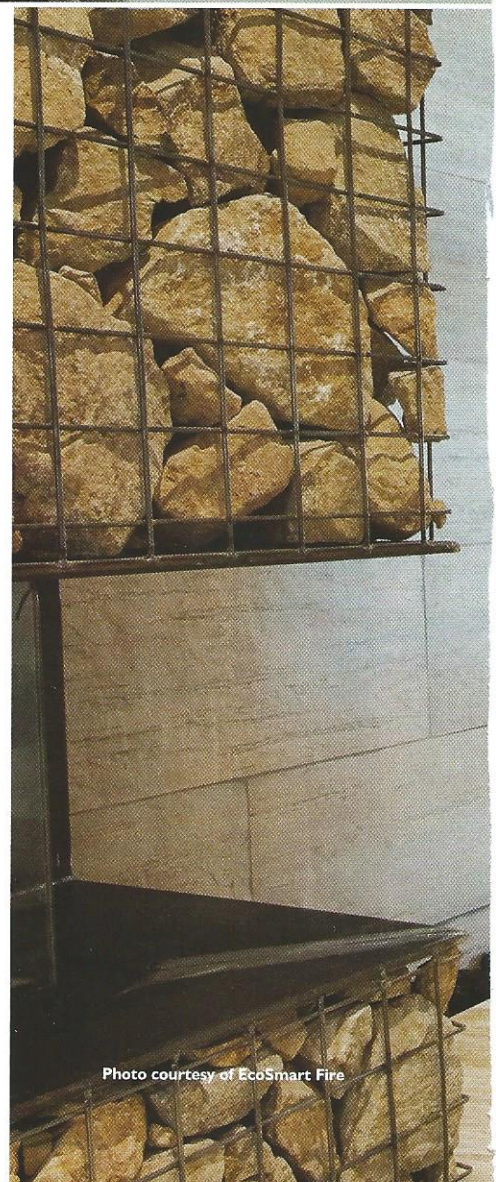


Photo courtesy of EcoSmart Fire

Sparking the flame

"Spark pioneered the linear, contemporary look with no fake logs and more 'fire as art,'" says Tom Healy, the co-founder and president of the 2005-born Spark. "We see a growing comfort level in the industry toward that aesthetic, that modern vibe. We have designed our units to meet the highest standards of architectural and design freedom."

From the get-go, Healy and his team steered away from trying to make gas fireplaces look or operate like wood-burning units. Instead of using artificial logs, they blended ribbons of fire with materials like stone, glass and sand for a fluid, natural appearance. They also experimented with fireplaces that boasted invisible frames—a trend that continues to snowball.

Green machine

In that same *invisible-look* vein, Napoleon is now offering a "clean-face" multi-view fireplace, which can act as a focal point between two rooms. The company's HD4 features firebox and burner options, including a log and linear glass burner, or a designer fire cradle with topaz glass embers. Napoleon's wood-burning fireplaces exceed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards. The electric fireplaces mix the look of traditional masonry with the convenience of simply plugging a unit into the wall.

Regency's high-efficiency, EPA-certified wood fireplaces have optional blowers to push heat to the furthest corners of a room. Gas inserts transform old fireplaces into stellar heaters and eliminate the hassles of drafts, ash removal and maintenance. The company's wood and pellet inserts help convert existing brick, masonry and factory-built fireplaces.

A major fuel source for new fireplaces is ethanol, a type of alcohol that can be made from the fermentation of corn and sugar cane. The advantage of using ethanol as a fuel is that it burns cleanly and only creates heat, water vapor and carbon dioxide. That means ethanol fireplaces can be installed without vents or flues, and they can be placed in locations that cannot sustain gas or wood-burning units.

"The government has put greater efficiency requirements on gas fireplaces and that's really putting everyone on top of their game," Healy says. "We've seen the results of using less power and being as green as we can. When we had those big storms with power outages for weeks in the northeast, we got letters from people who said our fireplaces were working without the power on. That was something we didn't anticipate when we created these models, but it's been a real-world benefit."

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Photo courtesy of Napoleon Fireplaces

Alexander Eburne, the CEO of EcoSmart, which was founded in 2004, prides his company on its use of ethanol and its ability to give homeowners the freedom to design their spaces with accommodating, eye-catching fire features. EcoSmart's products were even featured in the 2013 New American Home showcase in Las Vegas, Nevada. The event was an opportunity for the National Association of Home Builders to demonstrate progressive designs and technologies.

Just roll with it

"The role we played was to bring fire into several spaces in the home in a freestanding way, and the units were able to be relocated just like furniture," Eburne says. "This is important because homeowners are investing more in their homes now, and they realize they can design incredibly well outdoors as well as indoors. It's going back to that staycation concept. Burner kits and freestanding (no gas connection and no venting) units give homeowners control. People like to customize in ways fire has never been imagined before."

As more clean-faced gas fireplaces, ribbon flames and vent-free ethanol burners become available, homeowners can harness the kind of flexibility they desire. They can move their units from room to room depending on their needs, whether entertaining for a dinner party of twenty or snuggling up by the fireplace with two glasses of wine. The possibilities are infinite, and homeowners are no longer chained to one stationary fireplace in the den. In other words, fireplaces are moving with the homeowner, and ultimately, with the times. 🍷

For more information, visit sparkfires.com, ecosmartfire.com, napoleonfireplaces.com and regency-fire.com.



Photo courtesy of Regency Fireplace Products