

naturalLiving

Spring/Summer

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Kitchen *à la Mode*

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Plus

**HEAT YOUR HOME'S WATER FOR LESS
EXPLORE THE ARTISTIC SIDE OF FIREPLACES**

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The kitchen has always been the central gathering place in any home. That is why it is always changing; morphing and molding to fit each new generation's idea of the ideal home. So, what's next in kitchen design and how does it make our homes more comfortable – and our lives simpler?



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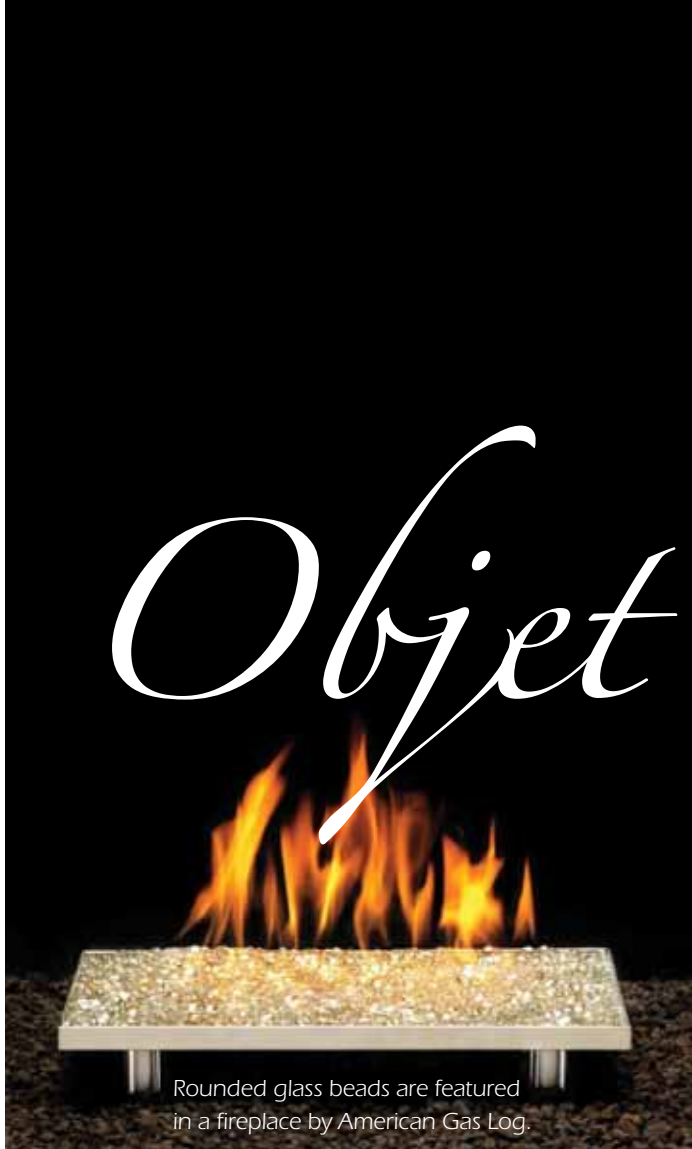
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Objet

d'fire



Rounded glass beads are featured in a fireplace by American Gas Log.

The increasingly artistic, stylish side of fireplaces, stoves and other natural gas products.

By Molly Petrilla

Cozying up by a warm fire is far from outdated — but the notion that a hearth is just about function rather than style certainly is.

Modern, art deco-inspired natural gas fireplaces have created a new trend in the industry, according to Stuart Hanson, marketing manager for Travis Industries.

“People still like traditional fireplaces, but there is definitely a need for more modern ones as well,” adds Greg Thomas, Napoleon’s director of sales.

And according to Coastroad Hearth & Patio Supply’s General Manager and Vice President Tom Parks, “If you go to almost any major manufacturer, they will have at least one modern-looking fireplace.”

Here are some of the most modern, fashionable fireplaces available, all practically guaranteed to not just warm your house but to elevate it from functional to a work of art.

LONG, LOW AND HIGH-DEF

“Right now, the trend is wide and low fireplaces,” Parks says. “The opening might be three to four feet wide, but only 16 to 18 inches high. It’s a very horizontal and linear look.”

Because art deco style revolves around uncluttered design, “There’s more focus on the actual flame now, and

framing it in a minimalist way,” Thomas says. “Most of these modern units have a simpler, cleaner look.”

Between their “widescreen” look and simple black frames, modern fireplaces have begun to mimic the shape, size and height of flat-screen televisions. Napoleon’s High Definition Series — notable for its unobtrusive “clean face frame” to maximize fire viewing — has actually been mistaken for a flat-panel TV inside Hearth & Stone in



Napoleon’s High Definition Series



Revolution triple-view fireplace by Fireplace Xtordinair

Philadelphia, Pa., owner Dan Carter says. Like their digital counterparts, these HD-fireplaces come in a variety of sizes, and offer either traditional logs or contemporary rocks or glossy glass.

BURSTING THROUGH WALLS

A through-wall fireplace can make for an eye-catching room divider. Usually mounted at the height of a picture frame, these see-through fireplaces can replace traditional artwork, offering sizzling views of a fire from two different rooms. Clark says through-wall fireplaces have been popular in his store, as they provide two rooms with heat in addition to looking good.

Some companies are opening up the fire still further with triple-view fireplaces, while Napoleon offers a four-sided glass island natural vent fireplace and Spark has a glass-free 360-degree open fire, which requires only an overhead hood.

A VERTICAL FIREPLACE?

Thanks to sophisticated technology and design, fireplaces now come in the vertical variety, allowing for a longer, slimmer ribbon of fire. Napoleon's Tureen,

for example, is a contemporary ceramic fire bowl filled with faux river rocks housed in a two-foot-wide by four-foot-tall fireplace. The combination is especially popular in high-end homes, Thomas says. Napoleon's Torch fireplace features an even slimmer flame, with its design measuring a foot wide by about three-and-a-half-feet tall. "It certainly doesn't look anything like a traditional fireplace," Carter says.



Napoleon's Tureen

BRANCHING OUT

Other new styles are emerging, too. Among the hot new options are:

Stylish stoves: Travis Industries' freestanding Eden gas stove is "specifically designed in the art deco style," but is at the same time "natural and organic," Hanson says. Inspired by interlocking trees, the black cast-iron Eden features a three-sided fire view with decorative metal branches on the outside. It's also earth-friendly, relying on a GreenSmart gas burner system that will heat your home while saving energy use and lowering heating bills.

Art deco arches: A hallmark in art deco design, arches also make an eye-catching fireplace shape. Mendota's Chelsea fireplace is

fairly petite compared to other modern hearths — about three feet high by two-and-a-half-foot wide — and the company describes it as “fine art that warms and lifts the soul.” Up the deco factor still more with options like a Milano tile interior, filigree overlay or metal doors. (For even more drama, Heat & Glo offers the Bravo — a kiva-inspired fireplace that’s all arch and comes in white, copper or oak.)

A class of its own: Some modern fireplaces are so unique that they don’t quite fit into any given category. Such is the case for Heat & Glo’s Cyclone — which the company says is better described as “fine art” than a conventional fireplace. The Cy-



Napoleon’s “crystallites” with a lighted Swarovski crystal bed

clone features a long tube with an equally long, particularly eye-catching, twisting flame inside it. It has a number of decorative fronts, including brushed nickel, black nickel, brushed copper or black copper.

Logging off: Traditional gas logs are also being put on the back burner in exchange for more artistic alternatives. Decorative glass beads or gem stones — both fixtures of art deco design — “can convert any fireplace into a modern work of art,” says Wayne Terpstra of American Gas Log. His company offers rounded glass beads in six different colors to match any home’s décor.

R.H. Peterson Co. offers both flat-edged glass and rounded gemstones in colors like black, indigo swirl, mint, blue topaz, bronze and platinum. Hargrove Hearth Products takes the idea of modern-art-inside-your-fireplace still further, offering an assortment of contemporary geometric shapes (think cones, spheres and cubes) that burn in place of logs.

Putting on the glitz: Natural gas fires may burn bright, but they also can get quite warm. Enter lighted fireplaces, which allow you to enjoy the glow of your hearth even during the hottest months of the year. Interior accent lights can “create a little ambiance when you’re not using the fire” and are “a trend across the board with modern designs,” Parks says.

Fireplace Xtrarordinair’s Clean Face fireplaces include ceiling lights that shine down on the logs, and can be turned to three levels of illumination, or turned off entirely. Similarly, Mendota claims its accent lighting system “adds extra drama and detail when the fire’s on, and a gentle glow without heat when it’s off.”

Napoleon’s optional “crystallites” provide accent lighting from underneath the glass ember bed, offering a glow with or without flame. There’s even a glitzed-up version for those who like extra sparkle: a lighted Swarovski crystal bed. ■



Heat & Glo’s Cyclone innovative fireplace

Getting Into Hot Water

New products allow you to heat your home's water for less.

By Cindy Baldhoff

It only takes one cold shower to create a renewed appreciation for your water heater. These days, there are new and improved types of water heaters.

Residential water heaters normally fall into two general categories — electric or gas. In recent years, the proliferation of high-efficiency options in gas water heating has fueled a significant interest in gas water heating, according to Mike Parker, vice president of marketing for A.O. Smith, which manufactures gas and electric tank and gas tankless water heaters.

“Electrical resistance isn’t an efficient way to create heat when you look at the source of that power, so that’s why you use a fuel like natural gas,” he says. “Gas is different. You get a lot of heat out of the exhaust gases before they are vented outside the home. When more heat is transferred to the water, the better off you are from an efficiency standpoint.”

Suppliers have introduced fans and other devices to direct gas where and when it’s needed most. New high-efficiency water heaters, including units made by Rheem, Bradford White, and A.O. Smith, can use 10 to 40 percent less than standard models, according to numbers released by the Energy Star® program. For instance, A.O. Smith’s new high-efficiency tank heater, called the Vertex, provides hot water at 96 percent thermal efficiency. While a standard gas water heater features a vertical flue that goes straight up the middle of the heater, the Vertex unit runs the gas through a coil, which means more of the heat transfers into the water.

“A basic gas unit is much cheaper to run than an electric heater because of the cost of fuels, and the Vertex unit will save them even more,” Parker says.

However, he says, comparing gas tank heaters to electric water heaters “is like comparing apples to oranges,” because costs are different in various geographic areas, and it takes a 50 gallon electric water heater to do the same job as a 40 gallon gas water heater. “On the gas side, there are a variety of options that are recognized by Energy Star®,” he says. “Consumers are being presented more options of what they can buy.”

GOING TANKLESS

Homeowners looking for additional efficiency should consider tankless heaters, which provide heated water on demand rather than continuously maintaining hot water. “Tankless heaters are more efficient than both a typical new tank and an older, existing tank-type,” says Butch Aikens, tankless resource manager for Rheem Water Heating.

Since the water isn’t heated until the customer demands it, the delivery temperature can be adjusted each time. “Unlike a tank, you can set the delivery temperature to 120 degrees for washing clothes or doing the dishes, but set it for 104 degrees if the baby is in the tub,” Aikens says. “That’s consumer convenience.”

Nicole Krol, energy program manager for Rinnai, says tankless heaters have a life expectancy of more than 20 years and have hydronic and radiant floor heating applications as well.

One of the big selling points of the tankless system — other than offering a much lower amount of carbon dioxide emissions — is the endless supply of hot water. “I served as the marketing director of a gas utility for many years, and it was very seldom that a customer called to complain about how much it cost to heat their water,” Aikens says, adding that he did receive calls from people wanting to have access to more hot water. “With tankless water heaters, that’s not a problem.”



Tankless water heaters can be installed either inside or outside the home; this is a Rheem indoor unit.



Solar panels are an increasingly popular way to provide energy – and can save dramatically on water heating costs.

WARMING UP TO SOLAR

Solar water heaters have risen to the forefront of the green building movement, thanks in large part because they don't have any emissions from about half of the hot water being produced, says Rod Hyatt, solar product manager of Heat Transfer Products. "Plus, if you're trying to reduce energy bills, you could knock out around 50 percent of hot water costs with solar," he adds, noting that results will be better in the south than in northern areas.

Solar water heating offers several tank options — but all require a back-up such as natural gas for when the sun isn't shining — and the other components needed, such as solar panels, will vary based on individual water usage. "Usually one or two panels will be enough for most small to average families," Hyatt says.

While a solar water heating system is much more expensive up front, costing around \$8,000 including installation, there are subsidies to help offset the costs, Hyatt says.

According to Energy Star®, heat pump water heaters are most effective when used in warm climates that have long cooling seasons. Parker says heat pumps bring existing electric water heaters to Energy Star standards. ■

ADDING EFFICIENCY TO EXISTING SYSTEMS

For consumers who don't have natural gas – but still want the benefits of a higher efficiency electric water heater – new heat pump water heaters have entered the market and offer an alternative.

"The only way to make electrical residential water heaters more efficient is to introduce heat pump technology," explains A.O. Smith's Parker. Although his company is about to introduce a heat pump product there are still many challenges associated with heat pump technology, he says.

"It creates heat relatively slow," he acknowledges. "All heat pump water heaters on the market have an electrical element as back up and supplemental heating in case the heat pump can't keep up with demand."

| | TYPE WATER HEATER | EFFICIENCY FACTOR | AVERAGE INSTALLED COST | ANNUAL OPERATING COST | CO2 (POUNDS/YEAR) |
|-------------|---|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| NATURAL GAS | Standard Gas Tank | 0.60 | \$850 | \$280 | 3,145 |
| | Medium Efficiency Gas Tank | 0.67 | \$1,025 | \$256 | 2,917 |
| | High Efficiency Gas Tank (Condensing) | 0.86 | \$2,000 | \$207 | 2,331 |
| | Standard Gas Tankless | 0.80 | \$1,800 | \$221 | 2,495 |
| | High Efficiency Gas Tankless (Condensing) | 0.93 | \$2,500 | \$192 | 2,222 |
| SOLAR | Solar with Gas back up | 1.20 | \$8,000 | \$146 | 1,671 |
| | Solar with Electric back up | 2.50 | \$6,500 | \$202 | 3,459 |
| ELECTRIC | Standard Electric Tank | 0.90 | \$750 | \$561 | 6,940 |
| | High Efficiency Electric Tank | 0.95 | \$820 | \$532 | 6,574 |
| | Electric Heat Pump Water Heater | 2.00 | \$1,660 | \$252 | 3,122 |

The table above is for comparison purposes only and uses average pricing information from multiple sources to provide a current comparison between various residential water heating options. Regional energy pricing and hot usage patterns may impact results for your specific home. Some Energy Factors and Average Installed Costs are from ACEEE and others come directly from manufacturers of these products. Energy usage is derived from DOE test procedures that use the following formulas: (Gas Therms/Yr = 41,045 BTU/EF X

365/100,000, and Electric KWH/Yr = 12.03/EF X 365.) Note that parasitic electric usage was calculated and added in for all natural gas models above except the atmospheric model that does not require electric. Operating costs use the current U.S. EIA Short-Term Energy Outlook rates for 2010 of \$11.59/MCF Residential Natural Gas and \$.1126/KWH Residential Electric. Natural Gas heating value is 1,035 BTU/CF. Pounds of CO2 are calculated using E-Grid 2005 data for all U.S. sources.

Warm and Cozy

The right equipment can warm your home while lowering your bills.

By Paula Felps

When temperatures drop, heating your home becomes top priority. But these days, it's not just about creating a warm and cozy space — it's about finding an efficient, planet-friendly way to do that.

One of the most rapidly growing alternatives to traditional forced-air heating systems is hydronics, which provides an affordable way to heat a home evenly. The system forces hot water through plastic tubes that are installed beneath the floors of your home, providing clean, quiet, draft-free heat. This radiant form of heat keeps the floor (and your toes!) toasty and warm, while eliminating cold and hot spots within the room.

According to Mary Smith Carson of the Hydronics Industry Alliance, hydronic heating systems can be zoned to control each room individually, preventing one room from being too warm while another may be too cold. "Hydronic heating systems are extremely efficient because of design advances in boilers, zone heating and the nature of the heating system," she says. "Although they may initially cost more than a forced air system, the benefits outweigh the additional costs."

She points out that with the recent advancements in technology for the burners, controls and pumps, efficiency has increased to more than 98 percent. Today's boilers allow users to automatically adjust the temperature to match outdoor conditions.

"On warmer days, the boilers use a lower water temperature to meet the demands of the home while maintaining the desired comfort level," Carson says. "On colder days, the boilers increase the water temperature to meet the increased demand."

This automated process can save up to 20 percent over conventional heating systems.

DIVERSE APPLICATIONS

The technological advances also have given hydronics a widening number of uses, including heating walls and swimming pools — and even melting snow on sidewalks and driveways. "Because of its safety

factors, radiant heat is being used to melt snow and ice around homes and businesses as well," Carson explains.

Although hydronics is, by far, most popular in cold-weather states and territories, even customers in warmer climates — such as Florida — are beginning to enjoy its benefits. "The technology can be paired with high velocity air conditioning and solar," she says. "A single unit can heat the home and produce hot water."

Although a hydronics system can be retrofitted into an existing home that's being remodeled, it's most commonly installed in new construction.

Hydronic towel warmers can easily be integrated into the home's hot water heating system. (There's nothing quite like getting out of the shower on a cold winter morning and finding a warm, dry towel waiting for you!)

An additional advantage of towel warmers is that they generate heat, so they can easily keep a bathroom warm, according to Pat Kahnert of Marathon Intl., which offers the BAXI line of towel warmers. The different sizes available allow for enough heat output for the towel warmer to be used either as a supplemental heater or as the sole source of heat for that room.

QUICK FIXES

Even homes that aren't ready to spring for an entire new heating system can find a few economical — and effective — ways to warm up. Using heaters designed to warm a specific area can help take the bite off of winter's chill. Such additions as space heaters and free standing stoves allow homeowners to generate heat where needed, creating a

comfortable space regardless of the outdoor temperatures.

Space heaters. For smaller spaces — or even large spaces that need a heating boost — gas space heaters can provide the perfect solution. Both vented and vent-free space heaters are available, and today's vent-free heaters, such as those made by Vanguard, can provide up to 30,000 Btu of clean, odorless heat, according to the manufacturer. That's enough to warm up to 1,000 square feet and, best of all, because the heaters don't require venting, the homeowner won't lose any heat — which gives it a rating of 99 percent efficiency.



Gas space heaters provide the perfect solution for heating small spaces.



Hydronic towel warmer

(However, it's important to check local codes before installing a vent-free heater, as they are not approved in certain jurisdictions. For example, they are not allowed in Canada.)

The COZY brand of gas-fired direct vent baseboard heaters provides another option for adding heat to cold rooms. Perfect as a replacement for an old electric baseboard heater – or as a new addition in any room where space is at a premium – the baseboards use technology developed by three utility companies in Canada, and are even approved for use in mobile home applications.

COZY also offers a floor furnace that can be installed between floor joists – which means it doesn't take up any space in the room. A variety of models allow consumers to choose the right size unit for their heating needs.

Gas space heaters come in either infrared or blue flame convection models. Infrared heaters are perfect for un-insulated rooms, because they are designed to heat objects in the room before heating the air. Blue flame convection heaters work similar to a central heating system and warm the air throughout the room while allowing you to see the nice blue flame burning behind a glass panel.

Freestanding stoves. For a home that needs extra warmth but doesn't have a fireplace, a freestanding stove can bring many of the same benefits of a fireplace. According to Vermont Castings, one of North America's largest suppliers of gas products, a stove offers more flexibility in venting options; it can be vented either through an existing chimney or through any outside wall; some models can be installed without vents. (Again, installation of these units will be dictated by the codes of that particular area, so always check codes before purchasing a unit.)

The flexibility of a freestanding stove means that it can be installed in virtually any room where it's needed.

Gas stoves burn clean energy and provide an efficient way to heat spaces. Another advantage of the steel or cast iron stoves is that they come in a variety of styles and colors, allowing them to complement any décor or environment. ■



Freestanding stoves are a clean and efficient way to heat spaces, and can be installed in virtually any room in the house.



BENEFITS OF GAS DRYERS

A natural gas clothes dryer saves you money and time — every time you do laundry. Plus, there are plenty of other benefits to drying your clothes with a natural gas dryer.

They save time. Clothes dry faster in a gas dryer so you spend less time doing laundry. Shorter drying times also save energy!

They dry loads for less. According to the California Consumer Energy Center, it costs about \$.15-.20 to dry a load of laundry with a natural gas dryer, compared to \$.30-.40 for an electric dryer. Natural gas dryers cost a little more to purchase, but over the lifetime of the dryer (on average 13 years) you make up more than the difference.

They reduce wrinkles. Since gas dryers dissipate heat more quickly and accurately monitor moisture levels, your clothes won't be overexposed to heat which causes excessive wrinkling.

They reduce static. It's true! Gas dryers produce less static energy, so you'll have fewer problems with static cling.

They're environmentally friendly. Using natural gas to directly operate an appliance is more energy efficient and produces less greenhouse gases. With natural gas, 90 percent of the energy is delivered directly to your home. Conversely, with electricity only about 30 percent useable energy is delivered to your home. That's because approximately 70 percent of the energy used to make electricity is lost during generation and transmission from the power plant.

Keeping Your Cool

Gas-driven heat pumps are an increasingly efficient, affordable way to control your home's temperature.

By Pam Baker

For decades, having a comfortable home has been just a thermostat setting away and rarely did it require much thought beyond determining an ideal temperature. But like most technologies, cooling units have changed rapidly in recent years, and there's much to be gained from installing the latest models. Understanding what's new in air conditioners will help you lower energy costs and provide greater temperature control in individual rooms.

Heat pumps retain the lead position in home cooling options but the units of today are radically different than those of years past. For one thing, some of today's heat pumps are powered by environmentally friendly natural gas rather than by electricity. Also, when in the heating mode, most natural gas models don't contain expensive-to-replace moving parts such as compressors, nor do most natural gas models require an expensive backup heating system to handle really cold days. So your family is not only saving money on utility bills, but also on maintenance and part-replacement costs.

Gas-fired absorption heat pumps, also known as gas heat pumps (GHP), offer solid savings and a wide range of comfort features. This technology has been tried and tested for decades in Japan. Most people are pleasantly surprised to learn that this technology, which has only recently come into widespread use in the United States, is not new.

"Gas-driven heat pumps are not new to people in other parts of the world," explains Tim Cone, chief operating officer of marketing at IntelliChoice Energy, which distributes NextAire gas heat pumps. "These types of cooling units have been successfully used for the past 20 years worldwide. They are most heavily in use in technology-savvy Japan."

This is not to say the technology is totally foreign to North America. "Gas absorption cooling, which has no compressor, is a proven technology that's been in commercial use since the 1920s," says Rick



Halbig, national sales manager at Robur. "Ask your grandparents if they remember Servel gas refrigerators; I'm sure they do. The technology was later adopted for air conditioning purposes in the mid 1960s. Research to reverse the cycle and develop a heat pump model had been ongoing for several years."

Robur and NextAire are two brands that were among the first to move into the American home market, both of them offering units for a wide range of home sizes. When it comes to the large, luxurious homes, one or the other of the two brands are usually found in use — and for good reasons.

Gas air conditioners are perfect for homes in hot, humid climates. But make no mistake, an 1,800-square-foot home benefits from using a gas air conditioner as does a 10,000-square-foot luxury home in any climate.

Gas absorption units are kinder to the environment and your wallet than electric units. These extremely high-efficiency gas-fired absorption heat pumps reduce annual operating costs by up to 40 percent.

"When compared to the other types of electric heat pumps, the primary difference is that Robur uses a chemical process with our absorption generator (also known as a thermal compressor with no moving parts), whereas an electric heat pump uses a mechanical process with a mechanical compressor," explains Halbig. "There is no mechanical compressor in the Robur unit so there is no expensive part to wear out that needs repair or replacement."

"When our heat pump unit is being used for heating we are utilizing the heat from the absorption process with heat extracted from the outside air. The combining of these two energy sources results in the high heating efficiency of the unit."

Robur's GAHP-AR (Gas Absorption Heat Pump – Air Source Reversible) unit has nominal capacity ratings of 4.8 Tons (57,700 Btu/hr) cooling and 120,000 Btu/hr heating. The unit's heating efficiency at rated conditions is an outstanding 126 percent. The Robur unit's



back-up heating equipment that is usually very costly to operate,” Halbig says.

NextAire’s eight-ton multi-zone GHP (gas heat pump) unit can replace multiple, noisy conventional units typically used in larger homes. It is also much quieter, operating at less than 57 decibels. “There is more design flexibility too since the system can be conveniently located up to 400 feet from the building, well out of view,” Cone says.

Gas chillers are another great option. These work with chilled water and they present a number of design options that heavy ductwork systems do not. They, too, have all the energy savings and green benefits as other gas-driven air conditioning units.

Another distinct advantage is the qualification for LEED points necessary for green-building certification. “We’re trying to get things off the power grid to reduce the pull on the grid and the carbon footprint of the user,” Cone says. “Your electric bill will be significantly reduced, too.”

Halbig adds that while there are many reasons gas-driven absorption heat pumps are so popular these days, chief among them are the “lower greenhouse gas emissions, the absence of ozone-depleting chemicals in the refrigerant, the reuse of waste heat, and the extremely high efficiencies.”

The NextAire 8-ton multi-zone GHP allows you to maintain individualized temperature settings in up to 17 different spaces. You can easily and efficiently customize comfort levels based on usage and personal preference. “For example, you can keep a wine cooler room at perfect temps while keeping a mother-in-law suite a bit toastier. Whatever the personal preferences, zoning allows you to keep everyone happy and comfortable,” Cone says. ■

Sources: NextAire: www.icegHP.com, Robur: www.Robur.com

cooling-to-heating capacity ratio better matches the requirements for most homes in the northern half of the United States.

Its heating capacity in colder weather (temperatures below 32°F) is considerably greater than most electric heat pumps. Even at 5°F, its heating capacity is approximately 90,000 BTUs with an efficiency around 94 percent.

On heating applications where lower hot water temperatures are required, such as radiant floor heating, the efficiency of the Robur heat pump will be around 100 percent. Depending on the actual heating load of the space and how the Robur unit is sized, back-up heat is usually not required until outdoor temperatures start dropping below -10°F or -15°F.

“In many areas of the country where winter temperatures never drop below -20°F, this feature can avoid extra cost associated with back-up heating requirements and/or minimize the need to operate



BEAT THE HEAT – AND THE HUMIDITY

As most of us know, it’s not just summer heat that can wear us down – it’s also the humidity. That’s true both inside and outside of the home.

Maintaining the proper humidity is vital to having a healthy home. When humidity levels are too high (more than 50 percent RH, or relative humidity), your home can become a breeding ground for mold, mildew and fungus. When the RH is too low – less than 40 percent – it can lead to such ailments as sore throats, sinus pain and an increased growth of viruses.

“Maintaining a relative humidity between 40

and 50 percent offers tremendous benefits to homeowners,” says Scott Janke, executive vice president for NovelAire Technologies. “It prevents mold, reduces allergens, protects furnishings and saves energy.”

NovelAire’s Dessicant unit is one way to fight summer humidity – while at the same time protecting family members who suffer from respiratory ailments. The unit has a separate humidistat, which allows you to control the humidity of your home independent of the central HVAC system.

Source: NovelAire, www.novelaire.com



Heartland Appliances' new Classic full kitchen.

Kitchen

à la Mode

The kitchen has always been the central gathering place in any home. That is why it is always changing: morphing and molding to fit each new generation's idea of the ideal home. So, what's next in kitchen design and how will it make our homes more comfortable – and our lives simpler?

The kitchen of tomorrow is sophisticated with clean and simplistic lines. It is a fun place to gather and eat, but blends well with the rest of the house rather than as a standalone, one-function space.

It combines nourishment with entertainment from new ways to cook to new ways to communicate with family, the world and the kitchen itself. What could possibly be better?

APPLIANCES AS ART

Appliances are the latest reflection of today's creativity. In addition to the colors we're already seeing in the kitchen, designers are experimenting with patterns and designs that can be screenprinted on appliances. Perhaps paisleys, plaids and houndstooth patterns may mark the next wave of appliances as a result.

However, appliances with bold colors and interesting textures will continue to be more a matter of personal reflection than design mandate.

For example, Michael Wolk, chairman and creative director of Michael Wolk Design Associates, complemented the overall contemporary design style of a luxury 8,000-square-foot oceanfront condominium in Trump Palace by incorporating glass-faced cabinets and stainless steel appliances. To achieve perfect balance and sensory harmony, Wolk selected a Giallo Topazio granite countertop and backsplash and dark-colored cabinets to provide a feeling of warmth to the kitchen.

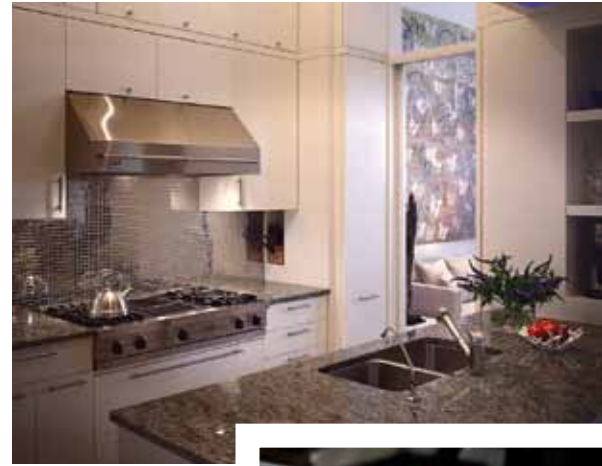
COOKING OPTIONS GET SOPHISTICATED

Cooking options are just as interesting as the appliance designs. Interest in pre-packaged foods is waning as cooking becomes as much a



Contemporary design in a luxury condominium designed by Michael Wolk is complete with glass-faced cabinets and stainless steel appliances.

White lacquer kitchen
by Campion Platt.



Indoor pizza oven from Wood Stone Corporation.



source of entertainment as it is nourishment. Although the microwave is still popular in the kitchen, consumers are tiring of the negative cooking characteristics of many microwaved foods, and now have several amazing new cooking appliances to choose from.

One of the new popular cooking options is a stone-hearth pizza oven. "People refer to it as a pizza oven to distinguish it from other kinds of ovens – and it is known for making great pizza," explains Keith Carpenter, president and founder of Wood Stone Corporation, a manufacturer of commercial and residential stone-hearth ovens. "But you can cook anything in it. As a matter of fact, most people love these ovens because you can cook several things at the same time in the same oven but at different temperatures."

Indeed, stone-hearth pizza ovens have "zones," which are areas within the oven that measure different temperatures depending how close they are to the gas-flame. There is a meat zone, a bread zone, a vegetable zone and so forth. An entire meal can be cooked at once. For those who would rather interact a little less with the cooking process, the pizza oven retains enough heat to slow cook a meal overnight even though the oven is turned off.

Jenn-Air's new line is also gathering accolades from "new kitchen" stylists. Top of the most-wanted list: downdraft cooktops that are also available in a unique duct-free configuration, and Jenn-Air's built-in indoor grills. In addition to creating the sleek looks touted by today's hottest designers, they bring the outdoor grilling experience inside, where it can be enjoyed year-round. They are also perfect for condos in high-rises where limited venting options previously deprived homeowners of the pleasures of cooking with gas.

Heartland Appliances offers a line of Classic Gas Ranges that combines nostalgic design with superior functionality. The sealed, high-efficiency gas burners offer a range of control that most high-output burners can't deliver, with their 10,000 Btu main input burner delivering more heat than most 13,000 Btu burners. Available in 30- and 48-inch models, they have four and six burners, respectively, to accommodate any size kitchen.

When it comes to style meeting substance, nothing tops Thermador's Star Burners. This dramatic star-shaped burner allows even flame and heat distribution, and Thermador recently introduced an elevated burner with increased output that fuels performance and allows for quick and easy clean-up.



Thermador's Star Burner reinvents the old circular burner to allow even heat distribution.

SIMPLE AND ELEGANT

"The future of kitchens is in the integration of elements," says renowned architect and designer Campion Platt. "Virtually all the equipment can be hidden, thus the room can be transformed more to a living than just a function space. More people are opting for eat-in kitchens and also combining kitchen rooms with family rooms. Accordingly, the design of kitchens will become less functional looking and more appealing as an interior room, more connected to the rest of the house."



Jenn-Air's modular downdraft cooktop brings the grilling experience inside.



The Izone Cooksurface provides a smooth glass surface for easy cleaning.

Indeed, simple is the “in” look this design season. The National Association of Home Builders’ (NAHB) January 2010 survey of home builders reports that kitchen size will remain about the same, but designers will eliminate walls and raise ceilings. Energy efficient appliances are a definite must.

The rules are changing, and today’s design details set the scene for understated elegance. According to Platt, the modern kitchen has the following features:

- Easy access
- Vertical storage
- Dual counter; island and galley
- Open kitchen
- Metal (not ceramic) tiles at backsplash
- LED lighting
- Lacquered cabinets for easy care and cleaning

CABINETS OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

As part of the changing face of the kitchen, exterior cabinetry has largely gone dark.

“More and more I see people using darker cabinets. Dark walnut, cappuccino-glazed cherry and even black cabinets are showing up in newly renovated condos as well as in larger suburban estate homes,” says Steve Armandi, vice president of sales for Renaissance Marble & Granite. “Larger windows, which allow more natural light inside, and improved lighting technology have also caused designers not to be afraid to incorporate such a contrast to what has been the norm of years past. With this trend of darker cabinetry, the use of light-colored stones on countertops is becoming more popular.”

It’s not just cabinets that are bringing new colors into the kitchen.

“People are making statements with their appliances, accessories and backsplash materials,” continues Armandi. “The ‘70s retro look has brought back some funky colors in the kitchen. To make that work, more and more people have been requesting to tone down the color of the countertop surfaces.”

AMBIENCE COUNTS

The interpretation of the kitchen as more of a living space and a family room where social gatherings take place is exemplified in smart integrated electronics. A TV, CD and DVD player, radio, Internet, and iPod docking station can be coupled with a sophisticated acoustics and lighting system with adjustable mood colors to achieve any desired dining or gathering ambience. Indeed, ambience elements are keystones of new kitchen designs.

Several software and hardware manufacturers are now designing audio and video integrated systems to achieve both mood enhancements and far-reaching remote controls with highly intuitive features.

THE KITCHEN HAS A BRAIN

The Continental Automated Buildings Association (CABA) says the kitchen of tomorrow will feature several projection surfaces for easy computer content retrieval and media use. This means that someday soon you’ll be able to project your computer or phone screen on certain surfaces in the kitchen. Maybe you want a TV to play on the wall. Or perhaps you would like a recipe to show on the stovetop or counter where you are preparing a meal. You could check your Email or Facebook page right from the counter or tabletop if you wish. The possibilities are virtually endless.

Facial and voice recognition technology will allow the kitchen to customize what it offers to fit each individual’s preferences.

Gesture recognition will also aid with computer multi-tasking without the need to stop and touch a keyboard, mouse or other controls. Wave your hand, for example, and the recipe page will turn. Hold your hand up in the universal “stop” position and whatever is playing will instantly mute or pause.

“Smart kitchens are making their way into many households now as equipment is tied into a home computer system that knows when something needs to get ordered, turns down the energy when you will be away and generally supports your way of living,” says Platt.

ENERGY AND EFFORT ARE REDUCED

Energy concerns – from utility bills to human exertion – are also a prime consideration in the design.

“All the drawers in this kitchen are self-closing, meaning with a light touch, they will close by themselves, slowly,” says Platt. “I also used a lot of energy-efficient LED lighting both in the kitchen island ceiling and also to accentuate the room within a room ‘box’ feeling.”

According to *Kitchen & Bath Design News*, touch LCD screens are saving human energy while making kitchen activities more enjoyable.

And, with an eye toward energy efficiency, gas is remaining the popular choice among consumers, and new technology is finding ways to make it more user-friendly than ever. For example, Fisher & Paykel is bringing the kitchen range into the future with the yet-to-be-released Izone CookSurface, which has retracting pot supports, burners and controls – making the smooth glass surface easy to clean when everything is turned off. The LED controls and precise temperature controls are further indicators of where the kitchen range is headed. ■

Rewards and Rebates

North American energy legislation guides homeowners toward savings, incentives.

By Paula Felps

Energy legislation in the U.S. and Canada is pivotal in providing both savings and incentives to consumers. Becoming familiar with energy legislation at a local and national level is essential for making smarter choices for your home as well as for the planet.

Today, energy legislation has created financial incentives that can help offset the costs of making one's home more energy efficient. These incentives also make it more affordable to purchase new energy-saving appliances. In the U.S., hundreds of millions of dollars have been allocated to the 2010 Energy Star rebate program, while Canada has both federal and provincial incentives providing similar rebates or tax credits.

LEARN TO EARN

According to Mick Womersley, associate professor of human ecology at Unity College in Unity, Maine, staying abreast of the latest energy legislation has a direct impact on consumers.

"Those who don't pay attention are going to be left behind," he says, noting that current legislation offers tax breaks and incentives for



everything from simple home weatherization to solar panel installation. "There are any number of programs available that can put them on a cheaper pathway. People will find they are penalized for not paying attention."

In the U.S., the Department of Energy sets minimum standards for the efficiency ratings of many home appliances. Efficiency ratings help consumers keep utility costs down and ensure environmental responsibility.

It is also a good idea to keep track of what bills, tax credits and financial incentives are about to take effect or will soon expire. This will allow you to plan purchases and take advantage of as many government incentives as possible. For example, the U.S.'s Energy Star rebate program was administered by individual states. The rebates all had start dates in early 2010, with end dates of one to four months later – or until the program funding was exhausted.

"Being aware of that legislation and the exact timing of the rebates in your state can make the difference between getting a rebate and not," he says. ■

WHERE TO FIND HELP

There are many resources available online to keep you informed of tax credits and financial incentives. Here are a few places to start.

In the U.S.:

- U.S. State Appliance Incentive
www.energysavers.gov/financial/70022.html
- U.S. Federal Tax Credit
www.energystar.gov/taxcredits
- Contact local assistance agencies, utilities and municipal governments

In Canada:

- Office of Energy Efficiency
<http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/corporate/incentives.cfm>
- Environment Canada Incentives and Rebates
<http://www.ec.gc.ca/incitatifs-incentives/>

Trout with Red Onion and Orange Relish

Preparation time: 10 minutes Cooking time: 20 minutes, Yield: 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

1 - 1 1/3-pound trout, boned, cut in half lengthwise
 Yellow cornmeal
 1 medium orange
 3 tbsps chopped fresh mint
 2 tbsps olive oil
 2/3 cup chopped red onion
 2 tbsps white wine vinegar
 Salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

1 Grate 1 tsp peel from orange. Cut off remaining peel and discard. Cut orange into half-inch pieces.

2 Mix orange pieces, peel and mint in small bowl.

3 Heat 1/2 tablespoon oil in heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add onion, then vinegar. Toss until just heated through, about 1 minute. Add onion mixture to orange mixture (do not clean skillet). Season relish with salt and pepper.

4 Sprinkle fish with salt and pepper.

5 Sprinkle on all sides with cornmeal.

6 Heat remaining 1-1/2 tbsps oil in same skillet over medium-high heat. Add fish and sauté until crisp outside and just opaque in center, about 4 minutes per side.

7 Transfer fish to plates; top with relish.



Stuffed Artichokes

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 35 minutes,

Yield: 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

3 tbsps cold pressed olive oil
 6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
 6 large-size artichokes
 1 tsp basil
 1 tsp parsley
 1 tsp oregano
 1/4 tsp sea salt
 1/8 tsp black pepper

PREPARATION

1 Cut off artichoke stems and trim 1/2 inch from tops of leaves. Separate leaves slightly to allow for stuffing.

2 Sauté garlic in oil until brown.

3 In a large bowl mix together above ingredients. Spoon mixture into the artichokes and place in a steamer pot and steam for 30 minutes at medium heat.

Vegetable Summer Rice

Preparation time: 10 minutes Cooking time: 45 minutes, Yield: 4 servings

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon of butter
 1/2 cup of finely chopped onion
 3 tablespoons of finely chopped green pepper
 2 tablespoons of finely chopped celery
 2 cloves of garlic, minced
 1 cup uncooked rice
 1 2/3 cups of broth (vegetable, chicken, or beef)
 1 teaspoon of salt
 1/2 teaspoon of black pepper
 1/2 teaspoon of paprika
 A dash of Tabasco sauce

PREPARATION

1 Sauté the onion, green pepper, and the celery in the butter until the onions are slightly transparent.

2 Add the minced garlic and the uncooked rice and stir a few times. Remove from heat.

3 Bring the broth to a boil in a medium saucepan and add the rice mixture, the salt, black pepper, paprika and the Tabasco sauce. Reduce the heat, cover with a tight fitting lid and let cook until the rice has absorbed the broth. This will take about 40 minutes.