

Friday, November 04, 2011

Posted on: October 6, 2011

Quit Smoking

Smokeless bioethanol fireplaces are versatile and unexpected indoor accents

By Cathy Cassata

CTW Features

If sitting on your sofa near a warm, cozy fire seems like a far-off dream, think again. Bioethanol-fueled fireplaces are a dream come true for those lacking a gas line or chimney. Plus, with no smoky emissions, these fireplaces might do the environment good.

Plant Fuel

Ethanol is a renewable energy source made by fermenting the sugar and starch components of plant by-products – mainly sugarcane and crops like grain, using yeast. This energy is used to create the burning flame in bio-ethanol fireplaces.

The greenest aspect of a bioethanol fireplace is the fuel, which produces low emissions and is renewable, says Alexander Eburne, CEO of EcoSmart Fire.

It's not that simple though. Kati Curtis, owner of Nirrada Interior Design in New York, N.Y., explains, "We still have to grow the plants to extract the fuel."

"If we're growing the corn, potatoes and sugar anyway, then bioethanol is a bi-product of that and is absolutely a renewable resource," she says. "But if we're growing the corn just to produce bioethanol, that's a different story."

Location, Location, Location

Since gas, electrical and plumbing connections aren't needed for bioethanol fireplaces and they only output water vapor and carbon dioxide, they don't require venting.

"Often times we're stuck with a home or apartment that may not have a chimney or gas line, so these are a great way to add a focal point to a room without having to do major work," says Curtis.

From free-standing styles that can move indoors and out and arrive out-of-the-box with little assembly to fixed styles that are mounted to the ground or set in a custom-designed wall build-in, there are a myriad of options. EcoSmart Fire offers products that can be added to existing wood fireplaces, says Eburne.

Curtis particularly likes using them as a room divider. "Since the big trend is to have one big open kitchen, dining, and living area, I love to use a bioethanol fireplace to separate the dining and living area, while still keeping an open feel."

The master bath is another place she uses them often. "They're a perfect way to bring a little romance to the bathroom with an authentic flame."

Safety First

While choosing a design might come easy, figuring out what's safe isn't as simple. "We are playing with fire, in essence, and it's important that consumers are aware of the products they are purchasing," Eburne says. He recommends researching safety features and quality of materials before purchasing a bioethanol fireplace. He suggests high grade stainless steel and heavy, thick materials.

Curtis warns that depending on the size of the fireplace, a certain amount of square footage is needed in the room for ventilation.

If price is the only concern holding you back, Eburne says most EcoSmart Fire bioethanol fireplaces fall between \$545 and \$5,000, and can cost as much as \$10,000.

Curtis says it's worth it. "It adds a tremendous impact for a small price and there's nothing like a fireplace to add ambience to a room."



A bioethanol fireplace produces few emissions, so it doesn't need a chimney or gas line and can be easily installed in many parts of the home. Image courtesy EcoSmart Fire