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SMALL SPACES ♦♦♦♦CHRISTINE BRUN

## Finessing a fireplace in a small home

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Today we think of the firelace as a romantic part of a room's decor – a marketable feature that provides a focal point or helps to sell a home. When several units with the same floor plan are on the market, who wouldn't want the one that advertises the quintessential symbol of home?

Historically, however, the fireplace was functional. Besides protecting a family from the cold and providing light, it was the site of multiple household tasks – heating water, cooking food and drying clothes. People spun wool, sewed, shelled peas or nuts, peeled potatoes and husked corn while seated near the hearth.

While we no longer depend on firelight to do our household chores or an open fire to keep us warm, we are still drawn to fireplaces. But for those of us who live in small homes, this can sometimes be a challenge. If a fireplace was not part of the original building, it can be expensive or impossible to remodel in a way to gain this feature.

One possible solution to this problem comes from an Australian company that conceived of a fireplace as a piece of furniture. The smart-looking unit requires no flue for ventilation or fixed-pipe connection that delivers a fuel supply, so it can be moved around to serve as a sideboard or sofa table. This kind of flexibility allows for a transportable fireplace just right for apartment or town-house living in the city.

The EcoSmart Fire shown here is designed and manufactured by the Fire Co. The open fireplace is versatile enough to fit into a wide range of architectural environments ranging from a loft or studio to a patio. It uses renewable energy and uses state-of-the-art design and technology. Naturally, it is important to get approval from local building authorities prior to installing such a unit.



Copley News Service photo courtesy of The Fire Co. A portable fireplace lends the ambience of the genuine article while serving as a room divider.

< Methylated spirits are used for fuel. The ethanol-based alcohol is produced by fermenting sugars that originate from agricultural and forestry products, including sugar cane, potatoes, bananas, beetroot and cereals such as wheat.

The fuel is housed in a stainless-steel burner chassis. You can turn the fire on and off as you wish and control the intensity of the flame through a built-in regulatory mechanism. This feature allows you to manipulate the amount of heat being generated and the amount of fuel used. Once the fuel is used, there is nothing to clean or clear.

The most fascinating feature for people who live in small homes is that the fireplace can be used as a room divider. Dual use is, after all, the secret ingredient to masterful space planning in small homes. Used floating between two spaces, the top surface could hold an important vase with bamboo or a stunning arrangement of fresh flowers.

Another use could be to sandwich the unit between walls and create a two-sided fireplace that services more private spaces. Most appealing is the ability to move these units from home to home and to provide the sense of having a cozy fireplace in rooms where outside venting is impossible for a more conventional structure.

Prices for this product range from \$2,500 to \$8,000.

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