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## Cozy Fireplaces Bring Warmth to Chilly Winter Nights

By Cathy Tyson



Copper fireplace at the Kangeter home. Photos Cathy Tyson

From a senior apartment to stately hillside estate to an historic ranch home, and beyond, it's not unusual to own a fireplace - or two - in this neck of the woods. In a completely random sampling of fireplace styles, Lamorinda residents opened their doors to share their unique fireplaces from kiva style, to a pellet stove, to a see-through model that truly brings the outdoors in.

About six years ago, Ed and Amie Kangeter purchased an historic 1930s home in Orinda. Kangeter was smitten when she saw the home's massive fireplace with its distinctive copper hood. Bringing back the shine was a major workout after years of oxidation; the copper had been seen better days, sporting a weathered patina when they bought the house. Rolls of paper towels and some elbow grease brought back the original youthful, but now 80-year-old sheen. The new owners replaced the terra cotta tile mantel and brick along the sides with opalescent tile, giving it a more contemporary look.

"It's kind of ironic, since we are in the scrap metal business, we know how valuable copper is," says Kangeter. "We tried to respect the continuity of the home, but have done some major updates."

Along with the copper fireplace, there's a kiva or "bee hive" round fireplace in a corner of what they call the Spanish room. This one gets a fair amount of use, since that room can be a little chilly. Son Louie Kangeter, 13, proudly reports, "I'm the official fire guy. My parents trust me." Regardless of who lights it, Louie, his little brother and sister, mom, dad and especially the dog really enjoy a warm fire on winter evenings.

Moraga homeowners Curtis and Shannon Hamm are thrilled with the Whitfield pellet stove in their family room, installed as part of a remodel in 1993. Standing in front of it is like being near a hair dryer blowing out warm air. They estimate they use up to 1.25 tons of pellets per year, the equivalent of burning one 40-pound bag every two days. The pellets are made of leftover wood residue from furniture manufacturing and sawdust from lumber production that is dried and compressed into small pellet-sized bits.

Pellets burn cleaner and more efficiently than conventional logs, and leave less ash to clean up. Their model has a handy automatic pellet feeder and adjustable blower to control the temperature, and on top sits a whale-shaped container that, when filled with water and heated, pushes steam out of its blowhole - an instant humidifier. With a large comfy couch, big screen TV and built-in bookcases, their family room couldn't be more inviting.

Perched on a hilltop off of Reliez Road in Lafayette is the spacious dramatic home of Meggin and Bill Schlinkert. The couple and their four grown children love to travel, and Schlinkert calls her family room "Ode to Africa" in homage to the hand-carved wooden animals the kids brought back from their African adventures. In 1982, the prior owner installed the striking black granite fireplace as well as the built-in TV and audio niche in rich dark stained cherry.

The see-through fireplace, also clad in black granite in the airy living room, is surrounded by windows that lead to the generous dining room. Schlinkert, who teaches art, added an array of plants along with colorful paint and furnishings to enliven the space. "The cool part is, when you look outside and the azaleas and rhododendrons are blooming, it's magnificent," she says.

Semi-empty nesters, Jill and Jim Larsen have lived in Orinda for years, oldest kids Molly and Sam are in college with just their youngest child, Hank, at home. When they decided to remodel about six years ago, the one detail they were sure about was what kind of fireplace they wanted. They were inspired by the substantial rustic fireplace with stone hearth at their favorite Gualala restaurant, St. Orres, and recreated it as a focal point in their remodeled living room.

Finally, a Moraga couple was looking for added warmth at their senior care facility. Their daughter was able to purchase an electric fireplace heater that reminded her of an old TV set, similar to a piece of furniture. They come in three sizes to accommodate a variety of rooms. The pair loves to stretch out in comfortable chairs and listen to audio-books on a CD player and not have the bother of wood, smoke, bringing in a gas line or cleaning out ashes. They just plug it in and go, with zero emissions or pollutants - and since it's portable, they can create a cozy spot wherever it's needed.

What better way to take the chill off a cold winter night than cozying up to a crackling fire?



Kiva style, Kangeter family.



Very efficient pellet stove at the Hamm's house.



Sailfish atop the Schlinkert's family room fireplace.





Dramatic window wall surrounding the Schlinkert's living room fireplace.



Classic stone fireplace at the Larsen home.



Jack Wuerth enjoys his electric fireplace.



Fireplace in the Schlinkert's breakfast room.

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