

# Cozy Fireplaces

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*Very efficient pellet stove at the Hamm's house.*

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



*Sailfish atop the Schlinkert's family room fireplace.*



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

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.



*Classic stone fireplace at the Larsen home.*