

Builders' Showcase



Photo provided

Depending on the builder, stone or full-masonry fireplaces can assume a unique look, such as this one installed in a Woodstock house by Peter Scholl of Scholl Construction Co., Crystal Lake.

Cold weather could spur interest in fireplaces

McHENRY COUNTY – New houses, especially those built by custom and semi-custom contractors, must have a fireplace.

Usually one is not sufficient and that is when two or three should suffice, but sometimes not. More are required. “Are you kidding?” builder Mike Doomis said. “We are bidding on one now with seven of them in it.”

Doomis and brother Tom are the owners of Doomis Custom Builders in West Dundee. They concentrate on designing and building custom houses in the 5,000- to 15,000-square-foot range.

“We have never done a custom house without a fireplace. The average is three to four which means one in the basement, at least one and maybe two on the first floor and then another in the master bedroom.”

Masonry fireplaces are preferred and they also cost the most. Other types are direct vent and vent-free fireplaces.

“Most of the time today our mate-



REVIEWS

Jerry Kuyper

rial for a (masonry) fireplace is cast stone. These look like big squares of limestone, but it is an artificial product.”

The facing on a fireplace alone can cost \$4,000 to \$8,000. “It depends on what the customer picks out,” Doomis said. The entire fireplace apparatus can cost \$15,000 for a single-story to \$25,000 for a two-story, he added. Besides the facing, a masonry fireplace includes hearth, foundation, firebox, mantel, ash dump door, cleanout door, chimney, crown, cap or shroud, damper, grate, lintel, lintel bar, and the list goes on.

“There is quite a bit to it,” agreed Peter Scholl of Scholl Construction Co., Crystal Lake. “There are different types of fireplaces, but the ones people like the most are the tradition-

al full-masonry ones where you build a basic firebox out of cinder blocks and face it with stone or brick. For a single fireplace with a full chimney up and out the house, that can run about \$15,000.”

Two other popular types of fireplaces are prefabricated direct vent and vent-free. They are popular primarily due to price. “Prefabs can range from \$1,500 to \$10,000,” Scholl construction manager Barb Merkel said.

Scholl slightly corrected those figures. “Direct vents start around \$1,200 and go up to \$8,000, not including the cost of installation.”

“It depends on the size (of the fireplace), blower, remote start, inserts and designs as some come with a real brick look. Some are vent-less and others are direct vent, where you do not need a chimney and the vent is through the back wall of the house,” Merkel said.

“I have done all three types, but I try to stay away from the vent-free

fireplaces,” Scholl said. “If people put them in a basement where there is no place to vent a flue, they are OK. It depends on use, but I stay away from them. We custom guys prefer full masonry which, as I said, can typically cost \$15,000. By comparison, a direct-vent with stone or brick facing can cost \$5,000. The vent-frees are less expensive. It depends on budget, the customer’s pocketbook, the location, such as in the basement, and whether they are on the first or second floors or both.”

Scholl recently built a custom 7,000-square-foot house in Bull Valley with five fireplaces. Four of the five fireplaces were masonry with natural finishes. The fifth was in the master suite. “It was a direct-vent, two-sided fireplace,” Scholl said.

A masonry fireplace can be defined as one built with brick or stone, including the brick, stone or reinforced concrete chimney.

• BUILDER

Continued from page 2

A prefab fireplace has sheet metal fireboxes.

Fuel for masonry as well as the prefab types include wood, natural gas, biomass and propane.

Depending on regulations of state and municipality, use of vent-less fireplaces, are restricted. They use gel, bottled or natural gas, cost the least and are the most efficient. Since air quality is a factor due to moisture released into the room air, sensors (oxygen and carbon monoxide) should be installed.

Direct-vent uses two pipes (a smaller one inside a larger one). The outer pipe draws air from the outside. The inner pipe serves as the fireplace exhaust. Vents can be out the top or the back. They are easy to install and more efficient than a masonry fireplace.

Direct-vent is popular with Roger Gerstad, president of Gerstad Builders in McHenry. The new houses in his current subdivisions (McHenry, Poplar Grove and Williams Bay, Wis.) rely on the direct-vent type.

According to Gerstad, one of the most energy-efficient fireplace options his company offers is the direct-vent, which is used with gas logs. "This system allows the vast majority of the heat provided by the gas logs to remain in the house," he said.

Gas log fireplaces built around a prefabricated metal insert are highly efficient in bringing heat back to the room, he added.

Many of these inserts feature air channels that wind around behind the firebox, the area where the fire is actually located. With the simple installation of a low-speed fan, air from the room is pushed through the air channels, where it picks up the heat of the fireplace and then gently placed back into the room.

Besides providing heat, aesthetics is important. "Today's fireplace has become a highly desirable feature that enhances aesthetic appeal of a room and increases resale value of the home in the future," Gerstad noted.

"The majority of our homebuyers express a desire

to have at least one fireplace somewhere in their new residence," Gerstad said. "The fireplace enhances a room's appearance by creating a central focal point and accentuating various features. For instance, stone or brick running from floor to ceiling can emphasize the room's height and volume space, while on the outside, tall chimney chases give a home additional depth and character."

Options such as brick, stone, ceramic, marble, slate facings, and drywall detailing allow buyers to choose a design that compliments the decorative theme of a room. Different shapes, sizes and designs, such as two-sided corner or three-sided styles, allow the fireplace to be positioned in various areas of the room.

According to Ryan VanLue of Rock Creek Homes, fireplaces also have a direct influence on the initial design of homes at Henning Estates in Huntley.

"We design our family rooms around the possibilities of how the fireplace can relate to such prominent features as entertainment centers, plasma TVs, windows, furniture, etc.," VanLue said.

His buyers can choose wood-burning or gas-burning fireplaces. The wood burners have gas starters that allow owners to dispense with kindling and light the logs quickly and easily. "For even more convenience, gas-burning fireplaces with artificial logs are perfect for homeowners who enjoy the sight of a warm fire but do not want to remove ashes or clean/maintain chimney flues," he said.

Wood-burning fireplaces are popular because of the crackling sounds and smells that can only be provided by natural wood, he noted.

"Our buyers especially enjoy wood burning fireplaces, as the large wooded home sites found in Henning Estates really set the proper mood. Imagine the warmth of a natural fire while looking out over one of our frozen lakes," VanLue said.

Buyers interested in receiving information about Gerstad's communities and location of decorated models can call 815-385-4495 or visit www.gerstadbld.com.

For information on Hen-

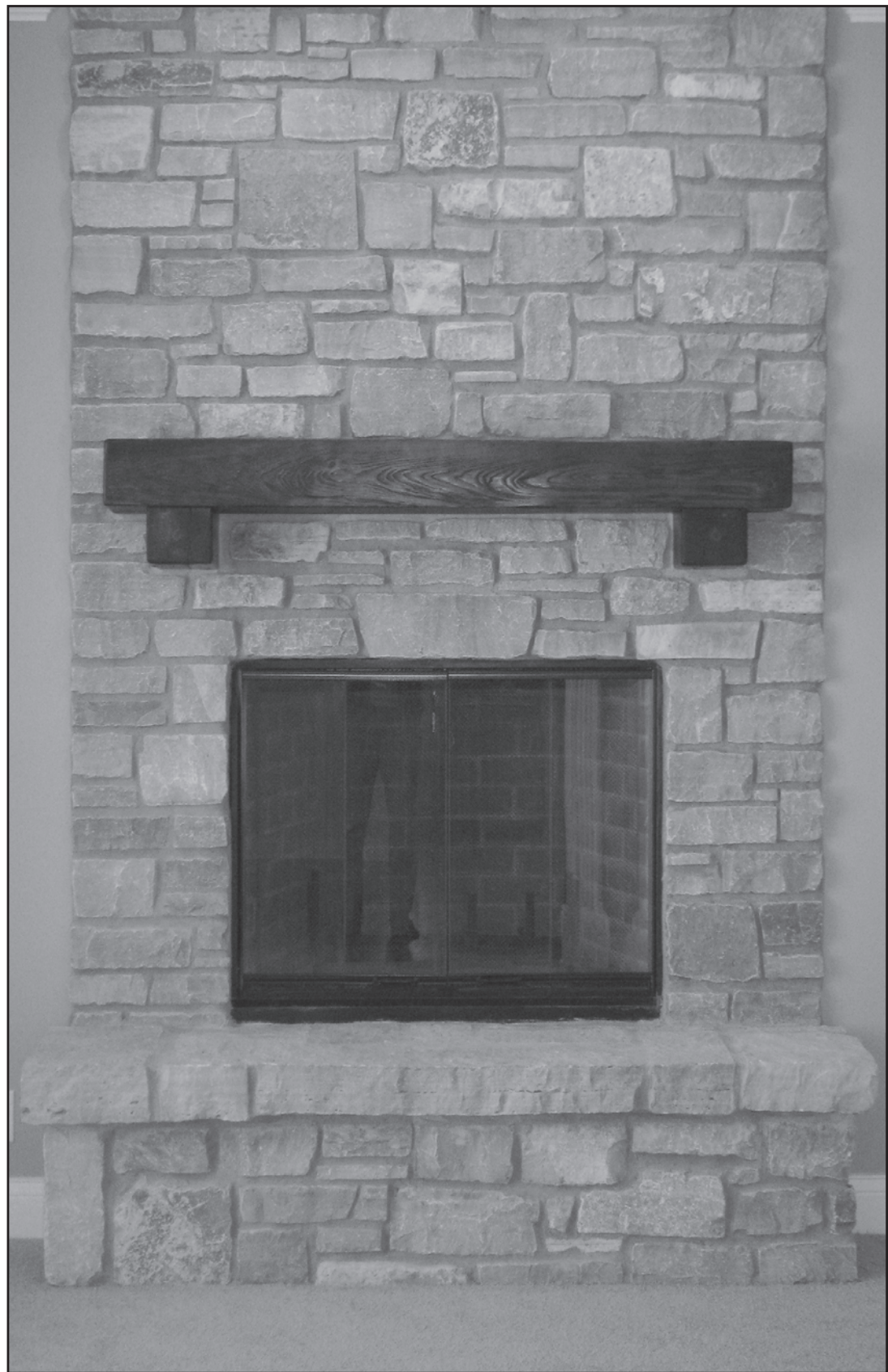


Photo provided

With a brick or stone facing, direct-vent, B-vent and vent-free fireplaces look like full-masonry productions.

ning Estates, call 847-338-3821 or visit www.henningestates.com.

For information on the Doomis brothers, call 847-426-1721, visit www.doomisbuilders.com or email miked@doomisbuilders.com.

For information on Scholl Construction Co. call 815-479-0910 or 815-955-8720 or visit www.schollconstruction.net or www.facebook.com/SchollConstructionCompany.

For information on fireplaces, visit <http://www.fireplacesnow.com/VentingOptions.asp> and <http://www.finehomebuilding.com/item/9546/gas-fireplaces-direct-vent-vs-vent-free>.

Why not just put a wood-burner, a simple box stove with metal piping into a new home?

"That might work for you or for me, but our customers won't go for it," Merkel said.

"They do not like the smoke and dirt and do not want to deal with the work that comes with a wood-burner," she said.

So it comes down to an easily maintained fireplace and, if one has the money, the ultimate in aesthetics.

"In that regard, of course masonry is the most beautiful. It also is the least cost-effective, but if you can afford beauty why not buy it."