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OFF DUTY

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

**** Saturday/Sunday, December 10 - 11, 2022 | **D1**

You Big Lug!
Our picks
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FUELED AGAIN In a Boston condo, local firm Stanton Schwartz Design used architectural wood to cozy up a sleek gas fireplace from European Home in Middleton, Mass.

TONY LUONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (LIVING ROOM); JULIE TREMBLAY (PHOTO ON TELEVISION); EUROPEAN HOME (GAS FIREFPLACE)

A Change of Hearth

Facing stricter restrictions on wood-burning fireplaces, interior designers are learning to decorate around gas and electric alternatives so well, homeowners don't really care that the fire isn't 'real'

BY ANTONIA VAN DER MEER

WHEN FAMILIES gather around the fire this holiday season, the odds are better than ever that no real kindling will be involved. Due to concerns about health and air quality, regulations against wood-burning fireplaces and stoves have grown increasingly strict—San Francisco, for example, forbids them in new construction—and homeowners drawn to flames have moved on to alternatives such as gas and electric. This doesn't mean such new-technology adopters are willing to give up the ghost of Christmases past, however. Fireplaces, even faux, remain core to a home's décor. "For generations, fire has been the center of the home," said Julie Buckner, an interior designer in Petaluma, Calif., who often installs electric fireplaces instead of gas or wood. The flame is a projection, so it emits no pollution and is safe for children and pets. "It's a light show," she said, "but once we commit to not burn wood, it becomes easier to accept that it doesn't look completely natural."

To make the illusion feel more like the real



The Gyrofocus Gas, newly available in the U.S., finally solved the problem of delivering gas to a suspended fireplace.

deal, Ms. Buckner concentrates on relevant décor questions. "Where does the fire sit in the room? How are the furnishings arranged?" What you actually do in the room, she added, can outweigh the lack of wood. "It helps to pour some wine, snuggle up on the sofa and turn on Netflix."

In a recent condo renovation (pictured above) by Needham, Mass., firm Stanton Schwartz Design, smart décor decisions contribute to the come-and-sit-a-while quality of a living area that includes a "fire feature" (as such faux hearths are often called). The clients wanted the benefits of heat and flame without the ashy mess of wood conflagrations, and listed a gas fireplace as a must-have. Their choice: a sleek glass-corner fireplace of dark steel. The open-concept living room is aesthetically very clean, almost entirely white, but a few architectural details tilt the space and the fireplace toward coziness. Teak wall planks that wrap around the corner from fireplace to ceiling suggest a "chimney," for example, and chunky wood beams traverse the ceiling. A long concrete ledge—raw, hand-cast, just wide enough for perching—runs underneath the fireplace.

"It's cold here in Boston, and we wanted to create a space that encourages people to enjoy the room," said Jessica Schwartz, who created the room.

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Inside



HEAR ME...NOT-QUITE ROAR
Dan Neil tests the (problematic) limits of an electric 'adventure' motorbike **D10**



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GETTY IMAGES (TENNIS RACKET)

DESIGN & DECORATING

How to Play Nicely With Fake Fire



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penthouse with design partner Ryan Stanton. Although modern gas fireplaces often feature a bed of glass shards, the pair chose ceramic driftwood instead, inspired by the home's location overlooking the water. "Glass is not flammable," said Ms. Schwartz, so it felt less "honest." A few real birch logs strategically set nearby bolster the fantasy.
Holly Markham, co-founder of European Home, a manufacturer and distributor of both

gas and electric models in Middleton, Mass., says plug-in electric fixtures have come a long way, increasing in sales by 53% since 2020. When a plumber working in their showroom turned off the gas, she recalls, he couldn't understand why a few fireplaces were still running: "He had no idea they were electric." She suggests consumers depend on knowledgeable local dealers, installers, designers and builders when considering installing an alternative fireplace. "Building codes can be complicated,

covering hundreds of pages," she said.
"If you're not consciously thinking about it, it's really realistic," said Randy Goldstein of the electric fireplace in his Petaluma, Calif., home. "I've got the flickering light and the ambience." His designer, Ms. Buckner, helped him choose a simple, glass-fronted black box, inset in his living-room wall. "It has tons of features—different flame heights, speeds and colors. It can even blow out warm air."
Some electric fireplaces use light pro-

jected onto a water-vapor mist to make the "flames" dance and produce wisps of "smoke." Other theatrical effects involve mats that mimic burning embers and audio that adds the sound of a crackling fire.
Designers sometimes lean heavily on the traditional accoutrements of a wood-burning fire to suggest a real hearth. For a home in Tenefly, N.J., interior designer and architect Robert Ventolo set an electric, water-vapor fire feature within a limestone surround and a black-slate firebox. A forged-steel fire basket cradles the device between two equally stately Art Deco andirons; a brush-and-poker set stand guard nearby. "It's the level of detail that makes it realistic," said Mr. Ventolo, of New York City's Crain and Ventolo Associates. "And even when there is no heat, it's a visually peaceful setting and a focal point of the room. If you see a flame, you think heat."
Dramatic mantels and surrounds are other visual cues that design pros favor. New York City designer Phillip Thomas says he uses a mantel above fires that run on alcohol-gel cartridges, even though such set-ups are so shallow they don't actually require an inset. "I have the fireplace surround protrude into the room anyway because it gives it emphasis," he said.

'It's the level of detail that makes it realistic. And if you see flame, you think heat.'

Something to keep in mind: A fireplace needs to look good even when the flames are not flickering. "Chunky 'oak' logs don't look real to me when the fire is off," said Susana Simonpietri, creative director of Brooklyn interior design studio Chango & Co., who prefers ceramic aspen or birch for the gas fireplaces she uses in her projects. "They are skinnier and look less faux. Sometimes the original arrangement is not as attractive as it could be. You can rearrange them to look more organic."
Traditional and organic are not the only aesthetic goals. A brand new addition to European Home's gas offerings—the Gyrofocus—offers a mod vibe with a curvy-bottomed capsule suspended from a pipe. It looks like it could have made a cameo in a 1970s Bond film—but designing it to work with gas was so tricky, it was unthinkable just a few years ago.
Lately, homeowners are more willing to face faux head on, says Ms. Simonpietri. "Younger clients don't necessarily want what they grew up with. My clients like cool angles and things that are sculptural," she said. The concept of the non-wood fireplace is acceptable to them. "They don't need to pretend it's anything other than what it is."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE-OFF / THE TRAPPINGS OF TENDING A FIRE LEND AN AIR OF AUTHENTICITY TO WOOD-FLAME ALTERNATIVES

<p>Cheetah Andirons, \$299, Frontgate.com</p>	<p>Antique Gold Oval Loop Fireplace Screen, \$494, BSEID.com</p>	<p>Modern Fireplace Tools, \$349, Arhaus.com</p>	<p>Dimplex Fresh Cut Log Set Accessory for Electric Fireplace \$320, Home-Depot.com</p>
<p>Caxton Freestanding Fire Basket, \$1,890, Chesneys.com</p>		<p>Louis XIII Mantel, \$1,665, Historic-Mantels.com</p>	

