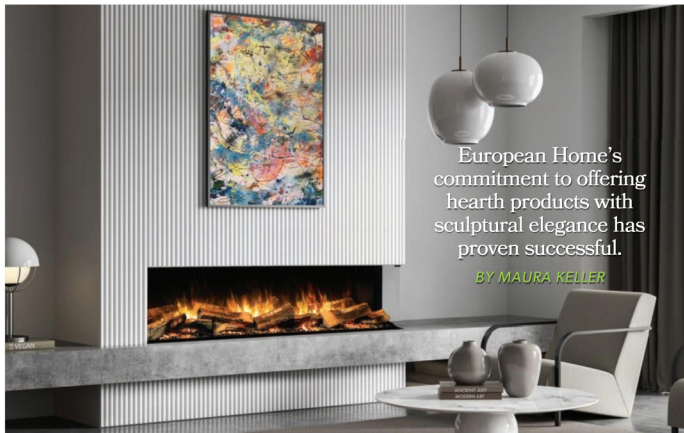


Modern Masterpieces



European Home's commitment to offering hearth products with sculptural elegance has proven successful.

BY MAURA KELLER

FOR SOME COMPANIES, AFTER THEIR FOUNDING, THEY GET A GOOD SENSE OF THE INDUSTRY

in which they operate and evaluate exactly what is missing. For Holly Markham, founder and co-owner with her husband, John, it became evident about four years after founding European Home that there was a clear need in the hearth industry for modern fireplaces.

Officially founded in 1999, European Home (Middleton, Massachusetts) got its start in fireplaces in 2003 and is now a design-oriented manufacturer, distributor, and importer of modern fireplaces. "In 2003, the only modern fireplaces were either custom made locally or coming from Europe, which did not meet North American building codes," Holly Markham says. "Just by calling leads from a few hearth companies from Europe, it became clear that there was a desire for more modern hearth products."

In the 20 years since entering the hearth marketplace, the Markhams have seen great changes. As Markham explains, dealers now display linear fireplaces and clean face designs as standard practice. "I heard often in 2005-2015 that this was a fad. I always stood behind the fact that it was not a fad, by looking at modern architecture," Markham says. "Who would say Frank Lloyd Wright was a fad? Modern architecture has stood the test of time."

Today, European Home sells through a retail channel of over 300 dealers across North America.

The diverse range of fireplaces has found homes in all U.S. states, as well as all provinces of Canada.

Under Holly's leadership, European Home has not only expanded but also remained steadfast in its commitment to delivering exquisite fireplaces. The company's dedication to offering sculptural elegance and modern design has solidified European Home's reputation as a respected company that tailors its offerings to the creative aspirations of homeowners, architects, builders, and interior designers.

TECHNOLOGICALLY SAVVY

In addition to design evolution within the hearth industry, technological advancements have also taken the industry by storm.



TOP: E-FX 1500 Electric Fireplace

BOTTOM: Domofocus Hanging Wood Fireplace

Within the world of electric fireplaces, electric "flame effects" are created using multicolored LED lights, though the appearance and execution of these effects can vary greatly from manufacturer to manufacturer.

"As more and more regions of the country are accepting climate change and changing building codes to not allow for gas installations, natural-looking electric fireplaces are a very important part of the hearth industry," Markham says. "Nothing can completely replace the feeling of a wood- or gas-burning fireplace. However, in recent years, through innovation and advances in technology, we are coming closer than ever."

Another innovation that Markham notes has drastically changed the industry includes suspended gas fireplaces. According to Markham, in 1967, French metal sculptor Dominique Imbert designed his first fireplace for personal use in his studio in the medieval village of Viols-le-Fort. A year later, he sculpted the Gyrofocus. "I want my fireplace to touch the sky, even to hang from it," Imbert stated. This was how Focus, the original suspended fireplace, was born.

"Today, the Gyrofocus Gas can rotate 100 degrees, which homeowners enjoy as a way to customize their space—depending on which part of the room you are in, you can turn the fireplace to face you," Markham says. "As there are no embers or projecting sparks with the Gyrofocus Gas, so there is no need for a protective hearth plate under the fireplace. It allows for complete freedom of choice in terms of floor covering, including wood."

European Home offers a line of vent-free gas fireplaces called the H Series by European Home, which are made in U.S. This ventless gas fireplace series features a modern, trimless, open-front style and is designed with European simplicity in mind. "With zero clearance ventless technology, you have multiple benefits including ease of installation as well as greater flexibility in fireplace location all while delivering fuel efficiency ratings near 99%," Markham says.

The H Series is popular with one-off sales to homeowners looking for simplicity as well as multifamily projects where ventilation is not practical. They are also very safe and approved through Omni Test Labs.

"Dealers who work with vent-free gas order these regularly. They love the ease of installation and the reliability," Markham says. "We would like to have more dealers familiar with this fireplace as it solves a problem of difficulty venting or budget issues and is very safe. We have been shipping the H Series for over 10 years."

One of European Home's newest featured products is the Domofocus Suspended Fireplace. Introduced in 2023, the Domofocus suspended fireplace, a smaller version of the iconic Gyrofocus, fea-

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tures the same clean, modern design and a hearth that rotates 360 degrees. The Domofocus' smaller size boasts a larger hearth opening, 9¼ inches high compared to the Gyrofocus' 8 inches, for a better view. "The shape and versatility of this contemporary fireplace not only makes it an efficient source of heat but also a showpiece and work of art," Markham says.

Most recently, European Home introduced Flamerite, a leading brand of electric fireplaces from the UK, at the Builders' Show in February. "We want to keep pushing for a more realistic flame with electric fireplaces," Markham says.

Flamerite boasts less glare, realistic logs, remote control to address concerns of app connectivity, and exceptional reliability.

"We put a few models through months of testing in-house as we continually push for product improvements and fewer callbacks for dealers," Markham says. "We found the parts used in the fireplaces to be higher quality than competitors."

SEEKING SOLUTIONS

While paying attention to and introducing new innovations in fireplace design and technology is paramount, the European Home team is also focused on the evolving consumer trends facing the industry. One issue that continually affects the industry includes the steeper state regulations and smaller living spaces that are becoming the norm. As a result, people are finding solutions to their fireplace needs with vent-free gas and electric models.

"Vent-free fireplaces, such as our H Series, allow for a

gas fireplace to be installed in places where a vent pipe or flue cannot be created," Markham says. "When someone wants a gas flame but has limited space or stricter restrictions in their area, our H Series line has become a great solution."

Markham notes that electric fireplaces have added another level to this. Without the need for an additional gas hookup, but still having a clean and modern look, electric fireplaces have become the go-to for apartments, condos, and many businesses. "All you need is a standard electrical outlet and you are ready to install."

On the dealer side of the industry, due to the stress of the pandemic and the difficulty in finding employees, Markham is seeing many dealers shying away from fireplaces that continuously have technical challenges.

"When the pilot does not light and the fireplace was serviced just a few months ago, that is frustrating for the homeowner who will share their frustrations with the dealer," Markham says. "We are finding dealers are simplifying their product line, remembering that their expertise is not a commodity and promoting what they have had success with. Most dealers also will not service what they have not sold, and that is a stress reducer as well."

With over 20 years of experience, the Markhams have learned a lot about the industry, the technology, and how to connect with consumers. As Markham explains, fireplaces can be complex, so European Home strives to offer as much preliminary information as possible to dealers and customers.

"We have a customized interactive online quote system for our dealers, which guides them to the unique

parts and accessories for any given model. It eliminates confusion and provides a clear list of prices and part numbers for each desired order that they can give to their customers without the need to set up the parts in their system," Markham says. "It's a simple way to qualify the customer and understand their budget."

And because the European Home team works closely with architects, builders, and designers, it offers dimensional sheets and 3D files of products. As a result, the company has received accolades aplenty for providing this kind of information as it adds ease to projects. "We also like to educate our dealer and architects by offering classes that can be held on-site or remotely," Markham says.

DOWN THE ROAD

Looking ahead, Markham recognizes that new innovations and improvements in technology have always driven the fireplace market. As she explains, just a few years ago, it was impossible to have a suspended fireplace that ran on gas and now the industry has the Gyrofocus Gas. And with the use of LED lighting, electric fireplaces now have glowing embers, dancing flames, and smoldering logs.

European Home will soon be expanding the company's suspended fireplace brand as more gas versions become available as well as a holographic/electric line. The company is also introducing a new line of electric fireplaces that will make consumers wonder, "Is that a real fire?"

"I hope fireplaces continue to move in a green direction," Markham says. "Fireplaces are a little bit of heaven on a cold night." ■