



TEXT BY ANN PATTERSON

Light Your Fire

Innovative fireplace designs fan the flames

This three-sided fireplace also functions as a room divider, separating the home office from the rest of the master suite in a Contemporary Arizona home.

What is it about fire that is so engaging?

The ancient Greeks listed fire as one of the world's main elements. Chinese philosophers also gave that honor to fire. And today, we cherish fireplaces for their warmth, usefulness and—yes—for bringing romance to everyday lives.

Architect Mark Sever incorporates fireplaces in almost every house his company designs. "It's one of our trademarks,"

Sever says. "There's something really cool about a fireplace. Typically, we put in five or six: one in the master bedroom, one in the master bath, another in the family room, and fire pits inside and outside."

Examples of Sever's work include a flaming wok pot set on a ledge that juts into a swimming pool, and a monumental stacked-concrete-block fireplace centered on a wood plank floor. Sever also has



Above: A narrow rectangular fire pit with stone surround divides a spa and seating area at a Peter Magee-designed house in Scottsdale. **Below:** Architect James Kottke worked with interior designer/homeowner Debbie Bloy to create this cut-out fireplace between a master bedroom and bath.



designed a 48-foot-long "wall of fire" parallel to an outdoor pool in San Diego. One of his most recent creations is a concrete and steel fireplace with a wood shroud that covers the outside of the structure and functions as a room divider. "Fireplaces are a big deal with us. I suggest them any chance I get," he says.

Interior designer Debbie Bloy exemplifies the homeowner who enjoys multiple fireplaces. She has three, all designed by Arizona architect James Kottke. They were added when she remodeled her 1960s-era townhouse last year. One, a two-sided fireplace, contains "clear ice-cube chipped glass." Built between the master bedroom and bath, it can be viewed from both areas.

Another stands in the living room and reaches to the ceiling. It features a surround faced with glass mosaic tiles. A third, located at eye level in her home office, is filled with clear glass chips.

"It's a mood thing. It's very calming," Bloy says of a fireplace. She also cites the practical gain. "I often turn it on in the bedroom in the morning to warm up the room."

The newest fireplace designs are show-stoppers. Some examples include: a 2-foot-square stainless steel-framed glass firebox floating in a living room window wall; a gas-fueled fireplace built into an entertainment center; and outdoor fire pits in which flames dance across amethyst-colored bits of glass.



FOCAL POINTS

Trendwise, most indoor fireplaces no longer burn wood, and their design reflects the home's architecture. For example, a fireplace in a Contemporary residence might be faced with steel and ceramic tile; a New Mexican Pueblo-style house may feature a stuccoed beehive fireplace; and the fireplace in a Tuscan-style dwelling could be clad with real or cultured stone. In addition, the use of fire outdoors can turn up in many forms and locations, such as fire pits, fire bowls and fireboxes on front patios, in courtyards, bordering swimming pools, and at the end of desert paths.

Says architect Karyn Parks: "The fireplace has become more of a sculptural focal point than the old hearth that sym-

Left: For his own Phoenix home, architect James Kottke designed a square firebox, which is set into the living room's glass wall.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN BECKER

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Clockwise from top left: Perfect for a small space, this brushed-stainless steel gas fireplace is recessed into a wall at table level. ■ This corner fireplace in the great room of a Scottsdale home features an elongated opening. ■ Landscape designer Troy Bankord created a pair of raised stainless steel fire pits near the pool area of a Phoenix home.



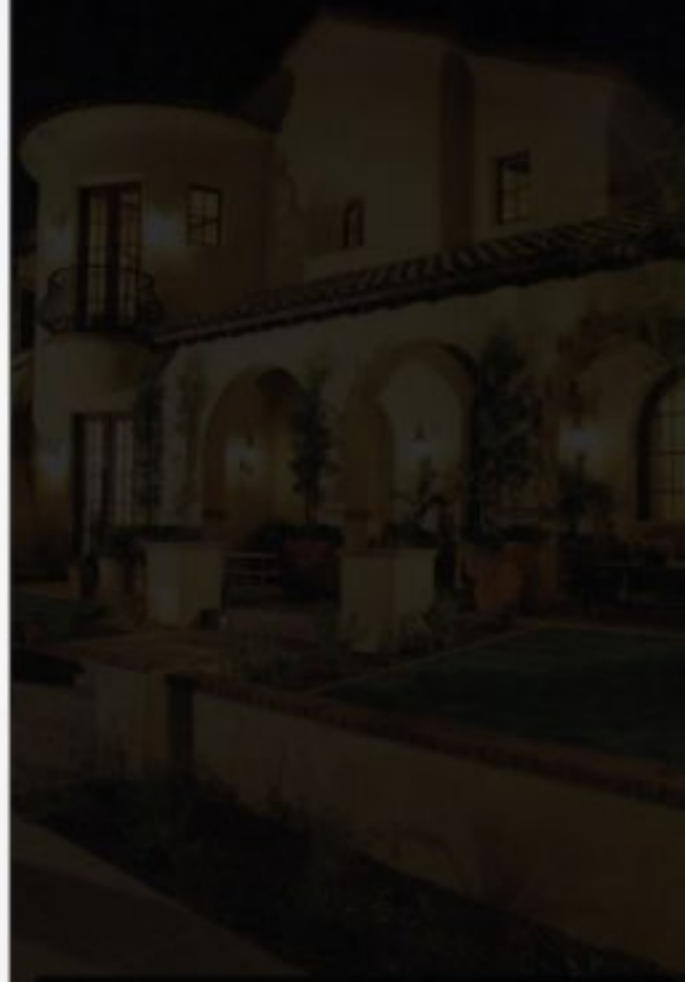
bolized the center of the home. Emotionally, it still plays that role."

To make her point, she describes a 30-foot-tall fireplace she designed in a Flagstaff, Ariz., home that terminates at the end of a long serpentine wall. The fireplace setting includes built-in seating and overhead clerestory windows that cast direct light onto the hearth. "The owner wanted

it dramatic," the architect explains.

Parks also has incorporated a gas fireplace in a bathroom shower and used a fireplace as a divider between a bathtub and the master bedroom. "You're only limited by the size of the firebox and the budget," she says.

Arizona's craze for outdoor fire pits may have originated with The Mirage



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TREND WATCH



Designed by architect Mark Sever and situated on the edge of a negative-edge pool, this dramatic-looking fire wok doubles as a water feature.

casino in Las Vegas, suggests pool professional Robert Marlatt. When the casino opened in 1989, the spectacular plumes of smoke and fire from a mock volcano shot 100 feet above the water and captured the public's imagination.

Today it's common to include fire woks and pits filled with chunks of glass or lava rock in a pool design. Still another concept that is catching on is installing a gas-fueled fire bowl next to a waterfall above the pool. Homeowners can start or stop the flames using a remote control, and if water splashes on the pot, "the gas comes up through the water and dissipates into the air," Marlatt comments.

Jim Doorley, a Phoenix landscape contractor, does more than combine fire and water. He also places fire pits at some distance from the residence. He notes, "Lots of people never go beyond the edge of their patio. I like to get them away from the house, so they can get a different perspective."

Doorley lines fire pits with firebrick

or fire clay and often fills them with lava rock. He locates them near seating and fuels them by propane or natural gas, depending on whether a natural gas line is handy. "I think of fireplaces as a design element and not just as a place to keep warm," he says.

Architect Gordon Rogers also sees fireplaces as more than heat sources. In one project, he designed a fire chamber at the end of a 20-foot-long deck lined with benches. The setting is not only a good spot for watching a sunrise or sunset, it also blocks views of neighboring properties, adding privacy. "It is quite magical," Rogers comments. And its glow can be seen from afar, like a beacon in the night.

The ancients obviously had it right: Fire is a natural attraction, making those drawn to it feel safe and communal. Luckily, today's designers are adding new technology and fresh aesthetics to residential fireplaces to quiet homeowners' busy lifestyles and return the hearth to the home. ☐