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ALL FIRED UP

HOMEOWNERS WANT CUSTOM FIREPLACES WITHOUT THE WOOD

When Matt and Jennifer Zingery were building their Dublin home, they knew they wanted a fireplace in their great room. What they didn't know was just how big it would be.

"It's bigger than we thought because we were working from a blueprint and hadn't seen one like it. I'm 5-foot-8, and I can't see the top of the mantel. It's just huge," says Jennifer Zingery.

The Zingerys are not alone. Today's home owners are replacing formal living rooms with expanded great rooms, many two stories high, and they know rooms of that size and ceiling height require something striking like a large, custom fireplace.

A fireplace sized for a traditional family room with a 9-foot ceiling gets lost in an open great room, so builder Bob Webb is taking a new approach that customizes the fireplace to the house and room.

"The trend right now is two-story family rooms, and many of them have a wall of windows on the back of the house," says Neil Rogers, vice president of marketing for Bob Webb.

"We drywall offsets to create posts or columns up the wall and place the fireplace between them. We can build a custom mantle and niches above it to house a mirror or artwork."

All of the cables, electrical wires and lighting are hidden.

The Zingerys installed a massive mirror above their mantle.

"We found it in a Bob Webb model. We loved it when we saw it and figured we'd never find anything big enough on our own," Jennifer Zingery said. "They built the fireplace knowing that mirror was going there."

With the additional ceiling height offered by two-story great rooms, it's easier to raise the hearth and the fireplace opening, known as the firebox, above floor level.

"By raising the hearth, it makes a seat where you can sit by the fire and get warm," Rogers says.

"Other home owners install plasma televisions in built-in niches above the fireplaces.

"We can build the fireplace with a plasma TV above it or on a sidewall, so they can enjoy the fire and the TV at the same time," says Rogers. The combination eliminates the need to find wall space for an armoire-like media center.

Tracie McGarity, owner of Tracie McGarity Interiors in Columbus, offers to hide that TV over the fireplace for her clients.

“I can make it disappear with a motorized system that drops a piece of art or a mirror in front of it,” she says. McGarity also is an interior designer with Meritage Homes’ Tartan Fields development in Dublin.

McGarity says she is doing more and more masonry fireplaces for Meritage Homes.

“I can make the fireplace opening much larger than with a purchased firebox. Typically, a mantel might be at about 5 feet. Now I may raise the fireplace opening to 5 feet,” she says.

If a homeowner uses the smaller, prefabricated firebox insert, McGarity says they’re often placed in other rooms, such as bedrooms.

“Fireplaces are an investment when building a home, so it’s not surprising people put a lot of emphasis on its importance to a room,” McGarity says.

The style of the house dictates what materials are used in the fireplace. Marble and granite are popular selections.

“I’m doing more and more with tile, though, because there are so many choices. Beyond that there’s also architectural molding, stone and carved wood that give a custom look,” she says.

Two-way fireplaces that connect two rooms are another option people are choosing. Rogers has one in his home.

“The family room side is more formal with hickory surrounds and marble. The other side is in the kitchen and is more informal. We used stone and it has a hearth-room feel to it,” he says.

Corner fireplaces are another custom option for homeowners, as are three-sided and freestanding fireplaces.

Most fireplaces typically use gas logs, which allows the firebox to remain open and not screened.

“No one wants a wood-burning fireplace anymore. It’s too messy,” Rogers says.

And direct vent fireplaces are gas fireplaces that are vented to an outside wall and can be placed around the house.

“Building codes dictate a lot of things, but basically you can put them almost anywhere in the house and not worry about needing a chimney or flue,” says Rogers. “We use them a lot in master suites where there’s no chimney.”