

Tradition plays key part of chimney sweep's job

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Atmosphere is part of any job and when Dennis Fiorotto puts on his top hat and tails, it becomes part of his profession.

No, Fiorotto isn't a doorman or an undertaker but rather a chimney sweep taking after the nimble men who used to jump from roof top to roof top in old London.

It's just an offshoot of his job as a fireplace contractor and owner of a business distributing fireplace accessories but with a number of complaints from people having chimney fires, he decided to venture to the roof tops to cure the problem.

"People should have their chimneys cleaned every two years because many people are burning green wood and with sap and soot and the odd bird's nest, there is a build-up in the chimney," he said one day last week. Fiorotto was idle that day, high wind and roof top chimney sweeps don't mix.

The uniform sets him out. Black top hat, with a black formal suit of tails and a spotless white silk scarf.

"It's basically the same uniform that was worn throughout Europe and England," he said. "All chimney sweeps wore the uniform as they jumped from roof to roof."

Most people Fiorotto calls on aren't too terribly impressed but do manage a smile when they open the door to find the formally-dressed chimney sweep.

"They usually have a smile," he continued. "Chimney sweeps always shake hands with their customers as it is believed to be good luck."

Cleaning chimneys involves getting on the roof of a house after blocking the fireplace and sweeping the walls of the stack, checking to make sure all the components are operating properly. Fiorotto said he then cleans out the fireplace, vacuuming the soot away.

One of the most difficult parts in setting up his sweep business—he began Dec. 1—was attaining the outfit. Fiorotto said he contacted a formal rental business and managed to attain a reasonable facsimile from a local hat manufacturer.

The outfit is only worn when originally greeting the customer. It could get rather dirty in a hurry so Fiorotto sheds it for a smock when the job begins.

In his business, he sees a growing number of people using wood heat from stoves or fireplaces to help lower the cost of fuel from main heat supplies.

But, he continued, people who have never been exposed to wood burning stoves and fireplaces often fail to check out their chimneys ending up with a house full of smoke.

"The best advice is to check the chimney thoroughly to make sure everything is working properly and that there is no large build-up of soot," he said. "Chimney fires can be extinguished relatively easily but the main problem is in extensive smoke damage."