

HOME SWEET HOME

Fireplace sales heating up

With gas prices rising, and a cold winter expected ahead, fireplace sales are heating up. Some people want to enjoy the smell and ambience created by a wood burning stove; others enjoy the maintenance-free aspect of a gas burning unit.

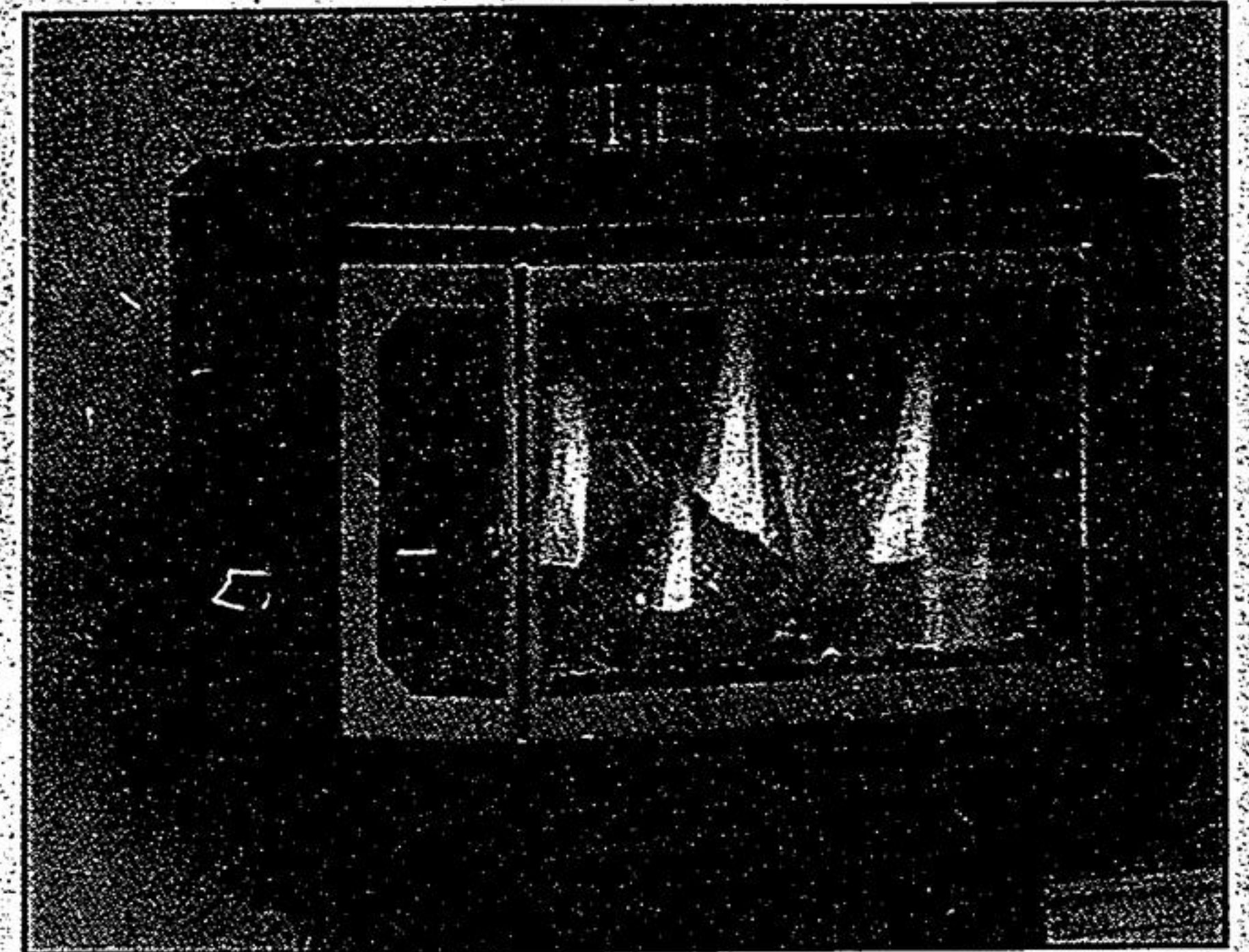
There is a whole range of new and exciting fireplace designs on the market. Whether it's a traditional wood burning stove or an energy-efficient gas fireplace, the styles and colours are amazing.

While wood burning stoves continue to sell well, a majority of the fireplaces sold these days are gas burning units. Some estimates suggest that gas fireplaces account

for about 70 per cent of the total market, and there are several reasons why.

Certainly gas is easier to use and it requires less maintenance and upkeep than wood burning stoves. Gas fireplaces are quick and easy to install, and they turn on with the flick of a switch.

Gas fireplaces are available today in many sophisticated styles with features that include bay windows, fans, enamel coatings, remote thermostat control, bi-fold doors, brass trim and cast-iron construction and trims. Modern technologies have produced effects that are so authentic, one has to look



twice to see if the fireplaces are real
TWO TYPES OF GAS FIREPLACES

There are two basic types of gas fireplaces manufactured today: inserts and direct-vent models. Shoppers will find a wide selection of units available of various physical dimensions and BTU capacities. It is important that homeowners select a model which is applicable primarily for heat, aesthetics, or a combination of both. A qualified contractor will ensure that your choice is appropriate and meets all gas codes.

INSERT models are installed in an existing wood burning fireplace. Most inserts will take combustion air from the room and a small metal liner is dropped down the existing masonry chimney to expel the flue gases. Some manufacturers have addressed the potential problem of negative pressures within the home when room air is used for combustion by bringing in fresh air from outside via a second metal liner through the chimney.

DIRECT-VENT models are installed against a blank wall, usually an outside wall, and are available as free standing "stoves" or as units that require further finishing such as surrounds and mantels to complete the installation. Neither of these types uses an existing chimney. Depending on the application, either a top or rear vent model will be chosen which uses a special double walled pipe. The inner pipe is used to expel flue gases and the exterior pipe brings in fresh air for combustion. Homeowners can supply the surround themselves or can choose a pre-manufactured one in a variety of finishes.

A gas fireplace can be installed in any room in the home. It's common to have more than one fireplace in a home. They're even showing up in kitchens, bathrooms and in walls beside stairways.

Electric fireplaces have also benefited from advanced technologies. Some units are strictly decorative, while others have fans and heaters sufficient enough to take the chill off on a cold night. These units are also available in a number of styles and are very popular in apartments and condominiums and other applications where natural gas and propane are not an option.

Consumers are looking for comfort and convenience and many are including a gas fireplace as part of a renovation. Preplanning is essential to ensure that the fireplace installation can be accommodated within code requirements. Often piping, etc. is done during construction with the installation following at a later date.

As with any type of gas appliance, the installation of a fireplace must be done by a licenced contractor. Many local companies offer showrooms with operating equipment and in-home consultations for their clients' convenience. With a wide range of products available, interested homeowners are sure to find something within their budget.

WOOD STOVES STILL POPULAR

If people who own wood stoves are buying gas stoves, the opposite also holds true. "There is a revitalized market for wood stoves today," says Mike Fitzpatrick, a sales associate with Ballantrae Stone and Stoves. "A lot of people enjoy the smell of wood and enjoy the option of lighting a fireplace on the weekend."

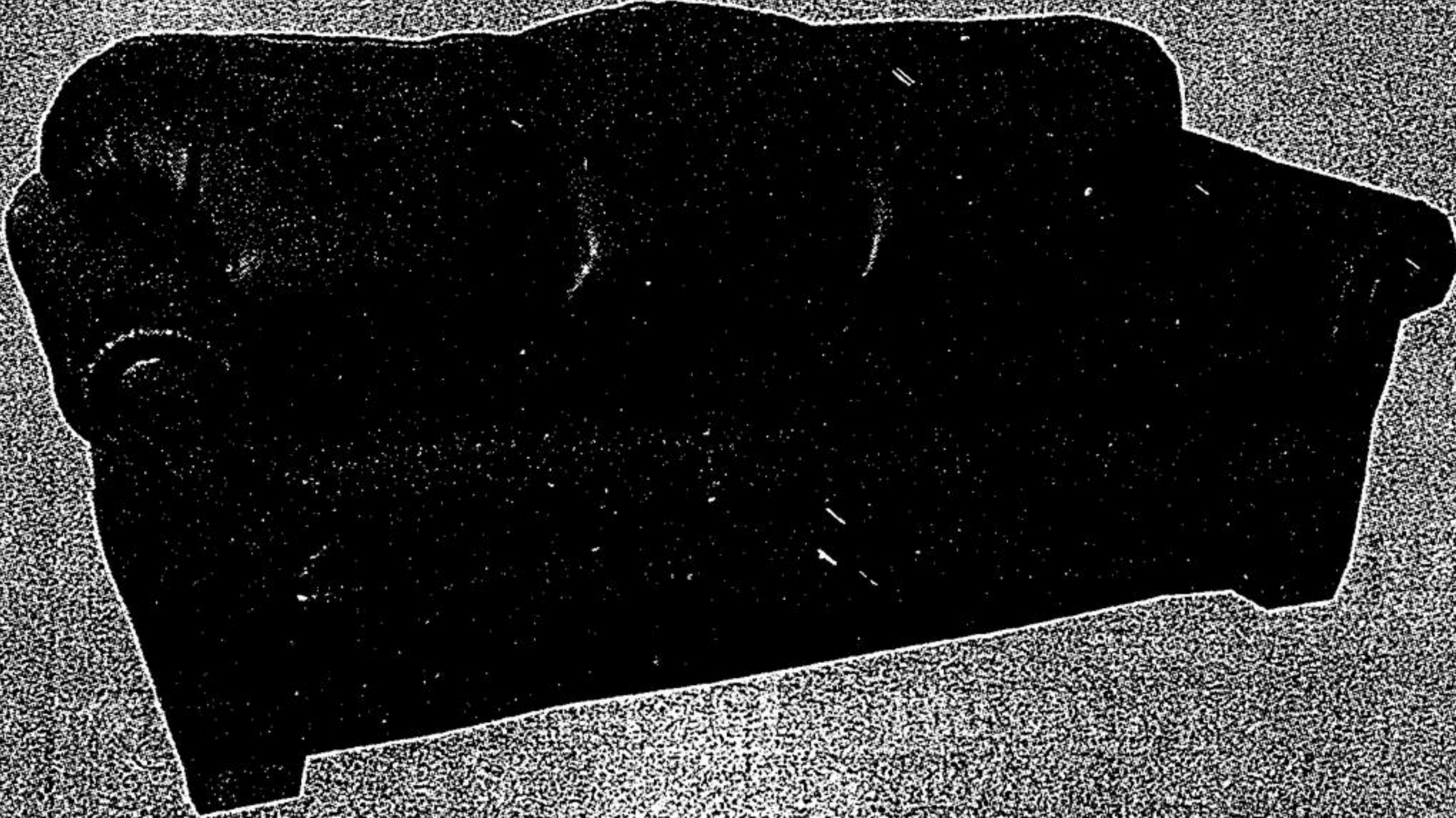
Wood stoves have also become much more efficient than older models, and the designs have become more sophisticated. "Wood stoves today burn cleaner, are easier to start and come with reduced clearances," says Fitzpatrick.

If you do own a wood burning fireplace, you may want to have it cleaned for the winter. Heavy soot and creosote will accumulate in the chimney that could, if left unchecked, ignite a fire. Chimneys should be checked with a flashlight for any debris or blockages such as birds nests.

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