

HOUSES

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VALOR FIREPLACES

- Manufactured by Miles Industries Ltd.
- 800-468-2567; www.valorfireplace.com
- Cost of model shown (Horizon FenderFire): about \$2200

Air quality in many Western cities and towns increasingly has become an issue. Wood-burning smoke is often the culprit and has resulted in the need for advisories instructing residents not to burn wood unless it is their only heat source. As a result, I've been installing natural-gas fireplaces in the homes I build for a number of years.

Early on, the challenge was finding gas fireplaces that did not look like aquariums with a fire inside. Lately, however, the industry has been producing gas fireplaces that not only look great but also are capable of serious space heating with a reasonable degree of efficiency.

My favorites are the Valor fireplaces. They have trim kits with cast-iron and heavy plate-

steel details that complement the stone, tile, and wood surrounds that I prefer. I avoid cheap decoration and accents such as obvious venting grilles and control panels. On Valor models, I particularly like the screened operable steel doors because they create a veil over the firebox, masking the subtle manufactured aspect of the heater.

Because most of my designs call for a raised hearth, having the controls under the firebox is rarely an issue. Other products on the market allow the possibility of a hearth flush with the floor by locating the control box on a flexible lead about 3 ft. or 4 ft. away.

Even though I usually take advantage of the direct-venting (through the wall) feature, I find that creating a "chimney" above the mantel is a welcome feature and helps to complete the traditional effect.

Chris Stebbins is a designer and builder in Eugene, Ore.

