

by JILL SELL

Large outdoor fireplaces, often enhanced with kitchen work areas, visual and audio systems and elaborate lighting have become major focal points in today's homes.

"Fireplaces for outdoor rooms aren't trying to compete with a January blizzard or a winter storm off Lake Erie," says Ross Johnson, vice president for sales at Fire Stone Home Products, a national company headquartered in Burnsville, Minn. "But an outdoor fireplace does allow some consumers to extend their outdoor season by six weeks earlier in the spring and six weeks later in the fall. You may not usually feel like sitting outside when it's 55 degrees or colder for any significant amount of time. But if you are wearing a sweatshirt and are sitting by a fireplace, you may. You can't heat the entire backyard, but that's not the intention."

Of the \$150 billion spent on home remodeling in 2005, one-third was spent on outdoor living areas, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And outdoor fireplace sales are burning holes through old sales records.

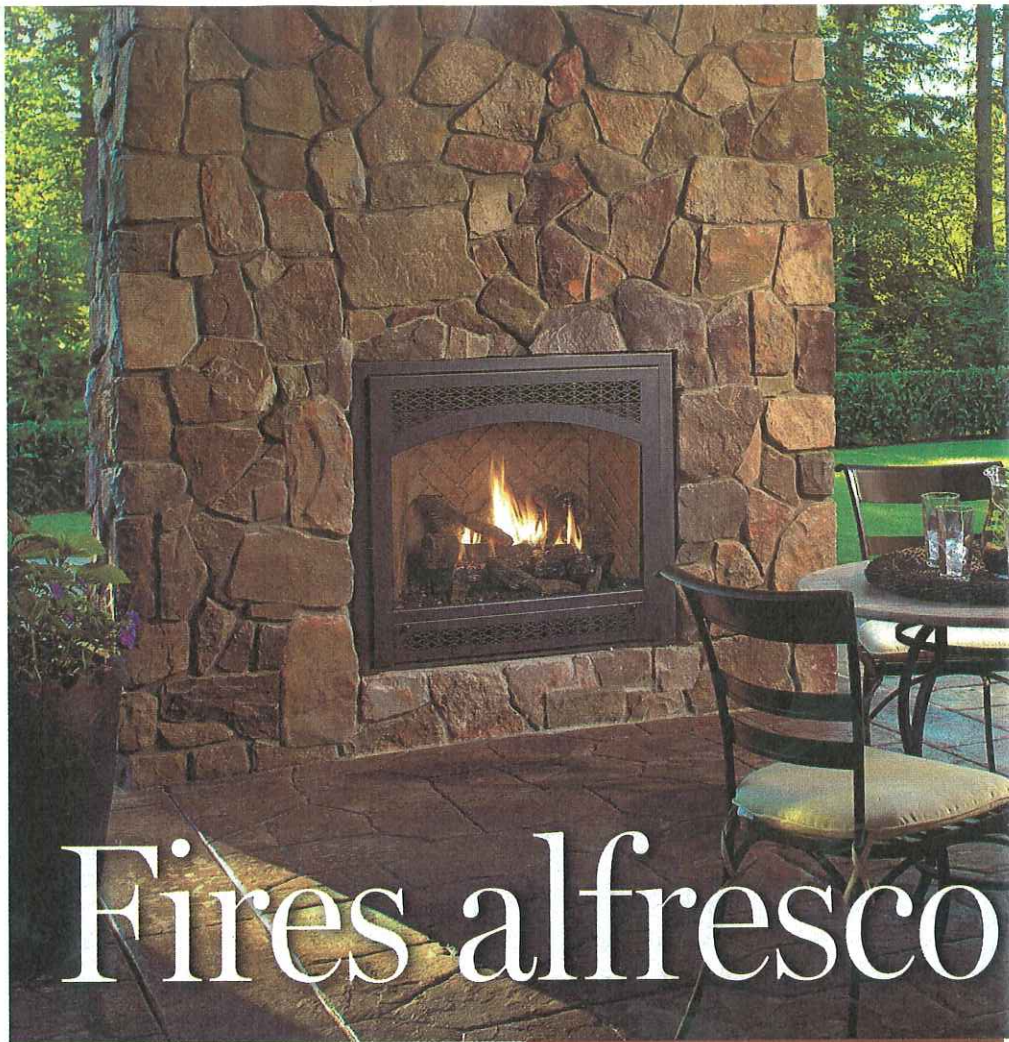
"Last year, we sold three or four outdoor fireplaces the total year," says Daryl Rothenfeld, vice president for building products at Mason Structural Steel in Walton Hills. "This year, we sell one or two a week. It's definitely come to Cleveland."

"... Once people realize they can use the fireplace more than just in the summer, they're willing to make more of an investment."

Mason Structural Steel has indoor and outdoor showrooms that are open to the public and building trades. The company sells gas, wood and electric outdoor and indoor fireplaces, fire pits and grills.

"Some people like the look of cultured stone on an outdoor fireplace, because it ties into the cultured stone they have on their indoor fireplace," says Nick Ridge, the company's regional sales manager.

Locating an outdoor fireplace where it can be seen from inside the house can create an interior ambience. Brilliant flames stand out from a wintry-white background, and at night, delicate snowflakes are illuminated. Outdoor fires can be lit for fall and winter holidays, special family occasions or romantic evenings. They can melt most anything. ■



Fires alfresco

Products

The Al Fresco Series from Majestic Fireplaces features five stainless-steel models that use either wood or gas. Available from builders, contractors, Mason Structural Steel, Country Stove and Patio, Hunters "3" Inc. and Capell's Hearth and Leisure. Prices: starting at \$1,229.

The St. Lawrence is a stainless-steel fireplace with a special drainage system designed with looks and function in mind. Prices start at \$6,995. Both are available from Extreme Outdoor/American Pools and Fountains.

Electraflame outdoor fireplaces by Dimplex have a realistic flame but no heat and can be placed on any surface. Prices: begin at \$500.

The Fire Stone Outdoor Great Room is the biggest outdoor fire pit on the market. The 42-inch-diameter bowl rests on concrete legs and burns wood or natural gas. Price: \$995 to \$2,840 depending on options.

The Avalon Winthrop HH Gas Fireplace with a Black Painted Victorian Lace Face is the perfect match for homeowners whose outdoor rooms feature black decorative metal (wrought iron or aluminum) furniture.

RESOURCES **Busy Bear Fireplace and Patio**, South Euclid, 216-291-5585. **Capell's Hearth and Leisure**, Elyria, 440-324-4311. **Dimplex**, www.dimplex.com or 1-800-668-6663. **Extreme Outdoors**, Hudson, www.OhioSwims.com or 330-656-4335. **Fire Stone Home Products**, www.FireStoneHP.com or 1-866-303-4028. **Hunters '3' Inc.**, Mantua, 330-274-8956. **Majestic Fireplaces**, www.majesticproducts.com or 1-800-668-5323. **Mason Structural Steel**, Walton Hills, www.masonsteel.com or 440-439-1040. **Quadra-Fire**, www.quadrafire.com or 1-800-926-4356.

Outdoor hearths lengthen family backyard season