

Building Scene

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Marilyn Fitchett editor/591-2300



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By Doug Funkh
staff writer

Jimmy Kogut of Livonia is a man with a vision impatiently waiting for the rest of the building industry to see the light.

Kogut has invented, patented and manufactured a product, Equalizer-Air, which he maintains will save heating dollars and efficiently introduce fresh air into houses and condominiums.

All at a cost of less than \$100 to the individual consumer.

"It's gone nowhere," Kogut said. "I'm battling millions and millions of dollars spent by window companies, insulation companies to seal up homes. I tell them to put a hole in the wall."

Kogut's invention consists of an aluminum vent mounted on an exterior wall of the house or condo. One plastic pipe from the vent connects directly to the cold air return of the furnace. Another leads to the furnace but isn't necessarily hooked up.

THE PIPE plugged into the furnace replaces air to the house lost from kitchen or bathroom fans, dryers and fireplaces, Kogut said. The lagging pipe, or combustion pipe, affects the burning process.

"(It combustion pipe) reduces air changes," Kogut said. "It's not using air in the house. It goes right from the pipe to the burner." That, in turn, keeps the rest of the house warm, reduces the number of times the furnace kicks on and saves money.

There are screens on the vent to keep insects out of the house and flappers controlled by pressure from the furnace blower, which open both pipes to allow outside air to enter only as needed.

EQUALIZER-AIR can be adapted to older houses or installed as houses are built.

Kogut, a buyer for Ford Motor Co., started experimenting in the late 1970s and early '80s when he got caught up in the energy crunch. He patented Equalizer-Air in 1984 and went into production in 1986.

The parts are made at a factory in Jackson and assembled in Kogut's basement. He figures he and his family sank some \$40,000 into the product before the first unit was stamped out. He's sold a couple of hundred.

Kogut has tried without success to sell directly to major retailers and heating contractors.

"They explained that people wouldn't understand

it ... people aren't concerned about heating costs," Kogut said.

SOME BUILDERS agreed with the concept, but then added that it was up to heating contractors to do the job, Kogut said. Contractors said they didn't need it.

"I got a runaround," he said.

So now Kogut makes the circuit of radio talk shows and newspapers, trying to take his message directly to the people.

Kogut has his supporters, among them, Glenn Haeger, a building expert who hosts a call-in advice show on WXYT Radio.

"His product was way ahead of its time," Haeger said. "Anything new people can't touch, see or feel they're very apprehensive about."

Outside air combustion source is an option builders should offer customers, Haeger said. "It cuts down on drafts, which cuts down on heating bills."

THE TREND is toward outside air sources for combustion, said Tension Barry, assistant chief of the mechanical division, bureau of construction code, state labor department.

"We're building houses tighter and tighter," he said. "No outside air is coming in."

A state amendment to the BOCA building code has mandated an outside combustion source on new houses since September 1989, Barry said. But he suspects that most municipalities haven't adopted the amendment.

"They have their own amendments, special needs," Barry said.

So why don't we see more fresh air pipes in new construction today?

"It's an old story with a lot of builders. They try to get as much profit out of a product as they can," said Mike Shorkey, president of Detroit Safety Furnace Pipe Co.

"With construction and tightening today ... they should absolutely consider putting in a make-up air unit," he said.

Kogut doesn't know why furnace manufacturers don't adapt similar systems to their original equipment, but he offered a theory.

"It's really like an accessory, a humidifier or electric air cleaner. I don't think furnace manufacturers are interested in accessories."

But Kogut expects that the tide will turn, probably in the next few years.

Jimmy Kogut shows off his invention, the Equalizer-Air. One hose from an outside vent provides fresh air to the house through the cold air duct in the furnace. The other hose places outside air near the furnace for the burning process.

JIM JACUPELOTTA photograph

Antiques may be hazardous

(AP) — The idea these days is to use your decorative collectibles instead of just admiring them. Items like turn-of-the-century teddy bears, cellobid trays, colorful dishware and funky old radios and lamps are fun to use.

But beware.

"Hazardous items show up more frequently than you might imagine," says Terry Kovel, an antiques commentator who tracks mishaps involving collectibles. An example is an early 20th century ceramic jug that contains radium. One manufacturer was Radium Ore Navigator Co.

"People were supposed to fill it with water and drink it for their health," Kovel says. "Now we know that radium is a carcinogen and these crocks shouldn't be kept, but recently I visited a house and there were two right in the dining room."

Old watches with luminous radium dials are safe so long as they are covered with a crystal, but the naked dials are being used in some modern costume jewelry and can pose a hazard if worn frequently.

OTHER COLLECTIBLES to beware of are china and glass dishes made before 1950. Many have lead-based glazes. Used for display, they are fine. But don't serve or store food in them, Kovel advises in her new book, "Antiques & Collectibles Price List" (Crown, \$11.95). The book, written with her husband, Ralph, has a section on hazards associated with collectibles.

Cellobid, an early form of plastic with a shiny beige-yellow color that makes it look like yellowed ivory, was used in making everything from dolls to dresser trays. It is flammable when overheated and gives off a sour, vinegar-like odor when it starts to break down. Items should be thrown away when this happens, she says, because there's no way to reverse the deterioration.

Collectibles were undoubtedly responsible for only a fraction of the 22,500 deaths and 3.4 million disabling injuries suffered in home accidents in 1989, says Robert L. O'Brien, public relations director of the National Safety Council in Chicago. Still, it pays to beware of potential dangers.

Tuck small rugs to the floor or place them over a foam rubber

pad to keep them from sliding. Don't store foodstuffs in old medicine bottles, even if you wash them first, and flush down the toilet any medication found in them.

DON'T USE SMALL electric appliances that are more than 30 years old. Wiring could be frayed, they could be poorly grounded and inadequately shielded, and they might contain asbestos.

If you have antique firearms, be sure they are not loaded and never allow children to play with them. Items children might play with or use are of greatest concern. Old toys with lead-based paint or sharp edges and stuffed toys with easily-removed glass eyes on metal pins which can be swallowed are hazards.

Old nursery furniture such as cribs also can pose hazards. They may have lead-based paint which can be poisonous if swallowed. Decorative cut-outs and slats can cause suffocation if they are spaced far enough apart so an infant can squeeze his head through. Make sure a mattress goes all the way to the edges of the crib, and don't allow active children to use old high chairs and cradles which are easily tipped, safety experts advise.

Use the same caution for antiques and collectibles that you would use for new items, said Dan Rummel, acting public affairs director of the Consumer Product Safety Commission in Washington.

While collectibles have the potential to hurt you, it's more likely that you'll damage them through improper care, says Kovel.

Some common errors include washing ivory to make it white. The characteristic yellow patina of age is preferred by collectors, and washing can reduce its value by half. Cleaning and polishing coins is also a mistake since it reduces their value. And be sure real gold leaf is used if chipped gold leaf frames or other objects are refinished.

Dishwashers are a modern convenience, but they don't do well by some old dishware. Eventually, Kovel says, the gold designs on china and glass will fade if washed in the dishwasher. Don't put pottery or porcelain with thin black lines known as crazing in the dishwasher. The heat from drying can cause the remaining glaze to flake off.

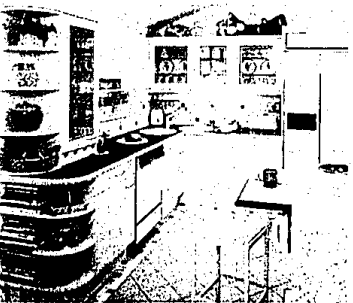
Everyone's need: more storage

(AP) — Nearly all homeowners share one common problem — lack of storage space. Regardless of the size of their house, it seems there is never enough room to store everything.

This is true especially for condominium owners and apartment dwellers. Somehow, the longer you live in the same place, the worse the problem gets. Fortunately, easy-to-build shelving systems offer an effective, inexpensive remedy for the do-it-yourselfer.

Shelving materials are available at lumber yards and home centers. Shelves are most commonly made from particleboard, plywood or solid lumber and are either 3/4 or 1 1/2 inches thick.

Edge treatments are often added to shelves for appearance. They can conceal exposed plywood edges, add rigidity and increase the shelf's load capacity, or simply create a decorative detail to dress up the room.



No matter how big the house, additional storage space is always mentioned as a need

The exact shelf design you choose is determined by the weight of the items being stored and the look you desire. But remember, you might also want to store heavier items in the future, so it's always better to overbuild the shelves slightly to prevent sagging and possible collapse.

The maximum span for each shelf between supports varies with the load and the material. As a general rule, 3/4-inch particleboard 10 inches wide can handle a load of 30 pounds per linear foot with supports 24 inches apart. You can stretch this span to 32 inches for 3/4-inch plywood. If the shelf is reinforced with 2-inch-wide stiffener along the front edge and a 3/4- by 2- by 6-inch support cleat under the rear of the shelf at the middle, you can increase these spans by 50 percent.

WHEN APPEARANCE is not the controlling factor — utility shelves in the basement, garage or workshop, for example — No. 2 common pine is quite suitable. This grade of pine has knots of various sizes, so be sure to handpick the boards carefully to avoid loose or oversized knots that would weaken the shelves. Note: If the pine is to be painted, first seal each knot with shellac to keep it from showing through.


Particleboard is the most economical shelving material and is often used under a plastic laminate. The disadvantage of particleboard is that it's heavy and tends to sag if it isn't supported properly.

When the look of fine hardwood shelves is desired, choose hardwood-veneer plywood. This cabinet-grade plywood is less expensive and lighter than solid hardwood and it's warp-free. Also, extra-wide plywood shelves are made easily without having to edge-join several boards together. Conceal the plywood's exposed edge with veneer tape, trim or a molding.

Shelves can be installed as permanent fixtures in the cabinet or as separate components that can be adjusted or removed, if necessary.

Large cabinets or cabinets without backs often have several adjustable shelves and one fixed shelf. This fixed shelf adds rigidity and strength to the assembly. Fixed shelves for small, light-weight cabinets can be attached with simple butt joints using glue and screws.

However, for a much stronger assembly, you should use dado joints — slots in the end supports — to install permanent shelves.



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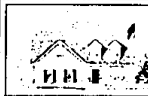



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