

INTERIOR DESIGN

Hearth items make a difference

Just as accessories can help liven up an outfit, they can do just the same for the hearth.

Whether it be a set of fireplace tools in a lustrous chrome finish, or a delicate hand-finished fireplace frame, accessories turn an otherwise ordinary-looking fireplace into one full of character. Firetools, and irons, firecreens, and wood carriers today come in new and exciting finishes and styles which can help "dress up" the hearth area.

"As we begin this next century, we're looking forward to offering a complete package for fabulous fireplaces," said Curtor Keithley, Hearth Products Association president and CEO. "With the wealth of items available in the hearth accessories market today, consumers can find a never-ending assortment

of items that reflect both their decorating style and personality.

"Just like accessories can makeover an otherwise plain-looking outfit, style-conscious hearth accessories can totally transform and give added flair to the fireplace. Accessories make the design difference and are as essential to the hearth today as the fire itself."

Accessories even reflect the up-to-the-minute styles seen on fashion's runways such as chrome, pewter, silver-polished accessories, and leather.

The most popular accessories-andirons, firesets, screens, mantels/surrounds, and woodcarriers-come in a plethora of finishes, styles, colors, shapes and textures. Some examples include:

■ Andirons-Fires can be built

on shapes ranging from the traditional clawfoot style to the more contemporary geometrical figures available in finishes such as brass, rustic wrought iron for that antique "weather-worn" look, or the ever-exciting chrome, and topped off with such exquisite details as polished marble.

■ Firesets or tools-Fireplace tools today serve not only a functional, but a decorative purpose. Styles run the gamut from Arts and Crafts influence to Southwestern style which reflects the warmth and beauty of the desert. Tools also come in such exciting finishes as natural iron, black or brushed steel, and beautiful white bronze and platinum finishes.

■ Firecreens-There is an enormous amount of choice when it comes to firecreens-from colorful hand-painted screens portraying a garden full of flowers, gothic-looking arches, traditional mesh, to playful scrollwork design. Firecreens include delicate pewter to brushed copper to innovative cast aluminum.

■ Glass Fireplace Doors-In addition to all-around safety and value, glass fireplace doors are now making a design statement for the hearth. Steel frames are available in plated and painted finishes, beautiful anodized aluminum styles.

Furnishings should not be a burden

More than half of all American households own a computer. Most of these households would rather trade in their dishwasher than live without their personal computer.

But, while the computer has proved its importance as a household necessity, most computers and high-tech peripherals still have no place to call their own on the homefront.

In fact, once inside the door, the technology is routinely treated like an unexpected guest, relegated to makeshift quarters. The result? A disorganized workspace, decreased productivity and possible back and wrist pain.

However, there's no longer any need to put up with computer furniture that doesn't provide for peak performance.

"Today there is a piece of furniture designed for every item of high-tech equipment and for every room in the home," says Mike Short, design director for Sauder Woodworking. "Whether the hold-up has been space, styling or budget concerns, it's easy to find a unit, or combination of units, that solves the problem."

And even if you're among the nearly 75 percent of computer

owners who, according to findings by Equifax, don't operate out of a designated home office, the right furniture can help set up a highly efficient satellite workstation.

With today's homes commonly equipped with more than one personal computer, every room has the potential to be wired into a hardworking, convenient satellite workstation. Sauder offers these suggestions for designing successful satellite workstations:

■ Lively and crowded at night and empty during the day, the family room is a perfect candidate for a workstation. A nifty computer desk with a hutch provides the necessary storage space to organize everything from file folders to CDs, while also providing access for multiple users.

These unobtrusive units also enable computer users to effortlessly interact with others in the family room or with other media such as the television. Handsome glass-fronted bookshelves and vertical file cabinets add extra storage as well as plenty of display space for personal accessories and photographs.

■ Outfitting a bedroom with

a computer armoire creates an ideal set-up for a private work oasis, perhaps on evenings when the television is blaring in another room. These cleverly designed units allow the user to bring the computer in and out of sight at will and offer a place for everything, including printer and CPU shelves, mouse pad and keyboard trays.

Built with special wing-style doors, these units can help create a cubicle effect that encloses computer users in privacy and helps shelter them from external distractions. When it's time to emerge, users can simply close the doors so that work is out-of-sight, out-of-mind.

■ Short on space, but overwhelmed with computer clutter? With about two feet of wall area and less than \$100, a powerful workstation can be set up anywhere using a computer cart. Sauder offers a version with Euro-inspired styling in its Parisian Collection. Compact and budget-friendly, these mobile designs hold a complete computer set-up, including shelves for storage and peripherals, and can easily be rolled in and out of closets and alcoves.

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Receivers haven't changed much in 25 years. They can be tucked snugly into cabinets in living rooms, great rooms and family rooms. CD players range from \$150-\$350 for the 400 disc holder. Listeners can keyboard in titles of CDs.

For bedrooms and offices where space may be more of a premium, "microsystems" are available. These systems have smaller units and speakers, but offer an excellent alternative.

Paulson wonders about the future of CDs, but believes that market and musical format is

safe for now.

"I don't know if the DVDs will replace the CDs," Paulson said. "There was a lot of talk about digital systems, but that didn't come through."

Emke believes the DVD-Audio technology will improve the industry. "It's only going to make it better," he said. "You will buy CDs which will have video with it."

"The only thing that will jeopardize CDs is if they come out with something smaller." Once computers began housing software and receivers allowed users

to "burn" (record) on CDs, cassette deck sales plummeted.

New technology is changing speakers, too. Paulson picks up a small cone and hands it to a reporter. The cone - a speaker component - is incredibly light. You wouldn't know this thing bango out music with clarity and distinction, and separation that would make Phil Spector, the producer who expanded instrumentation in pop music in the 1960s, blush.

"It's different technology," Paulson said. "They are using ceramic and aluminum to make

these cones in the speakers." Gone are the days of corrugated cardboard inside audio speakers in surround-sound systems.

It's a world that is constantly changing, but the traditionalists still want to play their music, regardless of the new technology.

"Occasionally we'll get someone who wants a cassette deck or they'll even walk in and want a phonograph," Paulson said. "We keep a couple on hand because a lot of folks are traditional vinyl fans."

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