

Wood stoves — a hot idea

Old-fashioned wood-burning stoves are hot selling items these days.

Upset by soaring utility bills in a bitterly cold winter, cost-conscious homeowners are making collectors' items out of those vintage potbellied and Franklin stoves that once warmed railroad stations and country schoolhouses.

"We bought an old second-hand parlor stove to heat the living room of our little rambler," recalls one man. "To our amazement, the stove shed heat throughout the house. Most of the time we didn't need to turn on the oil furnace."

Demand for the stoves reaches far beyond small towns, distant suburbs and vacation areas. "My firm sold 3,500 wood stoves last year," said a Washington, D.C., dealer. "They ranged from small tin units and traditional Franklin stoves to fancy models from Scandinavia and cost anywhere from \$20 to \$700."

Compared to many familiar household objects, the enclosed metal stove now making a strong comeback is a fairly recent invention. The Chinese supposedly used them centuries ago, but the charcoal brazier cast the dominant glow in the West.

Appearance of the first chimneys in the Middle

Ages opened the way for the brick-and-tile stoves that heated rooms all over France, Holland and Germany.

But these primitive stoves left much to be desired. They had no grates or openings to control air. Most people continued to use fireplaces for cooking and heating.

Heating problems in the New World were, if anything, worse than those in Europe. Early American colonists with coal stoves had to import all their coal from Europe.

First Lady Abigail Adams wrote plaintively, "Surrounded with forests, can you believe that wood is not to be had, because people cannot be found to cut and cart it?" She noted that her household had "recourse to coals; but we cannot get grates made and set. We have, indeed, come into a new country."

Benjamin Franklin became America's heating hero. Fed up with fireplaces—"man is scorched before, while he is froze behind"—he invented a portable iron fireplace that protruded into the room and cast much more heat than a recessed fireplace.

Today modern variations of his "miraculous stove" have never been more popular.

Housing prices going higher

Interest rates are at or near the bottom and home buyers should expect higher home prices by mid year.

That word comes from builders gather at the recent National Association of Home Builders Convention.

"Many builders reported strong home markets," said Manny Dembs, president of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

Dembs used his own experience as an example. In January, his organization sold 34 homes in Canton Township, Farmington Hills, Troy, Port Huron and New Haven.

Of the sales, 22 were in the \$55,000 range, while the other 12 were sold for up to \$80,000.

There are reasons why the home seeker should expect

higher prices in the coming months, as well as for a firming up of interest rates, Dembs said.

Demand of the kind that seems to be developing will put pressure on interest rates, in spite of ample supplies of money to finance homes, for one thing, he said. The size of the home mortgages available today will contribute to this pressure, along with the sheer volume of applications.

As for home prices, labor contracts across the nation usually apply at mid-year, with June 30 the end of most Detroit area contracts at present rates. Raises negotiated earlier thus will build in a 6.5 per cent labor factor in home pricing, starting soon.

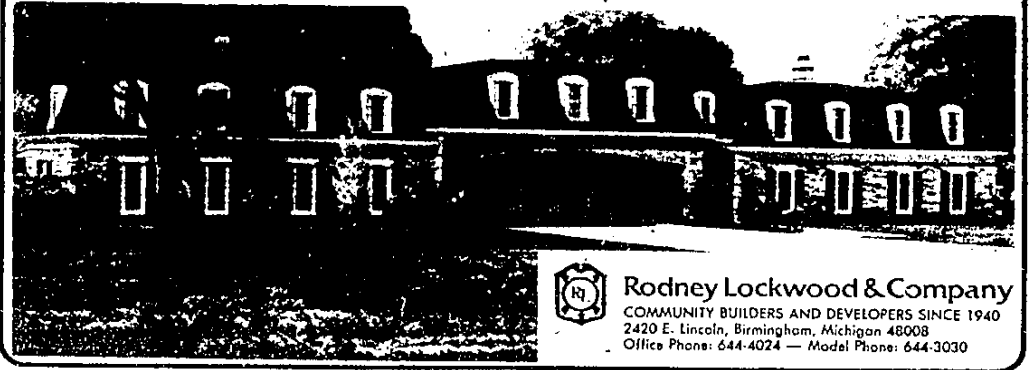
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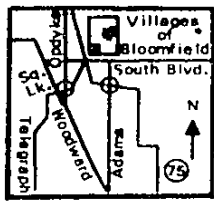
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