

Is Losing Your Gas Fireplace Keeping You From Making Your Home All-Electric?

There's a growing movement, with good reasons, to eliminate natural gas from our homes. Think carbon monoxide poisoning. Or the bad health effects of inhaling methane. Or home explosions from gas leaks. Or how the use of natural gas (which is methane) contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating climate change.

While it's easy (and financially incentivized by state, federal and utility rebates) to replace your gas furnace with a ducted or ductless heat pump system and your gas-fired water heater with a heat-pump water heater, many homeowners — myself included when I owned a single-family home — find it hard to accept giving up their gas fireplaces and gas grills.

Rita and I had to give up our gas grill when we moved into an apartment with balcony, but the George Foreman electric grill is a great replacement — and costs less to buy and operate. (You can also use it indoors!) But I didn't know until recently that there are some fine alternatives if you are willing to give up your gas fireplace.

As an active Realtor, I have seen and listed many homes with electric fireplaces. One of my recently sold listings, which you can still view at www.GreenMountainHome.info, has an electric fireplace sitting on the hearth of the wood-burning fireplace in the basement. Fast forward to

3:45 in that listing's video tour to see it. The seller explained that they couldn't keep the wood-burning fireplace from overheating the basement, but the electric fireplace can be controlled with a thermostat.

Temperature control is just one of the challenges with wood-burning and most gas fireplaces. I mentioned others in the first paragraph above, but cost of operation is another one. Many people just want the ambiance of a burning fireplace, which you can get for pennies per hour from an electric fireplace, but most electric fireplaces also having heating modes, and if you want heat from it, the electric cost is still less than the cost of gas for an equivalent amount of heat generation.

Much of the heat generated by a gas (or wood) fireplace goes up the chimney, whereas electric fireplaces are unvented and therefore 100% efficient in that respect. No chimney also means no rodents or birds taking up residence in them.

At www.ElephantEnergy.com you'll find a web page devoted to electric fireplaces, from which I downloaded the two pictures above right. On that page they describe seven different types of electric fireplaces, two of which — an insert and wall-mounted — are shown above.

That web page addresses the following considerations: Lower costs;



reduced carbon emissions; increased energy efficiency; improved safety; ambiance options; and model types.

In terms of costs, the web page claims a 30% savings over the cost of a gas fireplace. The electric fireplace generates less heat at lower cost, but when it's used to supplement, not replace, your central heating or for ambiance, that should be fine. If your home is solar-powered, it can be free. You can't create gas!

Model types which offer ambiance and/or heating options are broken down as follows:

Pre-fab fireplaces can be either free-standing or wall-mounted and can be plugged into any 120 Volt outlet. They range from \$400 to \$4,000 depending on the features you want.

Custom fireplaces require unique installation and can range in price from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

Wall-mounted fireplaces resemble flat-screen televisions and can cost as little as \$300.

Electric fireplace inserts allow you to make attractive use of your existing fireplace hearth and firebox. According to the website, they range

in price from \$400 to \$3,000.

Recessed electric fireplaces are nice if you're willing to build out a wall to accommodate the unit's depth, and can be quite attractive. The design options are limited only by your imagination. Cost can range from \$400 to \$7,000 or more.

Built-in electric fireplaces are just a variation on the above, but typically include a hearth, mantel and surround. Intended for heating, not just ambiance, they can range from \$3,000 to over \$10,000.

Water vapor electric fireplaces are my favorite. No one will mistake them for a gas or wood-burning fireplace, but they "spark" elegance and style. That's the other example included above. They create 3-dimensional "flames" through the use of water vapor and LED lights. Heating is not an option.

Elephant Energy does not sell fireplaces (or other systems), but they link to ModernBlaze.com, which sells a wide variety of all the types of fireplaces listed above. They offer free shipping and returns and a 10% discount if you sign up for text messages.

Becoming a 'Realtor' Is Optional, So Why Do It?

Golden Real Estate is a Realtor brokerage, meaning that all our agents belong to a local Realtor association and thereby are members of the Colorado Association of Realtors and the National Association of Realtors.

"Realtor" is a trademark, and only members of a Realtor association can call themselves Realtors. That's also why Realtor, like Kleenex, should always be capitalized.

It's estimated that only half of all licensed real estate agents are Realtors, but you have to be a Realtor if you want to work for us or any other Realtor brokerage. All the major franchises are Realtor brokerages, but there are lots of non-Realtor brokerages that an agent can join if he or she wants to avoid the \$500+ annual dues to be a Realtor.

So what's in it for an agent to be a Realtor, paying over \$5,000 per decade for the privilege?

First of all, non-Realtors can't work for a Realtor brokerage such as ours. They'd have to be independent or join a non-Realtor brokerage. Some brokerages, such as HomeSmart, Your Castle, and Resident Realty, have created both Realtor and non-Realtor brokerages with near-identical or identical logos and near identical names so that the average client or prospective client would have no idea that the agent they are speaking with might not be a Realtor.

I feel that's deceptive advertising, which violates the Realtor Code of Ethics, but non-Realtors aren't bound by that code. There are benefits to being a NAR member that wouldn't mean much to consumers. More than that, however, I believe in "paying one's dues." All agents benefit from NAR's lobbying on our behalf, but only Realtors pay for it. Non-Realtors are getting a free ride.

If You Want a Real Flame, Ethanol Is a 'Green' Option

Last week I shot a narrated video tour of an all-electric home that will be in October 7's **Metro Denver Green Homes Tour**. It's Michele Merritt's Lakewood home, and she has two fireplaces that burn liquid ethanol.

Ethanol fireplaces are the easiest kind to install because they require no venting, construction or electrical outlet. You can build it into a wall, like a regular fireplace, but you can

also have one as an indoor (or outdoor) firepit, since CO₂ is the only fume. You pour the liquid ethanol (basically just alcohol) into the reservoir and light it. A one-liter bottle of ethanol will burn for several hours. ModernBlaze.com sells 6 bottles for \$87 including shipping. They sell a 24-inch ethanol burner for \$1,895.

I have a link to their blog about ethanol fireplaces on our own blog at www.GoldenREblog.com.



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"I cannot do all the good the world needs, but the world needs all the good I can do." —Jana Stanfield