

# Lighting the flame of invention



Left: The burners can be designed for a range of living area tastes and styles, and can be free-standing to move around in different locations, or built into the dwelling.

Inset: The Fire Company also distributes the basic burner kit, allowing designers and builders to create their own feature.



**Energy-efficient fireplaces that burn ethanol give apartment and unit dwellers that cosy open fireplace feel. Susanna Nelson looks at the benefits of the EcoSmart Fire, an Australian innovation.**

**W**hen it comes to heating small spaces, nothing kills the atmosphere like an electric heater.

The environmentally friendly EcoSmart Fire was designed to introduce the charm of an open fireplace into flats and units. It doesn't require a flue, or a utility connection for fuel supply, and this gives it a design and installation flexibility that the classic open fireplace and pot-belly stove just doesn't have.

The EcoSmart Fire, designed and manufactured by Australian-owned business The Fire Company, was launched in 2004 at the Australian

Design Awards. Since then there have been more than 10,000 installations in 42 countries.

"The initial exposure was great," marketing manager Jenny Price says.

"We received a huge reaction from the media, and this spread around the world. We've had a lot of companies contacting us to become distributors of our product."

The product runs off its own supply of denatured ethanol – good old-fashioned methylated spirits – and burns clean, making it suitable for enclosed spaces.

"It's similar to a spirit stove," Jenny says. "The fire burns without smoke, so the only thing it emits is heat and steam and a very small amount of carbon, similar to when you burn a candle."

"It has been deemed safe to burn in an unflued room and we've had tests conducted on that in America, Europe and Australia."

"This is why we are able to promote it as an unvented product, because the

combustion is so clean."

Marketed as a design and lifestyle innovation rather than a simple heating device, the EcoSmart Fire has been installed in top-end establishments like the Shangri La Hotel in Sydney and the Long Room in Melbourne.

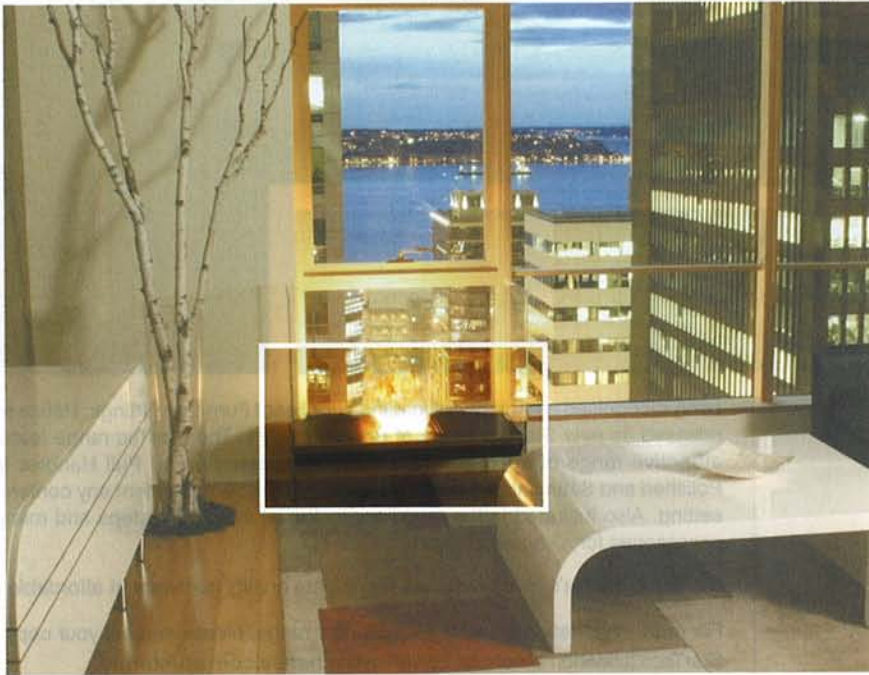
It is also in hairdressing salons in the UK and ski chalets in NSW and Victoria.

The EcoSmart Fire brings atmosphere to exclusive motor homes and yachts, and there's even an outdoor collection.

"The product is limited only to the consumer's imagination," Jenny says. "It has been installed in pretty much every type of architectural environment."

The outdoor collection is even threatening the market share of the trusty outdoor gas heater often seen at street cafes and markets.

"In some countries the outdoor gas heater is being phased out because it is energy intensive and therefore harmful to the environment. We're in the process of trying to assimilate the functionality of those heaters into our outdoor range. ➤



EcoSmart Fires can bring ambience, style and warmth to a range of smaller, un-vented spaces – like this high rise luxury apartment located in New York City.

“We’ve already got outdoor heaters, but we’re in the research and development phase of producing a range with radiant heat reflectors that push the heat down. Most of our fires contain an ambient feature rather than a heat-retaining feature because the heaters are designed to be in enclosed spaces where the heat is kept in the room.

“We’re hoping to develop something that will take over from the old gas heaters, because we see a niche market opportunity opening up.”

The company is receiving plenty of recognition for its product, particularly in design circles.

“We’ve exhibited at the Maison et Objets fair in Paris, and won the people’s choice award for innovation at the interior design awards held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

“It’s a rapidly evolving industry and the company is regularly approached by designers wanting to work on the product. We’re also finding new competitors springing up all the time.”

The Fire Company is keen to

present its environmental credentials, particularly as far as the product’s emissions go.

“The fires are fuel efficient – they’re equivalent to 2.5 electric heaters in their output,” Jenny says.

“Also, you don’t lose the heat up the flue. And you can turn the flame on and off as you like, so there’s no start-up or cool-down period in which extra energy is expended. Everything stays in the room, and that’s why it’s more than 90% efficient.”

The company also participates in a carbon offset initiative. It contributes to the planting of two trees for every product sold to offset the effects of the fuel production method and the carbon emissions of the business.

But how effectively does the EcoSmart Fire warm larger spaces, given its positioning as a ‘fire feature’ rather than a heating device?

“They can heat between 50 and 60 square metres quite easily,” Jenny says.

“In fact, most people buy them thinking they’re only a lifestyle product

which they can sit in front of and get the ambience, and they are quite surprised by how much they heat a room.”

You would think that a flue-less, self-contained unit like the EcoSmart Fire might be of little interest to builders, but the renovator range has been developed to allow architects and builders to design the product into their developments.

“The designer range is the only real consumer-driven product,” Jenny says.

“The rest of the range has been stripped back so that it is builder and architect friendly. We like to think that we’re very much into the ‘good look’ business, but we don’t profess to know everyone’s taste.

“So we also sell the basic burner kit, which is the core technique of our collection, and our main focus is on the builder working hand in hand with designers and architects to develop a centrepiece for a home – without us dictating what that taste should be.”

The only requirement is that builders ensure that they comply with compulsory clearances, such as a specified height, depth and width calculation. The fire also needs to be installed within non-combustible materials.

“We also recommend that the room be no less than 70 cubic metres, so it can’t be anywhere like a bathroom or a toilet or any small room.

“You have to have some form of ventilation, such as a window opening or a door. We don’t promote the use of them in unprotected environments where you’re not in control of the elements, such as wind. It is a fire after all, and it has the same dangers associated with it as any other form of exposed flame.

“Apart from that you can do whatever you like with the product – that’s why it has been so successful in the market.” ■