

## **Burnout in the living room**

By Jim Wasserman, staff writer

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, June 20, 2007

The last embers are soon to go out for that ancient household staple of English castles and Norman Rockwell scenes -- the wood-burning fireplace.

Come October in Sacramento County, home builders no longer can put traditional open fireplaces in new houses. Nor can contractors install them in existing homes.

The rule approved last year by local air regulators follows similar bans in most of the San Joaquin Valley, parts of the Bay Area and, soon, most of Southern California. The old-fashioned wood-burning hearth, with its emissions of "particulate matter," is increasingly becoming an icon of yesterday's home design.

A look at most suburban roof lines tells the story: There are fewer traditional chimneys.

Indeed, a 10-year decline now of the traditional wood fireplace has brought big changes to how houses are designed and built -- and how people live. Builders and architects say the television is increasingly pushing aside the fireplace as the focal point of a house. Unencumbered by the need for full-fledged chimneys, architects can put windows above gas fireplace mantles and make space above them for flat-screen televisions.

Increasingly, families gather in "bonus rooms," relegating the fireplace to a less-important corner of the living room area. And more homes than ever, especially smaller ones, are being designed without fireplaces at all. Indeed, most people with wood fireplaces today seldom use them.

Purists might scoff at the changes. But truth is, the gas fireplace now rules home design -- and has for some time.

"When I came here 10 years ago, we were doing 75 to 80 percent wood-burning fireplaces," says Rick Fischer, Sacramento-Benicia division manager for Minnesota-based Fireside Hearth and Home. "Now it's the opposite. We're probably 80 percent gas and 20 percent or less on the wood-burning side." The firm supplies area home builders.

It's the same nationally. North of Anchorage in Eagle River, Alaska, most new houses have gas fireplaces, says Hal Hardy, a radiology resident and wood-burning fire fan who just moved from there into a new house in West Sacramento.

Hardy's new fireplace in the Bella Rio subdivision? Gas.

"Hal doesn't have to chop trees any more," says his wife, Vicki Lumley, a psychologist at Mather's Veterans Affairs hospital.

The wood-burning fireplace traditionally was seen as more than a source of heat, one that embodied romantic notions of family and home. Witness the crackling blazes that roar on Thanksgiving Day or New Year's Eve.

But home builders turned years ago to flip-of-the-switch gas fireplaces as suburban buyers increasingly had less time to make fires, less space to store wood and more interest in electronic gadgets as the focal point of their houses. In smaller houses and urban midrises, even the gas fireplace is disappearing in favor of electric ones that can be plugged in and carried from room to room, architects say.

Air regulators, too, have stepped up pressures on old-fashioned wood-burning fireplaces as a source of pollutants that irritate the lungs and heart. In the world of health professionals, wood fires have taken on much the same stigma as cigarettes.

If regulators allow wood at all, they tend to require new, cleaner wood-burning fireplace inserts. Air quality districts throughout the Central Valley and Bay Area tell homeowners not to light fireplaces on high-pollutant days.

All these factors have changed one of the most basic ideas about home building. Goodbye to the big chimney running up the side, hello to the small vent on an outside wall.

"We quit doing wood-burning fireplaces 10 years ago," says Russ Davis, vice president of Folsom-based Elliott Homes. A gas fireplace "is cleaner," he says.

"You don't get the soot or the smoke. You don't get the smell of a stale fireplace. And it's much easier to decorate around it."

An estimated 156,000 to 196,000 Sacramento County residences still have traditional fireplaces, according to the Sacramento air quality district. That's as much as 37 percent of the county's 528,000 dwellings. In most, they're seldom used. But an old fireplace remains a terrific draw for buyers, real estate agents say.

"I have had lots of clients over the years who like the aesthetics of fireplaces, but they never use them," says Geoff Zimmerman, broker-owner of Sacramento-based Windermere-Dunnigan Realtors. Zimmerman specializes in the Land Park and East Sacramento houses that sport brick chimneys and beautiful 1930s and 1940s fireplaces.

"A lot of people say, 'I'm not going to use it. I want it for the bookshelves on either side.' Or it's a place I can put a gorgeous painting over the mantel. There's a lot of people who still like a fireplace, but they don't make fires," she says.

Architect Kerrin West says even gas fireplaces are taking a back seat to the growing size of televisions. Big-screen or flat-screen TV's have replaced the three-car garage as homeowner success symbols, she says.

"Everybody is worried about being able to see the TV. "They're less worried about whether you can see the fireplace from any seating area," says West, who runs the Sacramento branch of Des Moines-based BSB Design.

In West Sacramento, ex-Alaskans Hardy and Lumley didn't expect to own a fireplace at all in California, even a gas one.

"That was kind of a bonus," says Lumley, eyeing a new fireplace trimmed with brown stone and cherry wood. "It wasn't something we were looking for. We found the house we really really loved and it had a fireplace."

## **Developer renews vow of no homes**

**Patterson council, residents retain concerns about Crows Landing**

BY CHRISTINA SALERNO, staff writer  
Modesto Bee, Wednesday, June 20, 2007

PATTERSON -- Gerry Kamilos handed the City Council a written pledge Tuesday night promising not to use the Crows Landing project as a cover for housing, as his critics have suggested.

But council members and the audience of about 100 residents appeared unsatisfied, saying they have continuing concerns about the loss of valuable farmland, pollution and the impact of a short-haul rail line that would run through the community.

Kamilos is negotiating with the county to expand the former 1,527-acre Crows Landing Naval Air Station, southeast of Patterson, into a 4,560-acre industrial center. The project is centered around a rail line that would connect the air facility to the Port of Oakland.

Kamilos was in Patterson at the request of the council, which insisted last month that the Sacramento developer make a presentation in person before the city would assist him with efforts to mitigate concerns about traffic and the environment.

"As you know, there have been continuing allegations by those opposed to or unfamiliar with our project that there is an undisclosed intent by PCCP West Park to ultimately develop housing within the 4,800-acre West Park project," Kamilos said in his pledge, which he read aloud to the council. "Unfortunately, there is no way to refute that type of baseless allegation, other than to deny it."

Councilwoman Annette Smith said that the pledge didn't address Patterson's primary concern about trains running through the city.

In response to questions from the council, Kamilos said the rail would be operational in 2011 with two trains a day, each with 30 to 50 cars. After five years, the number of trains would increase to three or four, and by 2021 the rail would run about six trains daily.

"We're not talking 20 trains, as some people have said," Kamilos said.

Smith asked Kamilos how he planned to transport 800,000 containers a day to the Port of Oakland, as he previously told the Board of Supervisors.

"You can't bring that many containers on one to two trains a day, or five to six trains. When are we going to see the true data and see the true scope of the project? ... Those numbers don't match," Smith said.

Other council members raised concerns about the trains' impact on the downtown core, traffic congestion and irreparable harm to farmland.

"We already have a lot of jobs here -- the oldest, most natural job is farming. There is nothing anyone can do to mitigate this rich land. I am concerned about bulldozers and concrete over our precious resources," Councilman Dominic Farinha said.

Kamilos said his company is dedicated to having a one-to-one mitigation effort for farmland so every acre that's developed would have a corresponding acre that would lessen the impact.

The rail line also would help farmers, Kamilos said, because it would allow them to export their products more easily.

Kamilos said he plans to hold meetings with the public throughout the summer to listen to concerns, and will return to the council with more details about the project in September.

Ron Swift, a member of the West Side-Patterson Alliance for Community and Environment, a group of residents opposed to Kamilos' plan, said he wasn't impressed by the pledge. He said his group will continue to fight the proposal.

Other West Side residents also didn't appear to be satisfied with Kamilos' responses to the council.

"I was hoping for truthful answers, but I didn't hear any," said Patterson resident Kenny Buehner after the meeting.

"I don't think he has the answers himself," said Ed Maring, a farmer on the West Side who said he was opposed to the project because it would harm farmland. "We should be farming, not developing."

## WHAT IT MEANS

- **ISSUE:** Developer Gerry Kamilos went before the Patterson City Council and a crowd estimated at 100 to assure residents that there will not be houses tied to his Crows Landing project.

- **WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:** The City Council said last month it would not assist Kamilos on the project until he delivered a public presentation in person.
- **WHAT'S NEXT:** Kamilos plans to hold meetings with the public this summer before going back to the council in September with more details.

## **Supervisors oppose two air pollution bills**

By James Burger, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, June 20, 2007

Four Kern County supervisors expressed their opposition Tuesday to two bills that call for fees on air polluters and a change to the makeup of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board.

Only Supervisor Michael Rubio voted to support the bills.

Senate Bill 719 calls for the addition of two new air district board members from cities within the district and two technical members appointed for their professional expertise.

Senate Bill 240 would create new fees on drivers and businesses that generate pollution. The money raised would be used to try and clean up the San Joaquin Valley's air.

Speakers dueled over the issue in a public comment session.

Suzanne Noble, a manager with the Western States Petroleum Association, spoke against the bill on behalf of a coalition of businesses, family farms and valley cities.

Businesses already pay for their impacts on air quality, she said, and the valley doesn't need a couple of political appointees on its air board.

"We continue to fight against those who want to weaken and eliminate local control," she said.

But Arvin City Councilwoman Ragi Brar, who sits on the air board, said expert members are needed.

"I would challenge anyone to tell me why we wouldn't want someone who understands the health impacts of smog on our board," she said.

Arthur Unger of the Sierra Club implied the current 11-member board isn't doing all it could to improve air quality -- referring to a recent board decision to push back an air quality attainment deadline.

"Our presently constituted air board thinks it's OK for Arvin not to reach federal attainment until a kid born today is ready to graduate high school," he said.

Supervisors Jon McQuiston, a current air board member, and Mike Maggard, a former member, said the board needs to be made up of people elected to office by citizens.

Political appointees, McQuiston said, would have a "lack of accountability to the people of the valley."

Maggard, McQuiston, Ray Watson and Don Maben voted to send a letter of opposition to legislators considering the bills.

Rubio supported the bills and voted against the supervisors' motion.

He said people complain about bad air but throw a fit when a local or state government tells them they can't drive their SUVs.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, June 20, 2007:](#)

## **Europe's way ahead of U.S. in transportation**

My son and I just got back from Europe. The high-speed trains, electric-powered trains and metropolitan subways are safe and phenomenal. Driving a car for three days was very stressful.

In our seriously congested California, commuters will definitely go for low-pollution electric transportation. A high-speed train from Fresno to Los Angeles will take an hour and a half. Fresno to Sacramento will take 50 minutes.

At one-third the cost of highways and providing 450,000 jobs, high-speed trains would transport 100 million Californians by 2030. We need a transportation system for people. I would use a subway from my house to River Park. We need to act now.

Go to <http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov> for a wonderful video on the subject.

*Mike Starry, Fresno*