

By Bill Sendelback

Lowering Prices/ Gaining Ground

Ethanol is experiencing the classic hearth problem: Few consumers know that it exists.



Ethanol as a fuel for hearth products is still new, and the market for these appliances still small. However, thanks in part to new lower prices, the category is growing.

"Ethanol units have picked up some steam in our store," says Don Richardson, president of Arizona Fireplaces in Phoenix. "Ethanol is relatively new with undeveloped demand. People come in and are pleasantly surprised by the product. They want to buy it, but are turned off a lot by the high prices. With lower consumer pricing, it will pick up speed."

Richardson is apparently getting his wish as most manufacturers, even at the very high end, are introducing mid- and lower-price models. The suggested retail price range now stretches from \$100 for some tabletop models to \$20,000 for

ABOVE: Tribeca from Anywhere Fireplace.

Anywhere Fireplace has introduced five new models into its line that offer suggested list prices ranging from \$100 to \$400. Included are the wall-mounted Soho Black, Tribeca 2 floor-stand model, Lexington white lacquered tabletop model and larger sized Hudson and Madison tabletop models. The Hudson also can be used as a wall-hung model. The company offers lower priced, contemporary models. Call (914) 834-5855, visit www.anywherefireplace.com or *circle reader service number 070*.



Soho Black.

a few custom-built fireplaces.

"Even with this economy, we're doing quite well," says Stephane Thomas, CEO of Australian manufacturer Eco-Smart Fire. "Reception to the products has been great, but high prices are an impediment to the market. The hearth industry is fairly conservative, and most dealers don't know how to deal with high-end price points."

Eco-Smart Fire, a manufacturer at the very high end of the price range with models up to \$20,000, is now introducing units at prices as low as \$400 to "reinforce our high end."

Planika USA, with products made in Holland, claims a 30 percent sales increase in 2009. "Our 2010 percentage sales increase was a little bit lower," admits Matt Mnych, managing director. "It's still a niche product, but we're seeing more movement among fireplace dealers, and consumers are hearing more about ethanol models."

One of the acknowledged marketing problems with ethanol hearth products is that few consumers know about this technology. Most manufacturers see exposure to consumers as a



Madi Ferencz.

key to growth in the category. "We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg," according to Madi Ferencz, president and CEO of Anywhere Fireplace. "Very few consumers know about ethanol models, but there is incredible interest among the consumers that do. It's amazing how word-of-mouth has spread, because these units have a real fire and require little or no construction."

Lack of consumer awareness and knowledge of ethanol models is certainly slowing growth. "Hearth retailers have looked at it and, for the most part, are open to it," says Tom Owen, general manager of Black and Stone, "but the customer is reluctant."

"We're doing very well with hearth retailers, but we're disappointed at consumer interest," says Tim Lane, director of sales and marketing for Decoflame. "The hearth industry is in transition," according to Eco-Smart's Thomas, "like when we went from



Tom Owen.



Aquafires - Spherical Glass Fire.

Aquafires International has introduced three new tabletop models into its unique, very contemporary Pureflame line: the Spherical Glass Fire featuring a stainless-steel bowl, the Concave Fire with a stainless-steel concave pedestal, and the Pipe, featuring a stainless-steel bowl mounted on a marble pedestal styled like a smoking pipe. Also new is the company's Burner Insert, a less expensive burner featuring a 55-ounce fuel capacity. Aquafires also offers its Purefuels brand ethanol fuel. Call 1-866-647-9225, visit www.pureflame.com or *circle reader service number 071*.

New from **The Bio Flame** is its SEK, a 43-in. wide, freestanding, see-through model with a 36-in. burner, and the Sek XL, a 58-in. wide version with a 48-in. burner. A Bio Flame model was the winner of the 2010 Vesta Awards Outdoor Hearth Products competition. Call (403) 444-8888, visit www.thebioflame.com or *circle reader service number 072*.

SEK by The Bio Flame.



Flamenco ethanol log set.

Condar Company has revised its fuel tray for its Flamenco brand, gel ethanol log set to increase the burn time by 50 percent. The company's gel ethanol log sets are available in 18- and 24-in. sizes. Condar also offers its Flamenco Ethanol Gel fuel. Call (828) 894-8383, visit www.condar.com or *circle reader service number 073*.

New from **Decoflame** is its smaller size, stainless-steel City and black Urban wall-hung models. Both feature burn times of as long as five hours and retail for less than \$1,100. For 2011, the company will introduce auto ignition and two insert models. It also offers its Decofuel brand ethanol fuel. Call (626) 246-0790, visit www.decoflame.ca or *circle reader service number 074*.



Stainless-steel City.



VioFlame round burner in table.

Black and Stone has introduced square and round ethanol burners for patio tables; they also will be included in the company's new Vioflame brand patio tables. The company's very contemporary models have suggested retail prices ranging from \$500 to \$1,000; it also offers its Viofuel ethanol fuel. Call 1-800-605-2515, visit www.blackandstone.com or *circle reader service number 075*.

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wood to gas. People have to get used to it.”

Ecoflame has taken the education issue to a new level with its new show trailer. The company is traveling around the U.S., reaching prospects and dealers to demonstrate the technology. “Nobody is spending time bringing the product to the dealers’ doors,” says Steve Schmidt, head of North American sales. “We’re having tremendous success. The market is growing, and this category has taken hold.”

Surprisingly, many ethanol product manufacturers welcome newcomers as a way to grow awareness for the category. “We welcome new competition,” says Schmidt. “It will bring more attention and interest to the category for all of us.”

Ask and you shall receive. That new competition includes some familiar names. Included is Napoleon Fireplaces, which is introducing four wall-mount fireplace models. According to Roger Gipton, vice president of sales, “We think this (category) will grow. Ethanol has a realistic flame, and it has a growing market with builders and for condos.”

FMI Products is introducing two ethanol fireplace models after re-engineering a model shown four years ago by DESA before FMI purchased the DESA hearth products line. And The Outdoor Great Room Company is increasing its ethanol tabletop line. Though not planning to increase its ethanol offering, Travis Industries is enjoying success with its Tempest Torch tabletop model.

The range of ethanol products includes a wide variety of smaller tabletop models for indoor and outdoor use, larger wall mounted models, floor standing fireplaces and built-in fireplaces. At the lower price points, the trend is moving toward tabletop models, while fireplace models are shifting toward contemporary, wall-hung models. Larger units are becoming more common with fireplace burners sized up to 48 in.

Ethanol fuel is also offered by many ethanol appliance makers, as well as fuel-only suppliers. Condar Company is offering its Flamenco gel ethanol fuel, preferring to offer only gel which it claims is less prone to spillage. “Europe, where ethanol products are a huge market, is going to gel fuel,” claims Condar’s Mike McCue, president.

Forrest Paint Company also has intro-

Eco-Feu has introduced three tabletop models, sized small, medium and large, that feature burn times of as long as five hours. Models start at \$195 suggested list price. It also has introduced a 24-in. burner that eliminates the “empty space” between two separate flames for a larger flame pattern. Eco-Feu offers more than 20 very contemporary models. Call 1-866-435-1772, visit www.eco-feu.com or *circle reader service number 076*.



G1 and G2.

Ecoflame, formerly known as Grandeur Fireplace, is introducing a line of \$200 or less, medium-size tabletop models more oriented toward outdoor patio use. These units will complement Ecoflame’s more than three dozen other ethanol offerings and the company’s outdoor wicker furniture lines. Call (203) 721-2701, visit www.ecoflamefire.com or *circle reader service number 077*.



Antique white firebowl.



Burner One.

Eco-Smart Fire, the Australian-based pioneer of ethanol fireplaces, is introducing 20 new models of medium- and lower-priced units to complement its very high-end line. They will include new floor mount, wall mount and tabletop models, many with an electronic burner to control ignition, fuel feed rate and a shock shutdown system. The electronics are programmable and Bluetooth compatible for control from outside the home. The Eco-Smart Fire line will now offer models from \$400 to \$20,000 retail, and all fixed models are UL listed to the UL subject 1370 standard. Call 1-888-590-3335, visit www.ecosmartfire.com or *circle reader service number 078*.

FMI Products is introducing two built-in, ethanol fireplaces featuring “pop-in” fuel cartridges for easier and safer refueling even while the fireplace is burning. One model is a 43-in. linear fireplace, and the other has “bed and breakfast” styling. Both also feature Piezo ignition for safer lighting. Call 1-866-328-4537, visit www.fmiproducts.com or *circle reader service number 079*.



Linear fireplace.



Ambiance fuel.

Forrest Paint Company, better known for its Stove Brite stove and fireplace paint, has introduced its Stove Brite Ambiance Fuel gel ethanol, available in 32-oz. squeezable bottles and 16-oz. cans that also can be used as the burning containers. Call (541) 342-1821, visit www.forrestpaint.com or *circle reader service number 080*.

duced gel ethanol because of the company's concerns about the safety of using a liquid, according to Heath Panry, marketing manager. Fuel Barons claims it has had a "phenomenal year" with its Gen 2 OZOfire fuel with enough sales success to construct a second bottling plant.

Like wood pellets, ethanol fuel is a potential profit center for hearth retailers. "If you are selling ethanol models, you need to sell the fuel," says Ross Johnson, sales and marketing manager for The Outdoor Great Room Company, which also markets ethanol fuel. "This gets your customers back into your store on a regular basis."

Safety testing and listing is just now growing into an issue with ethanol models as more dealers are turning to home builders, and use in condos and apartments. Underwriters Laboratories is finalizing its UL Subject 1370/ORD standard for Unvented Alcohol Burning Decorative Appliances. A growing number of ethanol appliance manufacturers are testing to this standard even though many are listed to Europe's CE standard, which is not applicable in the U.S.

The UL standard does specify only attached models, leaving out tabletop units. And it requires that 10 percent of the fuel can be spilled without causing burner flare-up. The "unvented" reference in the standard has created problems in some markets that don't allow vent-free products, but UL is attempting to address this issue to keep ethanol models from being included with vent-free gas models.

"I did \$250,000 in ethanol units in 2009, but only 30 percent of that in 2010 because of the California regulations," says Spero Conomikes, owner of retailer Cornerstone Mantels in Los Angeles. "Since these are now classed as vent-free, California has tightened its regulations and fire marshals have shut down some installations. I still think ethanol models are great products, and they are safer than or as safe as gas models."

Despite regulatory glitches in some markets, most see ethanol as a growing market. "2011 will see record sales," predicts Decoflame's Tim Lane. "With more advertising, PR and television exposure, our optimism is extremely high." 🏠



Alyce Wittus.



Linear ethanol fireplace.

Napoleon Fireplaces is adding four new "slim profile," wall mount, ethanol fireplaces to its product line. The first CSA-certified ethanol models, claims the company, include the Square and 48-in. Linear, each with black, white, red or brushed stainless-steel surrounds, the Convex with brushed stainless-steel or black frame, and the Corner featuring three fuel containers and burners and stainless-steel back and base to reflect the flames. Suggested list prices range from \$599 to \$1,499. Call 1-800-461-5581, visit www.napoleonfireplaces.com or *circle reader service number 082*.

The Outdoor Greatroom Company

has added its Inspiration indoor or outdoor wall-hanging model featuring a spinning flame and a slide-out drawer for 14 oz. of gel fuel. Producing 9,000 Btus, the Inspiration also features reflective panels for a larger flame image. It's available with frames of stainless steel or Sedona Brown or Silver Vein powder-coating. A similar model, the Allure, was a finalist in the 2010 Vesta Awards Art of Fire competition. The company also offers ethanol fuel. Call 1-866-303-4028, visit www.outdoorgreatrooms.com or *circle reader service number 083*.



Inspiration fireplace.



Fire Line.

Planika USA is introducing its Planika Fire Line Automatic linear ethanol models featuring LED displays, one button remote control operation and a shock sensor that shuts off the unit during a severe jolt. The unit also shuts off if fuel is spilled or it overheats. These new built-in models also feature three flame sizes, 1.32 gallon fuel capacity for burn times as long as 10 hours, and are listed to the UL Subject 1370 test standard for attached models. Planika also offers its Fanola brand ethanol fuel. Call (201) 933-7787, visit www.planikausa.com or *circle reader service number 084*.

Wittus Fire by Design

is importing from Denmark an entire line of very contemporary ethanol models, marketed in North America under the Wittus brand. All are listed to the UL Subject 1370 test standard for attached units. Call (914) 764-5679, visit www.wittus.com or *circle reader service number 085*.



World.