

Wittus fires up fall with warm ‘furniture’

By ELLEN S. BEST

When Beyoncé wants to get even hotter, she and her husband, Jay Z, fire up their Wittus woodstove from Wittus-Fire By Design, located in Pound Ridge. So does Bill Gates, Tom Hanks, Kathleen Turner and other celebrities who have been drawn to the designer stoves that owners Niels and Alyce Wittus brand as “warm furniture.”

The shop offers more contemporary varieties of stoves

‘Wittus has a great product, they stand by their work.’

— KEVIN BRENNER
 OF BRENNER BUILDERS



CURTIS LEW PHOTO

Niels Wittus by one his best sellers, the Shaker stove.

— cooking, wood, pellet and fireplaces — than any other store in the country. Dealers in the U.S. and Canada carry some of their models.

Locals, too, are heating with the Wittus stoves, which are showing up in residences, hotels and restaurants, including Crabtree’s Kettle House Restaurant in Chappaqua, as functional, contemporary showpieces.

Scott and Anne Fernqvist live across the street from the Wittus showroom in Scotts Corners. Their large storage shed, full of split wood for their three Wittus stoves, is visible from the street. They like the modern look and high burning efficiency of the European stoves, as well as the customer service offered by Wittus. They use a minimal amount of oil to heat their home when they are out of town and can’t use the stoves.

“Our main driver for using wood instead of oil is sustainability,” Ms. Fernqvist said. She explained that locally sourced wood, a part of the biomass, regrows, and once again absorbs carbon emissions in the atmosphere, creating a closed carbon cycle. The stoves support a form of renewable energy that makes particularly good sense in areas like Pound Ridge with a lot of forest, added Ms. Fernqvist, an environmen-

tal consultant for the United Nations. Her husband also works in the area of environmental sustainability.

According to Mr. Wittus, architects, designers and contractors make up the majority of his clientele. Kevin Brenner of Brenner Builders said that he often recommends the stoves to clients who want a woodstove, favor contemporary design and seek energy efficiency. “Wittus has a great product, they stand by their work and also do the installation,” he said. At Mr. Brenner’s Healthy Home Energy & Consulting office in Somers, a Wittus stove provides the primary heat source.

Contractors are increasingly turning to the Wittus fireplace for new construction, as the units do not involve masonry, are cheaper to install than other models, and have a glass window in front that can be tilted open for easy cleaning.

The most popular Wittus stove, the Shaker, has a waiting list of hundreds, and will be available in November, Mr. Wittus said. Mr. Wittus has even applied to have the Shaker stove displayed at the Museum of Modern Art.

Because all their stoves are made in Europe, where homes tend to be smaller than in the U.S., their fireboxes are also smaller, with a six-hour max-

imum burning time. Being able to view the fire is integral to all the models, and is a departure from the common American design, where the fire is usually hidden inside.

The Twin Fires model won first place last year in the Brookhaven National Laboratories test as the most efficient woodstove. The model has two burning areas: one where the actual logs burn and an additional gasification box below, where the gases from the wood are drawn down to burn in another fire. As a result of this design, no particles are released. “It’s the Porsche of stoves,” Mr. Wittus said, “and it burns over 1300 degrees, cleanly.”

The stoves meet the Environmental Protection Agency’s regulation for how much particulate matter can be released into the atmosphere.

Wittus pellet stoves burn small wood pellets and are the easiest for a new woodstove user as they do not require a chimney — only a pipe directed out through the house wall. With this model, a bin is filled up with the pellets, which provide the fuel source. They have multiple settings to regulate the heat, just like traditional electric thermostats. However, Mr. Wittus said they are not as popular now that oil prices have gone down.

A native of Denmark, Mr. Wittus and his wife travel frequently to factories, showrooms and trade shows throughout Europe to connect with designers and find new stove models to add to their line. Some of the models take up to two years to construct and come in a variety of colors. Most are made of gray or black steel.

After moving to Pound Ridge from the Upper West Side in the late 1970s to raise a family, Mr. Wittus and his wife initially operated a showroom in their home. Mr. Wittus’ father was briefly in the stove business in Denmark, which gave him the idea to expand what was traditionally a functional object into a contemporary showpiece.

His showroom on Westchester Avenue opened 25 years ago and has expanded twice in its present location. It now includes a kitchen that can hold events and demonstrations for dealers and customers. The showroom also sells stove accessories and wood storage bins that can store up to two cords of wood and can be ganged together for additional space.

For more information, call 764-5679 or visit wittus.com.

Wittus-Fire by Design is located at 40 Westchester Ave., Pound Ridge.