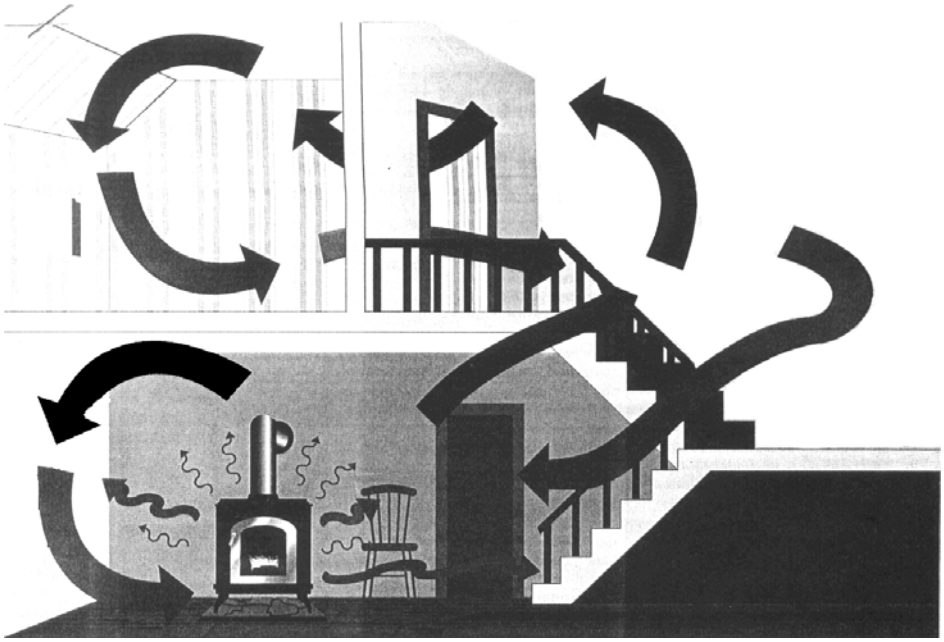
EASIER THAN YOU THINK

One of the nicest things about the gas hearth appliances of the '90s is how affordable, easy and versatile they are to install. Some gas freestanding stoves and fireplaces, for example, can be ''power-vented,'' meaning they can be installed in the interior of the home, and vented through an outside wall as far away as 100 feet. Other gas fireplaces and stoves can be ''direct-vented'' horizontally through the wall. These direct-vent appliances use components sold with them to introduce combustion air and exhaust it through any outside wall.



Radiant heat warms objects within the room; convective heat warms room air, and can be fan–forced to other areas of the home.

Before you decide on a hearth appliance, take a stroll through your home and visualize where you would like your unit installed. If you have an existing fireplace and are in the market for a fireplace insert or gas logs, your decision should be easy. But if you're considering a stove or built-in fireplace, placement will require some thought on your part.

As a rule, heating appliances operate best if they are centrally located. They are best installed on the main floor in one of the rooms you use most often. Placing your appliance near an open stairwell helps to draw warm air near the ceiling up to the second floor, and channel cooler air downstairs. In homes with high ceilings, a circulating ceiling fan will help push the heat down to your living space, while optional or standard fan systems will boost heat output throughout.

If you are considering an appliance with a fan, locate likely electrical sources. If your home has a subspace that is exposed to solar heat during the day, installing your appliance on the opposite side of the house should even out room temperatures. Also consider your family's traffic pattern through the house.

If you are considering a fireplace insert, the dimensions of your fireplace are very important. Measure the width and height of the opening, and the depth of your fireplace at hearth level and 24 inches (610 mm) above the hearth. Also, measure the extension of the hearth in front of the fireplace. Remember that there may need to be structural changes to allow for proper installation. These changes differ by appliance, especially when it comes to venting.

GAS STOVES AND FIREPLACES

Gas appliances vent through an out-side wall, or through a new or existing prefabricated chimney or a relined masonry fireplace. Relining is required by manufacturers, and is important for proper draft.

When gas is burned it forms water vapor, which may seep into the chimney's surfaces, or into your home. A reline with an aluminum or stainless steel gas liner provides a surefire path for condensation to exit the house. Once the reline is complete, if there is considerable space between the inside wall of the chimney and the liner, or if your chimney is on an outside wall in a cold climate, added insulation may be needed to prevent condensation.

Affordable Type B gas vent funnels exhaust vertically from freestanding gas stoves and fireplaces. Direct-vent or power-vented appliances use components sold with the stove or fireplace to draw in fresh outside air and release exhaust through an outside wall.

GAS FIREPLACE INSERTS
An aluminum or stainless steel gas liner, required by the appliance manufacturer, is used to vent your gas fireplace insert inside a masonry fireplace. As with other gas appliances, relining is required by the manufacturer and, depending on the open area between the liner and the chimney, added insulation may be necessary to keep condensation from forming.

GAS LOGS
Vented gas logs must be vented through an existing chimney with proper draft.

FIREPLACE ENCLOSURES
Glass fireplace enclosures are not only extremely functional additions, they also give any fireplace a fabulous finished look. From bold design statements to subtle whispers of warmth, today's glass door systems offer unique benefits that open fireplaces can't match.

Their most important benefit comes into play with gas logs. When gas logs are installed, the fireplace's damper is removed or permanently fixed in a partially open position. This can contribute to the heat in your home escaping up the flue. Glass fireplace enclosures, on the other hand, take the place of a damper by providing a shield between the warm air in your home and the great outdoors. In fact, some are over 90 percent airtight, providing a much more effective heat loss barrier than a damper.

STYING OPTIONS
Standard glass enclosures come in all shapes and sizes for arched or rectangular brick, stone or marble fireplaces. A wide selection of handfinished and fitted custom doors are also available for arched and multi-sided fireplaces, as well as oversized openings.

Approved glass doors for metal, factory-built fireplaces can also be added to installations.

Door frames range from ornate, lavish affairs to 'barely there' contemporary styles that seem to disappear before the flames. For the ultimate understatement, unframed doors with hidden hinges are also available.

Bi-fold, cabinet and even sliding glass doors are available, in your choice of tinted, bronzed or mirrored tempered safety glass. Or choose beveled glass, a smart styling statement that veils the flames and hides ashes in between fires.

SIZING
Before shopping for a fireplace enclosure, it's best to have the dimensions of your fireplaces on hand. Measure the height of your rectangular fireplace on both the left and right side, and its width at the top and bottom. It's likely, especially if your fireplace is arched or if you choose a custom design, that your hearth product retailer will re-measure your fireplace before ordering the doors from the manufacturer.

If you are buying a gas log set at the same time you are purchasing your fireplace enclosure, measure the width of the floor in your fireplace's firebox as well. This will ensure that the log set you purchase is properly sized for your fireplace.

OPERATION
Once you start your fire, open the doors for the warming benefits of radiant heat. Most manufacturers suggest that you keep the doors open to prevent breakage or frame discoloration from exposure to high temperatures.