

Finding the Perfect Fireplace

Earthcore makes efficient, cost-effective, and beautiful fireplaces from the land of ice and fire.

By Zack Harold

Along Iceland's southern shore sits Mt. Hekla. It's an impressive snow-capped ridge shaped like an upturned boat, a popular place for hiking, skiing, and rock climbing. But Hekla is also the most active of Iceland's many volcanoes, erupting more than 20 times over the last 1,000 years.

Those eruptions have created huge deposits of pumice at the mountain's base, as glowing red magma infused with gas bubbles cooled off to form highly-pressurized, porous, and lightweight stone. The process has gone on for millennia. But it was only about 80 years ago that a Danish chimney company realized this pumice—Mother Nature's own firebrick—made highly effective chimney insulation. The company then began building fireboxes from pumice, too, and the **Isokern** fireplace was born.

It wasn't until the 1990s that Isokern products became widely available in the U.S. **Carl Spadaro**, who'd cut his teeth in the investment business, took over the company's North American operations. He formed his Jacksonville, Florida-based company **Earthcore** and started traveling the U.S. and Canada, attending trade shows and touting the benefits of his product to any architect, government building official, or contractor who'd listen.

Unlike a traditional brick-and-mortar fireplace, Isokern fireplaces and chimneys are made with organic pumice aggregate, which go together quickly thanks to their inter-locking construction. "Nobody knew what modular masonry technology was," he says.

It didn't take long for customers to realize Earthcore's Isokern fireplaces didn't just go together quickly. They also looked great and were more fuel efficient than traditional fireplaces. And since the material comes from the belly of the earth, they will last forever.

Isokern's popularity has inspired some knockoffs over the years, but these competitors make their modular components from concrete, not pumice. "Fire and concrete don't like each other. It eventually cracks and fails," Spadaro says. Pumice, meanwhile, is incredibly resilient. "You're using materials that are 6,000 years old," he says. "Nothing beats a volcano."

Earthcore has a network of 10 solution centers across the country and is available through more than 400 dealers nationwide.



"THEY GO TOGETHER LIKE LINCOLN LOGS."

**BRIAN THOMPSON
TEXAS-BASED HOME BUILDER**



Because it is so lightweight and well-insulated, Earthcore's Bvetto series can be installed directly onto wood flooring. It is the tallest of the company's fireplace options, with a 52-inch finished opening height. And, like all Isokern models, customers can choose from a variety of hand-laid firebrick options to suit their decorating style.



Pumice is so plentiful around Mt. Hekla that harvesting the stone requires little more than scraping off a few feet of black soil and digging up the loose rock. Trucks move the stone to a nearby port where it is loaded onto ships, bound for Earthcore's state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Chesapeake, Virginia. Once there, the pumice is pressed into a mold under intense pressure in an automated plant to form the 23 unique pieces used to construct the line Isokern fireplaces.

Houston, Texas-based homebuilder Brian Thompson has been using Earthcore products for 15 years. He says customers appreciate Isokern's efficiency and appearance but really love the cost savings. Materials for Isokern fireplaces cost more than brick but can be built so quickly the labor costs are drastically lower. "Masonry might take a week," Thompson says. Isokern fireplaces, meanwhile, are assembled in less than a day. "They go together like Lincoln Logs," he says.

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF EARTHCORE

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The Magnum series can be used for indoor or outdoor installations and will burn either gas or wood. It is available in widths up to 72 inches and can be installed on a wood sub-floor using Earthcore's proprietary Fire-Lite stand, making this product versatile for even a second-floor installation.

Earthcore's gas-burning Vent Free series can be installed in places where a typical fireplace would not go, such as a multi-story high-rise where there are no outlets for venting. This model, like the Magnum and Standard series, is available with a double-sided visibility option and can be used in indoor or outdoor applications.

Isokern's pumice fireplaces heat up quickly and retain that heat. Not only does this make them more efficient than traditional masonry installations, it reduces creosote buildup since the smoke stays warm as it escapes the chimney. Earthcore's GreenTech solution, a proprietary catalytic combustor that is easily installed on Isokern's Magnum and Standard series fireplaces, creates the world's cleanest-burning open hearth masonry fireplace. The combustor reduces emissions by up to 80% and qualifies under the EPA's Phase II Voluntary Wood Burning Fireplace Program. **gb&d**