

Log burner came just in time for summer



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We've had a shiny new clean air log-burner fitted to Eco Worrier HQ, just in time for the warmer weather.

In a case of who we know, not necessarily what we know, Mrs Eco Worrier and I took advantage of the Government's drive to make New Zealand homes more energy efficient. An old friend of ours, Dan Howard, recently joined Energy Mad, a company which does "energy audits" on homes and suggests ways of making Kiwis' houses more environmentally friendly, particularly in terms of heating.

Knowing we have a house built

in the late 1950s, Dan approached us about being part of a pilot programme for the EECA's Energy Wise scheme. Long story short, he came round with his clipboard, pen and other bits and pieces, assessed the energy efficiency of our house, and declared us in need of a better heating option than the old open fire in the lounge. With the Government paying the loan interest, we've borrowed a few thousand from ASB for our new Ethos clean-air log-burner, which now sits proudly in the original fireplace. Eco Smart Homes managing director Fraser Scott says the company's work is currently limited to the Waipa Lines Company's area, but he's hopeful the firm can offer the service throughout the Waikato-King Country next year, once he has other lines companies and the likes of Wel Networks on board.

As romantic and mystical as open fires are, they are hopelessly inefficient. More than 70 per cent of the heat goes up the chimney, which I am sure you'll agree is horribly wasteful – particularly if you're paying for firewood (which we don't, but you get my drift). And then there is the waste: because we had to burn so much wood for minimal heat, there was more ash. The old open fire churned endlessly through the fuel, even if some of it was scavenged from the front lawn of our neighbours, who're busily renovating their home. (The old borer-ravaged rimu walls of our neighbour's house have literally kept my family warm over the last few months and saved them the hassle of disposing of it.)

But back to the new log-burner: the tradesman who fitted the fire, flue and chimney extension did an absolutely splendid job, and it really does look rather cool. Not

only does it throw out the heat at an incredible rate, it also burns the wood far more efficiently and so we use substantially less. Lighting the darned thing is a bit weird though, I must say. After years of shoving loads of old newspapers in the open fire to get it going, the Ethos is a breath of fresh warm air. You toss in a couple of firelighters, pile on your kindling and them some bigger bits of wood, light it, and away it goes. No newspaper needed, you just open what we've called "the throttle", air rushes on in and the fire roars into life. Once it's roaring, you close the throttle and generally add only one or two bits of wood every hour. It's quite remarkable and has made a dramatic difference to the temperatures inside our house: it's like every ounce of heat is pouring out into the lounge, while substantially less smoke pours out into the sky.

The new Ethos burner works nicely in conjunction with the enviro-bodged "double-glazing" in the toilet, and also complements the sheep in the ceiling. Okay, not live sheep as such, but we do have about a foot of natural woollen insulation in our ceiling, and it's just as brilliant (and effective) as the new fire.

The installation of the insulation took place earlier this year. The work of Hawke's Bay firm Apco, it cost a mere \$800 for the whole house and immediately made a dramatic difference, even before the new fire was installed. Apco's Phil Collins was a man of his word, charging exactly what he quoted for the work, which took him and a colleague just a few hours. As Phil clambered around our ceiling, his sidekick fed wool into a machine, which then fired it through a long tube and up into the dark crevasse below our roof.

If you poke your head into our ceiling, you get a strong whiff of eau de woolshed.

The wool is clean and excellent quality, and best of all it's not full of the many chemical compounds which make up numerous other home insulation materials. And of course, it's 100 per cent made in New Zealand.

Credit also to Charlie Brown, who built our home 50 years ago. Charlie obviously thought ahead, and installed a coal range connected to a wetback in the kitchen.

We still use it, and should the power go off, we're safe in the knowledge we can still shower the Junior Eco Worriers and cook dinner without a hassle. Summer might be just around the corner, but with all these heating and insulation improvements at Eco Worrier HQ, I'm already looking forward to next winter.

□ www.ecosmarthome.co.nz