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DCS BY FISHER & PAYKEL



MILES INDUSTRIES/VALOR FIREPLACES



WINDWARD DESIGN GROUP



ON FIRE

Ortal's North American market expands as consumers opt for modern, sleek fireplace designs.

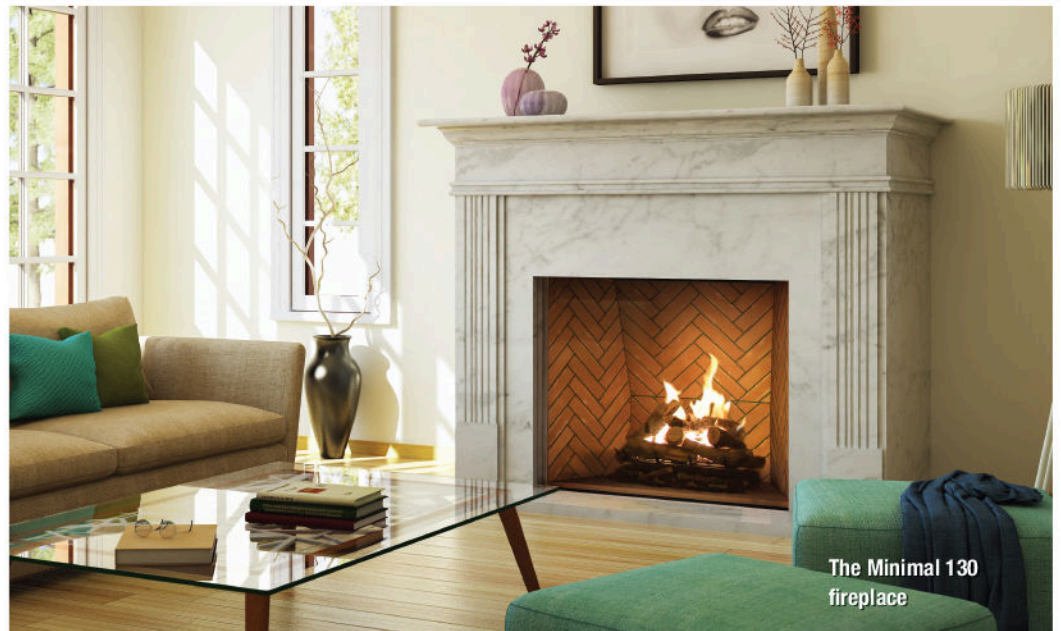
BY SHARON SANDERS



The Space Creator 120 fireplace



The Clear 150 LS fireplace with double glass, fan assisted



The Minimal 130 fireplace

When Ortal USA (Canoga Park, California) came onto the North American hearth scene in 2010, few believed that modern design could ever be considered mainstream in an industry dominated by traditional-style fireplaces.

The company, however, has proved its doubters wrong. Today, Ortal is enjoying the success that it dreamed about from the beginning.

Not only have consumers embraced the company's products, but it has become a trendsetter and a leader: It offers what it calls the largest line of modern fireplaces available in the United States and Canada, with nine basic styles and more than 60 standard products. Its linear direct-vent gas fireplaces were the first of their kind, and they have opened doors to the modern look that has reshaped the industry.

Ortal started out building fireplaces for wood and oil in 1986. It gradually transitioned to modern design and then began to sell its products in



The stand-alone 75x65 Curve Tunnel fireplace

Europe, where the modern look had long been embraced. When the company made the jump from Europe to North America, its modern vibe was not received with open arms.

Gil Ben Zion, COO, says, "It was a shock to the market." Many thought that Ortal's three-sided, frameless linear fireplaces looked unrealistic (they were even compared to fish tanks) and that they

would never catch on with consumers. "We didn't care what anyone thought. We continued to do what we believed we should do in our hearts, and it has paid off," he adds.

As the modern-design movement has grown over the years, Ortal's once-niche fireplaces have become favorites of architects, designers, and consumers looking for something fresh and inspiring. People are drawn to Ortal for its

unique design, clean lines, realistic flame, and overall visual appeal. Its signature lineup of linear fireplaces is the most high-end group in the industry, it says.

What sets Ortal apart as an innovator, Ben Zion reports, is more than the feature set found in its fireplaces. "If a company is an innovator in products alone, it is not a true innovator," he says. "It's much more than that. What makes Ortal an inno-

vator is the DNA of the company.”

He continues, “It’s how we approach everything we do, from creating a new product line to how we are serving our customers. We work like crazy to ensure that our customers are getting what they want. I believe that they see our company as a big family that stands behind them. We care, we listen, and we inspire our customers—because we love what we are doing.”

THE ART OF LISTENING

“You have to be a good listener if you are going to be a great innovator,” Ben Zion explains, adding that one doesn’t come up with great ideas for products in a vacuum. Ortal’s research/development process is truly a grassroots effort. He says, “We reach out to dealers, consumers, architects, designers, and our sales and marketing representatives to find out what they need and what we can improve on: They are the ones who fuel innovation.”

Ben Zion regularly visits specialty hearth stores to get input from their owners and from salespeople who have been selling fireplaces for decades. “If I counted the number of years of knowledge that I am getting from my dealers, it would easily extend to 1,000 years and above, and it’s free knowledge,” he says. “People like to be a part of something that is bigger than they are and want to know that they have voices.”

Ortal pays attention to all of the feedback that it receives and takes it seriously. Ben Zion explains that it’s a balancing act to take all the feedback that he gets in the field and then to implement it in a strategic and practical way.

He says, “We have a talented team in Israel that builds our units, but building a unit is only 50% of the process. The other 50% is what my dealers, consumers, or architects have told us they want. We show them prototypes before a unit goes to market, so we know when we have gotten it exactly right. We want to give them the fireplaces they dream about; that is what makes Ortal unique.”

Ortal proudly introduced its first traditional-style fireplaces this year: the Minimal 110 and Minimal 130. The idea to offer a traditional option came about as a direct result of listening to what people were requesting. “Dealers who loved our modern fireplaces were pushing us to create a traditional version—so after 2.5 years of development, we have something we are proud to add to the Ortal lineup,” Ben Zion says.

Ortal is different in its approach to the traditional models in the sense that it brought its signature features from the modern units and integrated them into the designs for the traditional ones. The Minimal models come standard with a micromesh screen that allows a full view of the flames. Their brick interiors, beautiful log sets, and natural flames give them the look of an authentic masonry wood-burning fireplace.

They also feature dimming halogen lights located above the firebox, rather than below it, to enhance the view of the interior’s design. The Minimal models are available with signature qualities that Ortal has become known for, including its

Cool Wall technology. They were designed with a transitional aesthetic that can be successfully mixed with both traditional and modern decor.

A DESIRE TO INSPIRE

Ortal has always had a passion to inspire the marketplace. It is constantly bringing new products to the table, making improvements to what it already offers, and getting better at everything it does. “We don’t know how to stop,” Ben Zion explains, adding that the company is always coming up with new ways to get people to think differently about fireplaces. “We are not just selling fireplaces; we are selling a dream with a design. A fireplace can change the whole environment of a room, transforming it,” he says.

He often hears from architects who say that Ortal fireplaces inspire (and even challenge) them to create better designs. The company’s new Curve series is a perfect example of inspirational design. It features an impressive 360-degree view of the fire that is a standout in the industry. Ben Zion says,

“We created the Curve because we always have a showpiece in our line that gives people something they can dream about and that causes them to think out of the box.”

The series includes two models: the stand-alone 75x65 Curve and the stand-alone 75x65 Curve Tunnel. It shares the same qualities as the company’s popular linear line (Cool Wall technology, a frameless design, and interior media), and it comes with a variety of aesthetic hood options, in shapes from flat to conical. “It really is the champagne of fireplaces,” Ben Zion says.

As Ortal heads into its sixth year in the North American market, it continues to strengthen and grow its organization. “We work together as a big team—a team that includes the engineers, the welders, and my partners in Israel and extends to everyone in the United States and Canada who is helping us create beautiful, inspirational fireplaces,” Ben Zion says. “I am so fortunate to work with people every day who care and share a vision of excellence.” ■