

Products

by Patrick McCombe

DOMESTIC WATER

Faster Hot Water. Homeowners and businesses can waste 25 gallons of water every day waiting for it to get hot, but you can shorten the wait and reduce the unnecessary consumption with a circulating pump. Circulating pumps temper the water by periodically mixing hot water into the system. Systems

like the *Plumb and Plug Cartridge Circulators* from Taco use a digital timer to cycle the pump on and off as many as ten times a day to coincide with periods of peak water usage. Taco also makes a version with an analog timer with similar capabilities. The analog version has a list price of \$275; the digital version has a list price of \$295.

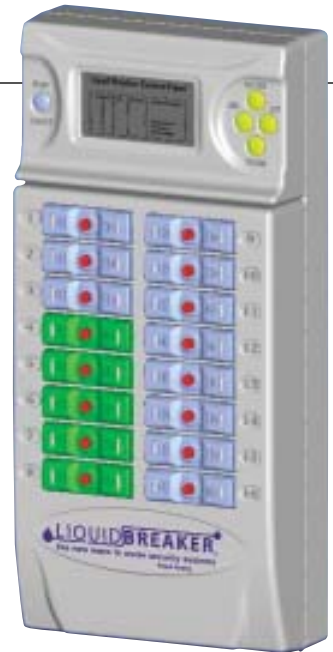
Taco, 401/942-2360, www.taco-havc.com.



All's Well. Few things are as disturbing as running out of domestic water, and it happens all too frequently to homeowners relying on a low-yield well. In most cases, the problem with low-yield wells is they don't collect groundwater fast enough to keep up during times of high demand. The *Well Manager* uses a pretty simple method to produce more water from a low-yield well.

During the workday and at night, when the household wouldn't ordinarily call for water, the Well Manager intermittently activates the well pump to fill a nonpressurized tank for later use. When the pressure switch calls for water, it gets it from the nonpressurized tank first, not from the well. Electronic controls monitor operation and prevent running the well dry. According to the manufacturer, the Well Manager can provide enough water for a family of four from wells producing as little as .1 gpm. Prices start at about \$4,000.

Reid Plumbing Products, 800/211-8070, www.wellmanager.com.



Broken Pipe Protection.

Broken water pipes or leaks can ruin a home in a hurry. Stopping leaks before that happens is the rationale behind *Liquid Breaker*. Similar to a conventional breaker panel, the monitoring system uses small sensors connected to shut-off valves that cut the supply of water to the offending pipe or fixture before it's a problem. Competitive products rely on valves that can become stuck from inactivity, but Liquid Breaker's valves are actuated with greater pressure to overcome scale or corrosion in the valve body. In addition, the system shuts off water only to the leaking pipe or fixture, without shutting down the whole house. Valves can be hard-wired or controlled with RF transmitters.

Liquid Breaker, 866/444-0212, www.liquidbreaker.com.

HOME AUTOMATION

Low-Tech Light Control. Home automation doesn't have to mean expensive controls and the ability to call your oven from the road. The *Sensor Plug* is a simple plug-



in device that automatically turns on a connected device whenever somebody enters the space. Once activated, the device will stay on for 15 minutes unless the motion sensor is reactivated during that time, which starts the counter once again. It works from up to 20 feet away and with devices of

up to 500 watts. It sells for \$15.

Andev, 845/297-8001, www.sensorplug.com.

Mood Swings. For those who enjoy creating interior lighting scenes, the *Toscana Deluxe Programmer* from Leviton offers up to 64 whole-house lighting schemas. The DHC (Decora Home Controls) device uses x10 protocol and can handle up to 256 individual devices. It includes set-up wizards for easier programming and includes Leviton's Intellisense Technology, which reduces signal problems caused by line interference. The controller sells for about \$480, and compatible devices average about \$50 per load.

Leviton, 800/833-3532, www.leviton.com.



Sexy Switches. Providing your customers with lighting controls that make their life easier without bogging them down in technology they don't need or understand is a delicate balance. If you're looking for a lighting controller that isn't too scary, you might consider *Home Touch*.



According to the manufacturer, Home Touch uses a communication technology similar to x10 but more reliable. Switches can turn lights on and off from up to 1,000 feet away using the home's existing wiring. The controllers are available in white, almond, ivory, and black in both Decora and Home Touch's own designs. A 2,000-square-foot house with ten modules usually costs about \$3,000 installed.

LiteTouch, 888/548-3824, www.litetouch.com.

Automation in a Box. If you're building a customer's dream vacation home, you might suggest the *Shell Home Genie*. The home management system allows homeowners to control their heating and cooling, turn on lights or appliances, and capture video from a remote location using a broad-band internet connection.

Available contact switches allow monitoring of doors, windows, file cabinets, and even the collection of fine wine in the cellar. Starter kits sell for \$600 on the company's website.

Shell Energy Services, 866/677-4355, www.shellhomegenie.com.



MANUFACTURED FIREPLACES & ACCESSORIES

Stand Tall. The short firebox common to many manufactured fireplaces tends to look small and boxy when compared to a classic masonry fireplace. The *Colonial Wood-Burning Fireplace* from Lennox has a noticeably taller front opening that



gives it a more traditional appearance. It also has an interior that looks more like actual brick and a front that minimizes exposed sheet metal. Builder-friendly features include built-in nailing tabs and an integral damper. It uses 10-inch, double-

wall flue pipe and has a base price of about \$1,400.

Lennox Hearth Products, 800/953-6669, www.lennoxhearthproducts.com.

Rock Solid. I think of stone mantels as a defining detail in Edwardian manors and medieval castles, but they also make a nice addition to more modest properties. Forshaw makes a line of *Stone Mantels* that install quickly and easily — without a mason. They're secured to the wall with thinset, and they're sized for most factory-built fireplaces. Prices average about \$900. The "Greek-inspired" Aegean is shown.

Forshaw, 800/367-7429, www.forshaws.com.



Plug In. I remember a childhood friend's family setting up their electric fireplace every year so they could have a place for hanging the stockings and snapping holiday photos. Unfortunately, the light bulb and rotating drum meant

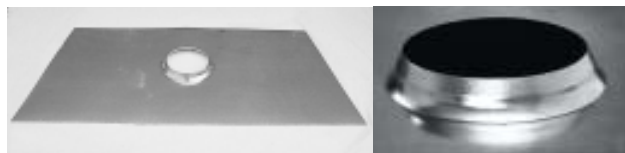


to simulate flames wasn't very convincing, but times have changed. In fact, I did a double take when I saw the *OptiFlame* at this year's Builders' Show. The electric fireplace is available in free-

standing and built-in models from 23 inches to 48 inches wide and eliminates the hassles of installing a gas line or flue. It seems like the perfect fireplace for homes in the city and for rooms that need a little romantic boost. It's even available with remote control. Generally, prices are in the \$500 to \$750 range.

Dimplex, 800/668-6663, www.dimplex.com.

Top Hat. Forshaw's *Chase Top Flashing* is not a fireplace accessory that homeowners will display with their brass tools and bellows, but it's at least as important. Designed to cap off-site-built wood chases, it makes installing a manufactured fireplace easier because it will save at least one trip to your sheet-metal fabricator. The preformed flashing is made



from 26-gauge, G-90 galvanized steel and has an upturned lip that encircles the flue for better water resistance. It's available for flues of from 5³/₄ inches to 16 inches outside diameter with one, two, or three holes. Sizes go from 3x3 feet to 4x8 feet. One-hole chase tops run about \$25.

Forshaw, 800/367-7429, www.forshaws.com.

MANUFACTURED FIREPLACES & ACCESSORIES

Breathing Room. While fireplaces are good for many things, improving indoor air quality doesn't usually jump to mind as one of them. The *FreshAir Gas Fireplace* is a little different. It uses a heat-recovery ventilator to extract heat from exhaust gases and to introduce fresh air into the building at the same time. The balanced combustion reduces the buildup of interior humidity and the spilling of exhaust gases into the living space. To make installation easier and to allow greater flexibility of placement, the ventilator can be located up to 54 feet away from the firebox. Installed prices run about \$6,000.

Heatilator, 877/427-8368, www.freshairfireplace.com.

