



The large, free-standing fireplace in this Portsmouth home is framed in Peacock Green granite slabs that sparkle in gold when a fire is burning.

Heart and hearth of the home

One couple's dream home challenged builders and designers alike with a free-standing fireplace

BY CHELSEA

WONACOTT-MERSHON

chelsea@eastbaynewspapers.com

PORTSMOUTH — When Bob and Marlene McBriar built a new home in Portsmouth, Marlene got everything she wanted — so goes the husband-wife joke that all Bob wanted was a big screen TV to watch the Jets play. Yet on a tour of their waterfront home, Bob is the one whose eyes gleam with happiness as they behold all the little things like the double-paned windows, recessed lighting and crown molding.

Their 13th home has countless features that make it comfortable beyond comparison, but one thing in particular makes it unique beyond the ordinary: a huge, free-standing fireplace. It dominates the home's entrance and anchors the entire first floor.

The hearth has open sight lines on three sides, so it literally frames views of the Sakonnet River from many angles. Yet despite the draw of the scenic vista outside, the

greenish, black granite slabs inevitably hold one's eyes captivated by the sheer size, weight and magnificence of the undertaking.

The concept of a free-standing fireplace came when the McBriars told architect Bob Morin they wanted a house without interior walls; they wanted to see the water from anywhere in the house. So practically all the rooms flow into the next without barriers, and the fireplace is the centerpiece of it all.

Mr. McBriar said that when he took the idea out to bid, he had plenty of builders reluctantly walk away.

"I had people who told me, 'No, I can't do this,' " he said.

When all was said and done, the framing was welded from steel that runs the entire height of the house and allows for a brick fireplace to "hang" off it. On top of the bricks, Mr. and Mrs. McBriar selected Peacock Green granite slabs; it took 25 different-sized pieces to finish. Their fireplace measures almost six feet on each side.

The Peacock Green features beads of gold threaded through a deep forest green and mottled

black stone. When a fire is lit, the light cast from flames makes those subtle sparks of gold just glimmer.

Mr. McBriar remembers feeling "concerned about how it would look in the end" because he couldn't visualize it, but once they decided on the Peacock Green, they used it again in the kitchen countertops, backsplash and island.

In July 2002, when the house was completed, Mr. and Mrs. McBriar had the home of their dreams. To commemorate the end of a long road, the McBriars named their home Tara Lar (Tara is Portuguese for "land," and Lar is Irish for "home").

The McBriars spent so much time designing their house, they've become friends with one of their lead designers, Gaye Weatherly of Weatherly Stone and Tile.

Ms. Weatherly helped them choose the fireplace granite style and then went on to choose styles throughout the rest of the house, from ceramic limestone floor tiles, to white Artesian marble and beach glass in the bathrooms.