

Home Zone: Dumbwaiter a smart solution for carrying firewood

by Linda Pescatore

Lugging heavy logs from the basement to your fireplace can be tiring and messy, but the WoodWaiter from W.B. Fowler Industries of Quebec can lighten the load.

The WoodWaiter is essentially a dumbwaiter that lifts a sturdy roll-out basket from a lower level through a trap door in your floor. The device can even be installed inside a hearth, conveying freshly chopped wood next to your fireplace without tracking chips and splinters through the house.

Powered by an electric motor, the WoodWaiter features a key-operated control and uses standard 110-volt electricity. A built-in circuit breaker stops the unit in the event of overloading or jamming, according to the company Web site, www.woodwaiter.com. The WoodWaiter locks securely in position whenever the key is turned off.

The WoodWaiter is not attached to the basement floor but instead hangs from the floor joists of the level above (or from the hearth). It is shipped assembled, can be installed by a handyman or experienced do-it-yourselfer, requiring no specialized tools, the company says. It will work in any house with sufficient clearance.

An extra key control can be installed in the basement to allow operation from either end.

W.B. Fowler offers a choice of 12 models that vary in basket size - accommodating either standard 16- or 24-inch logs - and distance that the basket must travel. Most modern homes will fall into the medium range of about 6 1/2 feet, according to the company, but distances from about 4 feet to 8 feet can be accommodated.

LOG ROLLING - The WoodWaiter makes easy work of carrying a heavy load of firewood from the basement to the hearth. CNS Photo courtesy of W.B. Fowler Industries. **DECKED OUT** - A deck made of precast concrete 'stone' requires much less upkeep than traditional wooden decks. CNS Photo courtesy of Dekstone. Prices, which include all duties for U.S. shipments, range from \$1,534 to \$2,750.

Of course, you can use the WoodWaiter for hoisting other items besides firewood. But if you want a device that will lift items like groceries, laundry, tools and meals higher than just one level, consider Fowler's HandyWaiter. It will carry loads weighing as much as 200 pounds with multiple stops, as high as 40 feet. Prices begin at \$4,066.

STACKING THE DECK

When it comes to leisurely outdoor living, the last thing you want is more work. Dekstone, a new decking product made of precast concrete, eliminates the scrubbing, sanding and staining that comes with traditional wood decks, according to Stepstone Inc., the Southern California company that manufactures Dekstone.

Made from a 4,000-pounds-per-square-inch concrete mixed with a choice of four pigments - Wheat, Agave Verde, Sterling Gray and Tuscan Amber - and reinforced with a welded wire mesh, Dekstone looks like expensive natural stone. Since it is custom-poured for each installation, there are slight variations in color that make each Dekstone site unique.

The long-lasting, durable Dekstone is well-suited for areas that are exposed to extreme weather conditions, including fire-prone environments, because the noncombustible material is impervious to rot, mold and pests, according to Stepstone.

Dekstone comes with complete installation instructions and can be installed by the do-it-yourselfer, although it will require special tools, such as a diamond-blade masonry saw, according to company literature. Such tools may often be rented.

Dekstone costs \$9-\$10 per square foot for materials, not including shipping. It comes with a 10-year warranty.

In California, Dekstone is available at San Jose Forest Products and Dixieline Lumber. Nationwide, Dekstone can be purchased directly from Stepstone. Call 800-572-9029 or visit www.dekstone.com for more information.