

# MOUNTAIN House & HOME

Planning, Building & Remodeling Your Colorado Home

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## Breathe Easier

More mountain homeowners are using home oxygen enrichment systems

**F**OR CHERYL SABAN, IT WAS A no-brainer to have a home oxygen enrichment system installed in her vacation home in Aspen. Her husband's altitude sickness had become, at times, so severe it landed him in the hospital. So when they built their home in Aspen, they had The Oxygen Company of Aspen install oxygen ports in every room of their home.

"My husband is able to enjoy his time in Aspen now without worrying so much about the possibility of altitude

sickness," Saban says.

David Kahnweiler of Illinois also purchased a vacation home in Aspen and ordered an oxygen enrichment system on the recommendation of his builder. When he arrives in Aspen, he spends his first two days in his oxygenated home to acclimate and combat his altitude sickness. "It's very helpful," he says.

Even full-time residents of Aspen, like Hana Pevny, use home oxygen enrichment systems to acclimate after being away on business trips, or to simply

get a better night's sleep. Pevny also uses the portable headset option the company offers to bounce back more quickly from rigorous workouts, and to break up lactic acid and aid in muscle recovery, she says.

The Oxygen Company, a successful business providing personal, non-medical oxygen, is perhaps best known for its bottled oxygen product called Oxia. The personal oxygen device sells for about \$60 and holds 8.2 gallons of 90 percent compressed oxygen, compared

The Ambient System can control the oxygen levels of entire rooms, and the more expensive Altitude Control System allows the homeowner to set the oxygen level at a specific elevation.



to normal air, which contains about 20 percent oxygen content.

HP Reilly, CEO, says he was seeking a non-medical way to address altitude sickness using oxygen in the home when he ran across a company in Korea that was producing whole home oxygen units for use in urban, highly polluted areas. To his delight, he learned that the same kind of units used in Asian homes could be used in high-elevation homes.

In 2005, The Oxygen Company began home installations when a friend of Reilly's, who is a builder, suggested he set it up in a client's vacation home because the homeowner suffered from altitude sickness. Reilly installed the oxygen ports throughout the home, along with an elevation monitoring system and digital wall panel for approximately \$60,000.

With the system, homeowners are able to program in their originating elevation, and the system toggles oxygen levels between the two elevations to help people acclimate to the high-elevation environment. The homeowners were ecstatic with the success of the system in alleviating their altitude sickness and since that time, The Oxygen Company has installed systems in close to 100 mountain homes, from Montana to Telluride and Vail.

### How it works

The oxygen system sounds so simple, it's a wonder it wasn't being installed in homes years ago. It can be placed in

a new or existing home with no more difficulty than that of an audio-visual system, says Reilly. The OxySpace oxygen machine is set up in a home's mechanical room, and the tubing that delivers oxygen throughout the home is pulled into rooms, much like an electrical or media cable would be. The oxygen ports look somewhat like a cable television port and are covered by a similar faceplate. The system is powered by plugging the machine into a 120-volt outlet.

In addition to wall ports, The Oxygen Company provides accessories such as a wand, which looks somewhat like a small microphone stand that people can manipulate to create a more directed flow of oxygen. For example, users can direct the oxygen to blow over their head while sleeping. There is also a headset that looks a little like a telephone headset, which blows oxygen close to the face. A special pillow also can act as a diffusing mat, gently blowing oxygen through small holes. Homeowners can add aromatherapy scents, such as lavender, ginger and eucalyptus, to the oxygen system.

### Are there risks?

Reilly says that because his systems deliver non-medical levels of oxygen (medical oxygen is 93 percent or more oxygen) and because there is no pressurized gas within the system, there is no increased fire risk at elevation. The Oxygen Company's systems provide no

LEFT: Directed oxygen flow is the most cost-effective solution when choosing an oxygen system for your home. One of the options is a special pillow that gently blows oxygen through small holes.

more oxygen than one would find at sea level. "It is oxygen enriched air," says Reilly, "it's not 100 percent oxygen, only 60 percent to 70 percent oxygen, and the volume is slow and constant."

### What about maintenance?

The systems are relatively low maintenance, Reilly says. They can deliver oxygen for 3,000 to 4,000 hours before the filter and compressor pump need to be replaced at a cost of about \$200. Aromatherapy cartridges (\$5 each) work for 400 minutes. Each system comes with a two-year warranty, which includes a maintenance check every six months. After the warranty expires, a maintenance check costs less than \$100. Normally, other parts of the system will need to be replaced after 7,500 hours, or about 2 ½ years of use, running 8 hours per day. However, Reilly and his staff check the units once a year and only replace parts when they need to be replaced. This includes the Solenoid Valve and PSA Module, which cost about \$150 for replacement.

### Costs

The Oxygen Company provides three main options, which range in price from \$3,000 to as much as \$100,000.

**DIRECTED FLOW** — The most cost-effective solution is directed flow, which involves a port above the bed that blows oxygen while homeowners sleep. Price range: \$3,000 to \$5,000.

**AMBIENT SYSTEM** — An ambient system changes the oxygen content of entire rooms. Price range: \$10,000 to \$30,000.

**ALTITUDE CONTROL SYSTEM** — Homeowners can set the elevation at which they would like their home to be oxygen-wise, using a digital wall panel. Oxygen levels are constantly monitored and controlled, depending on how homeowners set the unit. Price range: \$30,000 to \$100,000. 🏠



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