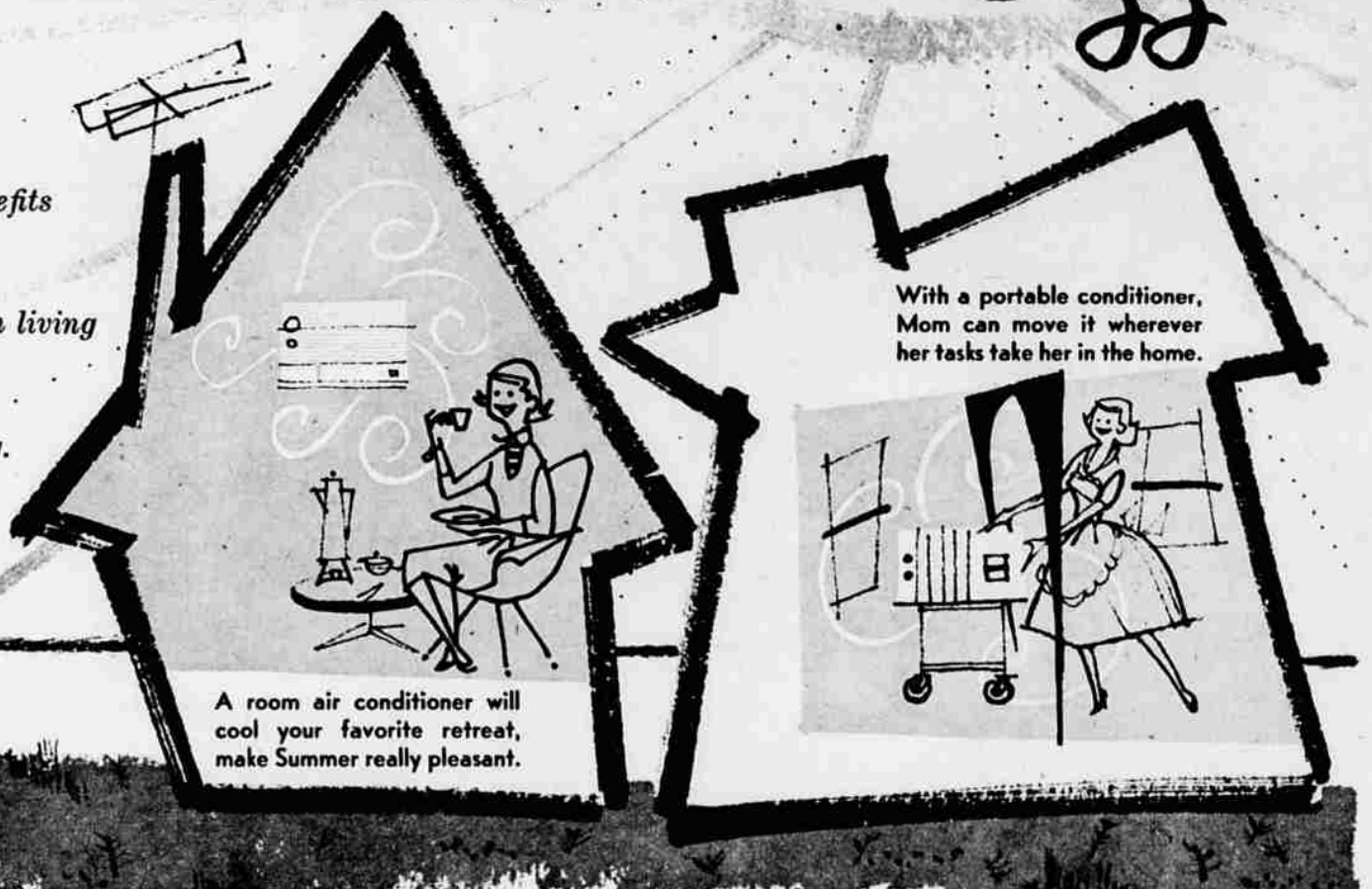
Summer Without the Sizzle

That's one of the benefits of air conditioning, the boon to modern living now within the means of almost any family.



A room air conditioner will cool your favorite retreat, make Summer really pleasant.

With a portable conditioner, Mom can move it wherever her tasks take her in the home.

by Jack Glasner

Remember the good old days when Summer's heat settled over town, and there wasn't any place to cool off except the swimming hole?

One man — a millionaire — decided he'd done enough sweltering and could afford to do something about it. So Charles G. Gates commissioned a pioneer air-conditioning engineer to cool his $900,000 show-place mansion in Minneapolis. This first modern home air-conditioning system had a monster central unit six feet by seven feet and ceiling high, not including the refrigeration unit. And it cost more than most homes do today!

Unfortunately, millionaire Gates never enjoyed his air conditioning. He died before the installation was finished.

That was 40 years ago. Today it's no longer necessary to be a millionaire or to have a spare room for a monstrous cooling unit in order to enjoy Summer comfort. America's air-conditioning industry has slimmed down the size and cost of units so almost anyone can have a cool, comfortable Summer.

Although half a century old, air conditioning has become a common home appliance only during the last five years. Room air conditioners are by far the most popular, but central installations are becoming more common in new homes.

Air conditioners have changed radically since large numbers of buyers got a look at them. Consumers get what they want, and that's certainly true in air conditioners.

A 1955 survey showed that owners and prospective customers objected to air conditioners hanging out the window—inside as well as out! So manufacturers now offer models only 16 inches deep. These can be installed in windows or walls, fitting flush with both sides of the wall.

Many customers also reported that they originally bought a room unit for their bedrooms, but later shifted it to the living room for full family comfort. So manufacturers developed portable units which can be wheeled from room to room and plugged into a regular 110-volt house circuit.

The question of voltage was another important one to air-conditioner owners who often found their unit necessitated new wiring because it required a 220-volt circuit. Today, units up to the ¾-ton size in many models may be plugged right into the ordinary house circuit, drawing less electricity than an electric toaster or iron.

The survey also indicated that most of us aren't sure what size air conditioner is best for a particular room. If an undersize unit is bought, the user will be disappointed because it doesn't cool effectively. Here's a rough rule of thumb to use for room units:

A ½-ton unit will cool rooms up to 250 square feet; ¾-ton, 400 square feet; 1 ton, 600 square feet.

These estimates are for the toughest conditions anywhere —high humidity and high temperature. If the humidity is lower in your area, an air-conditioning unit will cool a larger area.

Don't be intimidated by that term "ton"—it's simply a way of classifying the cooling capacity. Technically, a 1-ton unit will deliver the same cooling effect as melting a ton of ice over a 24-hour period.

If you have more than 600 square feet to cool, a console unit may be the answer. These units come in a wide range of sizes and styles and cost slightly more than window units because of cabinet costs. They can be used for both heating and cooling, replacing a radiator.

Window units in regular and casement models run from about $200 to $600, depending on size, make, and style. But the kingpin of the cooling units is the central air-conditioning system. You can be cool anywhere in your home with one of these!

If you're a do-it-yourselfer, several manufacturers offer units complete with fiberglass ducts which are easy to fabricate and install. An attic installation with ducts leading to various rooms is a not-too-difficult job for the home handyman. With this installation, you can air condition a 1,100-square foot house for between $600 and $750.

If you already have ducts for a warm air heating system, the cost is even less. In many cases, it's simply a matter of installing a cooling unit and connecting it to the existing ducts. Or this may be the time to install a new furnace, replacing the old one with a modern combination air conditioner-furnace for year-around comfort.

An average six-room house in most areas can be completely air conditioned for not more than $2,000, if it's properly insulated. The job could run to $3,500 for a 3,500- →