



Photo courtesy of Great Falls Distinctive Interiors

Another benefit of gas is its convenience. No splitting and stacking wood, no kindling, no crumbling newspaper, no priming the flue, no cleaning up ashes, and no chimney sweeping. But, call me a sentimentalist; these are precisely the activities that make me love the entire concept of wood burning masonry fireplaces. They aren't easy, and like a gourmet meal, maybe they shouldn't be. But perhaps that's a topic better suited for a fireside conversation among friends.

Despite their relative inefficiency, traditional wood-burning masonry fireplaces are still more widely used than any

other type of fireplace. Probably the two biggest reasons for the popularity of wood burning fireplaces are tradition and aesthetics. Since few homeowners use their fireplaces as heat sources, many only use their fireplaces a few times each season, and they are often willing to trade efficiency for nostalgia and sensory appeal. For many nothing can replace the unique scent of pine or oak or hickory, the lure of wood-fed flames, the random sizzles and pops, and the final glowing embers winding down the evening's end.

Form and Function

After talking with a number of prominent designers, architects, and other fireplace professionals, one phrase now echoes in my mind—"A fireplace is the focal point of any room." For this reason, many designers and homeowners still prefer the traditional look of a wood burning fireplace, but regardless of your preference, wood or gas, vented or not, whether you are planning to build a new home, add a fireplace to an existing home, or restore an old fireplace in disrepair, you will most likely want to treat your fireplace as the most important aspect of the room.

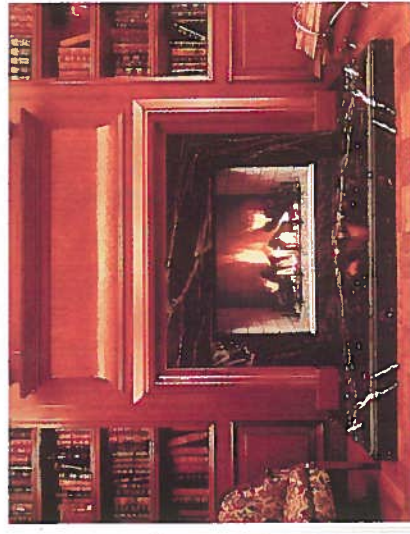


Photo courtesy of Lennox Hearth Products

I say "most likely" because there are always exceptions to the rule. For example, Barry Dixon mentioned that fireplaces in bedrooms are less likely to become focal points for the room. Additionally, Baltimore based Architect David Gleason noted that sometimes a particular view may want to be the focal point of the room, and in such cases the fireplace will play a less significant role.

In addition to placement, one will need to consider proportion. Alice Busch, interior designer and President of Great Falls Distinctive Interiors, Inc., has noted that the trends in fireplaces are moving toward massive proportions. Dixon agrees, but cautions against incorporating fireplaces that are out of proportion with the size of a room. A huge fireplace in a small room will look out of place. Likewise, a small fireplace in a large room will certainly diminish the impact.

Fireplaces that accompany new construction custom homes or home addition projects are probably the easiest to consider. Without pre-existing conditions to contend with, you can work with your builder, architect and interior designer to plan the fireplace of your dreams. As you consider the many

options available when starting from scratch, you will also have the opportunity to specify which rooms will include a fireplace and whether traditional masonry, a prefabricated firebox, or a gas system will best fit the needs of your project.

You will also want to think about how rooms with fireplaces will be organized. According to David Gleason, in order to determine the best way to situate a fireplace one must consider "the size of room, any views or vistas, circulation patterns, furniture placement, and the proportions of the room versus the proportions of the fireplace." Furthermore, will the fireplace work best on an outside wall, an inside wall, or in the center of a room? If the chimney will run along an outside wall, remember that you will need to consider how it will affect the silhouette of your house, and what materials you will want to use so that the chimney fits in with your home's architectural style.

While there are many issues to consider when including a fireplace in the design for a new home or an addition, adding a fireplace to an existing room can be more even more complicated. According to David Gleason, you need to think about how the fireplace will be supported from below. Additionally, how will the fireplace relate to the rest of the existing of room? Because pre-existing conditions often include furnishings, multi-media, entryways, plumbing, electrical wiring, etc., Gleason feels that the easiest way to add a fireplace is to use a pre-fabricated firebox.

These factory built, zero clearance, insulated, fireboxes are suitable for both wood and gas burning, can be installed almost anywhere, and traditional design elements such as mantles, surrounds, or hearths can be specified separately. In addition, there is no need for extra reinforcement, and since ventilation can be accomplished by using insulated piping instead of masonry chimneys, thousands of dollars in savings can be passed on to the homeowner.

Weighing the options and deciding on the best fireplace design for a home can be an involved process, but historically restoring and preserving fireplaces that date back to colonial times

STEP-BY-STEP RELINING A CHIMNEY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EARLY BIRD CONSTRUCTION



FIGURE 1: Job begins with scaffold.



FIGURE 2: 1840s farmhouse showing living room fireplace (before.)



FIGURE 3: Forms ready for pour.



FIGURE 4: Pouring two separate flues for the furnace and fireplace.



FIGURE 5: Finish pour.



FIGURE 6: Chimney brickwork restored.



FIGURE 7: (After) Stone cleaned and restored. Relined damper installed. Hearth is ready to burn.



FIGURE 8: Finished product ready for another 100 years.