

winter

A guide to the various types of fireplaces

warmth



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PHOTOS BY TOBIAS ROMANIUK



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A new fireplace is one of those projects where you can keep it simple and cost effective, or go all out and create a stunning new space in your home. You can hire out the entire project, or DIY that cool mantle and hearth you've been dreaming about. The choices out there are endless, from rustic stone wood burning fireplaces with great mantles and stone hearths, to high efficient, ultra modern pieces that take up no more space than a flat screen TV.

So, where do you start? Gas? Wood? Electric? Start by taking a walk through a showroom, familiarize yourself with the various products, and arrange an in-home consultation with an expert who can help you determine which option is best for your home. Maybe you have your heart set on the smell of a traditional wood burning fireplace, and you enjoy the exercise of cutting and splitting wood, or perhaps you lead a faster paced life and require heat on demand with the touch of a remote control. Cost is an obvious factor, but there are plenty of options for all budgets.

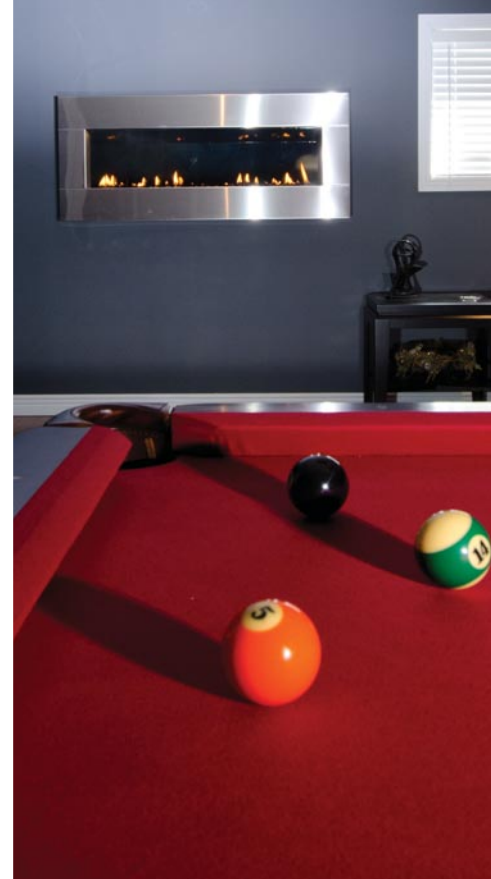
Wood/Pellet Burning

There's nothing like a crackling real wood fire. Wood burning fireplaces are available as an insert or as a wood stove, and both are offered in high efficiency models. Up-front costs are generally a little higher than gas if you factor in the venting and installation costs. Venting for a wood burning unit is far more labour intensive than for a gas unit, and the product used for venting is expensive as well. Insurance companies will insist that the fireplace is professionally installed, and vented to certain specifications for fire safety. You will certainly want to consider chimney cleaning and ash disposal as part of a regular maintenance routine.

Gas

There are a variety of gas fireplaces, from inserts to freestanding units that look like wood burning fireplaces. Gas or propane units are very low maintenance but will likely require a technician if problems occur. A gas burning fireplace will allow for greater control of heat regulation than a wood fire. You will need to take





into consideration venting, either through an existing chimney with a B-Vent, or direct venting through an exterior wall.

Propane tank placement will require 10 feet from any window or doorway, and cannot be installed under a deck, with consideration being given to ease of access for refueling. The insert, venting, and gas connections should be made by a certified installer. A gas fireplace will require bonding of the gas line to the electrical ground in your home as well. These services can all be arranged by your supplier at the point of purchase. Be sure to take this opportunity to upgrade your fire detector to a combination smoke/carbon monoxide detector.

One of my favourite projects on a renovation, which has the potential for creating a huge visual impact and functionality, is to re-face and convert a tired looking wood burning fireplace to a high efficient gas insert. Integrate modern cabinetry, and create a media center around it to breathe new life into a dated room and turn it into a modern, multi-functional family space. This type of project is very easily done with minimal tear up by re-using an existing fireplace and chimney.

Electric

You will find interesting new product choices available for electric units, from inserts to wall mounts, and even one that emits a mist to give the appearance of smoke. An electric fireplace is generally used as a supplementary heat source, more for visual effect in a room than for heat, with far lower up-front and operational costs. Electric fireplaces will generally require low maintenance and have low installation costs. Consider this as the equivalent of a baseboard heater. An electric fire place will require a dedicated circuit by code, as you may run the risk of overloading an existing circuit. Never use an extension cord for this purpose.

Fireplaces shown are available at Atlantic Fireplaces or Home Elements with the exception of the real stone fireplace, built by Jim and Sue Bennett of Avalon Design and Installation. 🏠