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# HEARTH & HOME

## A GUIDE TO CHOOSING A FIREPLACE

By Designer, Jessica Cinnamon

**The fireplace has always** been an essential part of the home – historically out of necessity as a primary source of heat and light; today as a symbol of style and for the ambiance it brings to the home. While homes have evolved, one thing hasn't changed – the fireplace continues to be the hub of the home, a natural gathering place and focal point.



Photo by Stephani Buchman

Regency Fireplaces

*Pro Tip*

**PROPANE AND NATURAL GAS FIREPLACES OFTEN USE GLASS AND STONES WITHIN THE FIRE BOX OR PIT, WHICH EVENLY DISTRIBUTES THE GAS AND CREATES A BARRIER BETWEEN THE BURNER AND FLAMES.**

Your fireplace media is also an opportunity to add some colour, sparkle and sophistication to the unit.



In addition to traditional placement in the living rooms of virtually every home on the block, fireplaces have become unique features raising the bar on bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, offices and outdoor entertainment areas. Each application has specific requirements, and a style that's best-suited to its intended placement and purpose.

If you're considering installing a fireplace, there are crucial steps to follow to ensure your project's success.

Before you get too deep into the ashes, ensure the fireplace is permitted and possible. Regardless of the type of dwelling, obtaining a building permit is essential, and failure to do so may lead to costly delays, legal complications, or even the removal of completed work.



*Pro Tip*

**WHEN CHOOSING A GAS OR ELECTRIC FIREPLACE, PAY ATTENTION TO EACH UNIT BTU OUTPUT.**

The rule of thumb is approximately 40 BTUs per square foot of living space. So, a fireplace with 40,000 BTUs will be sufficient to heat a space measuring 1,000 sq. ft.



Once you know if you can do it, find out what exactly can be done. Is your space suited to the style of fireplace you're dreaming of? Here's my overview of three popular options:

A wood-burning fireplace is unlike anything else, with its crackling sound, smoky aroma, and warm, flickering glow. However, installing a wood-burning fireplace can be a costly effort, requiring major structural work and a chimney built of masonry, which may not always be a viable option in some homes. Beyond that, owning a wood-burning fireplace requires effort, including building and maintaining fires, storing firewood and annual cleaning.

Gas fireplaces offer all the allure of a traditional fireplace at a fraction of the cost and effort and added safety,

making them a popular choice among many homeowners today. Modern advancements in technology have made gas fireplaces more stylish and efficient than ever, such as radiant gas fireplaces that circulate heat efficiently while keeping the surrounding area cooler – a great option for condo owners and families with small children and pets. A gas fireplace can be installed virtually anywhere, and a simple flick of the switch instantly wraps the room in a warm glow. Simply put, gas is easy and low-maintenance, with the ambient beauty of a traditional wood-burning unit.

Electric fireplaces are another great option when a real wood-burning or gas fireplace just isn't an option. This "plug-and-play" option is great addition for condos or homes where a gas line is not possible, or where the

budget doesn't quite match the vision. Electric fireplaces have certainly come a long way, artfully emulating the appearance of real flames, and in some cases, the sound of crackling logs, with some units even equipped with a realistic "smoke" effect. Electric units are easy to use, just plug it in and enjoy the heat and the flickering "flame."

Aside from the fireplace itself, comes everything that surrounds it. In my designs I like to bring in custom built-in shelving surrounding a fireplace as a way to frame this feature, or create a streamlined display with a simple but bold piece of framed artwork, suspended above or placed on the mantel.

Even if a fireplace is no longer functional, it can still be fabulous and serve as a lovely visual focal

point. Arrange firewood neatly inside the fireplace alcove and embellish the mantel space with seasonal decor or candles to achieve a finished appearance. This imaginative technique adds character and elevates a room's overall atmosphere.

The concept of "home" usually encompasses an element of "warmth" in some capacity, often manifested through a comforting style, a cozy feel or an inviting atmosphere. And in my designer opinion, the most wonderful, welcoming home designs encompass all three. Not sure where to start? Look to your fireplace, or the empty spot where you plan to install one, for the easiest and most effective way to warm up your space, and take your place from "house" to "home." ♦



**JESSICA CINNAMON** is the Principal Designer and founder of Toronto based **Jessica Cinnamon Design Inc.** The firm is a multi-disciplinary design company that has become known for creating stylish and well curated interiors. They provide complete bespoke residential design services throughout Toronto Ontario, the GTA, Cottage Country, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

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