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# Home IS WHERE THE hearth is

by AMANDA SHIELDS • photos KIELY RAMOS PHOTOGRAPHY



## Fireplace fundamentals

The fireplace has long been the hub of the home, but this fixture has since evolved from its original utilitarian origins for cooking and as a source of light and heat. In addition to its functional uses, in the modern home, a fireplace is also seen as a key focal point for entertainment and ambience. While entirely optional from a functional perspective, it remains a steadfast highlight in many homes.

With that being said, you've finally decided it's time to crank up the heat in your own home with a new fireplace. Perhaps you're adding a brand-new unit, or your existing fireplace could use an update. Before you reach for the marshmallows, you have some other decisions to make. What type of fireplace is best suited to your space, and how do you intend to use it? Here are some fireplace fundamentals to keep in mind.

### ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES... AND SOME OBSTACLES

It's safe to say that almost anything's possible with an unlimited budget, but most of us face obstacles in one form or another, with financial and structural restrictions topping the list. If you live in a condominium suite, you'll also have the condo board to contend with. Consult a professional designer or contractor to determine what's actually possible, given your budget, the specs of the space, your functional needs and your esthetic vision.

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

While the Great Room is the most frequently chosen place to add a fireplace, you can break from tradition



and consider adding one to your front foyer, kitchen, dining room, principal bedroom, study, the bathroom or even the backyard. While whimsical, keep in mind that unconventional places may not yield the best return on your investment if your goal is to boost your property value.

### SO MANY OPTIONS

Wood-burning, gas and electric, oh my! Each type of unit has its pros and cons, so do your research before you buy.

A wood-burning fireplace is the real deal. The quality of light and heat and the smell are key reasons people are drawn to the hearth like a moth to a flame. But admittedly, this type of unit is high maintenance, from the structural requirements, to building and tending to the fire, buying (or chopping) and storing firewood, and annual cleaning and/or inspections.

Gas fireplaces have gained in popularity for those who want fire with the flick of a switch, remote control or a smartphone app! Gas fireplaces are efficient and result in less heat transfer, reducing the risk of damage to nearby surfaces, furniture and artwork hung over the mantel. On the flipside, a gas unit can be costly, especially if you

need a gas line installed. Furthermore, the authenticity can be lacking, with no crackling flame or woody aroma.

Where a real fireplace isn't possible, an electric unit can be a good solution. These are easy to source and once delivered, you just put it in place, plug it in and enjoy. If you change your mind, you can move it like any other piece of furniture. While the unit itself is less expensive than its wood-burning or gas counterparts, an electric fireplace can be expensive to operate, given the high cost of electricity.

### STYLE FILE

Alongside the type of fireplace you choose, you'll also need to decide on a style. Consider details such as the finishing of the firebox and surround, the trim, mantel, chimney and wall around it. Ensure your choice aligns with the broader esthetic and theme of your home.

### ADDED VALUE

Aside from your own enjoyment, a fireplace can add value when you choose to sell your home, so consider this as an investment on all sides. But in the meantime, sit back, put your feet up and crank up the heat!



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