

Fireplaces, is your home ready for one?

Contributed by richart khalil

In any room, a fire is a focal point; it sets the aesthetic terms, provides movement, color and warmth. Therefore the choice of the fireplace becomes essential in a way that fits your lifestyle.

Fireplace components

Chimney and flue: are integral elements of any fire. The gases inside the chimney are hotter and less dense than the air in the room, so the air is drawn from the room, up to the flue along with any smoke and combustion gases, to the outside air via chimney.

Hearth: is composed of two main elements: the back hearth – directly under the fire – and the front hearth – which extends into the room. The back hearth should be of firebrick or heatproof screed. The front hearth is composed of a constructional hearth build into the floor and a decorative one on top of it, usually made of stone, marble, tile or slate.

Basket or grate: can be stand-alone item within the recess, or part of a larger insert made of cast iron or steel. Baskets are available in wide range of designs.

Fireback: is an optional element in an open fire, which protects the masonry and reflects heat back into the room.

Lintel: carries the weight of the chimney.

Mantel: is the decorative frame to an open fire.

Safety and preparation

Before you light your fire make sure you carry out a few safety checks: Check ventilation. All appliances, whatever fuel they burn, need an adequate flow of air for combustion. Is the chimney lined? If not, corrosive elements in the gases can eat into the mortar and weaken the structure. Has the chimney been swept? Chimneys must be swept regularly as it will help prevent chimney fires and reduces the risk of dangerous fume emissions from blocked appliances. If you have an open fire, pre-warm the chimney before lighting your first fire of the year. Always use a fireguard if there are children or infirm people around. Battery-operated smoke alarms are an invaluable safety item. Use alarms that also detect flammable gas and carbon monoxide leaks. Once the system is understood and the safety measurements are seriously considered, you can choose your fire type – wood, gas or solid-fuel – and the contact specialist fireplace companies.