

Put a wood-burning stove into your fireplace and it could add value to your property as well as saving money on heating bills

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PUBLISHED: 09:02, 13 December 2014 | UPDATED: 10:13, 13 December 2014



Many of us can recall those brutal days when, in the name of modernity, some homeowners began chucking out their old fireplaces and removing awkward chimney breasts to create contemporary spaces with clean lines and flat walls.

Even today, most new-build flats have no hint of a fireplace. After all, who'd want a smoky relic of a bygone age when you can have underfloor heating or slimline radiators?

But times are changing. Soaring heating bills, environmentally-sound and clean fuels, and the return of people wanting more character in their homes have all contributed to a revival of the traditional fireplace and surround.



In fact, a feature fireplace can add up to 5 per cent to a home's value. And at this time of year, the warm glow and crackle of logs burning in the hearth seem very appealing indeed.

'More people are starting to realise that they can have a real fire, even in the city and in smoke-controlled areas,' says David Adamson, of Direct Stoves and Fireplaces (directstoves.com).

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'Technology has advanced — many wood-burning stoves are now DEFRA-approved, meaning you can burn wood and other smokeless fuels even in London terrace properties.

'Not only that, by burning wood you are heating your home as carbon neutrally as possible — and, with a little investment, it will actually save you money long-term.'

Heating just the room that you are in is certainly more cost-effective than centrally heating an entire house. Using wood as your heat source costs 2.5p per kw/h compared with gas at 4p and electricity at 11p, say HETAS, the solid fuels industry body.

And HETAS has seen an unprecedented interest in wood-burning stoves, with more than 200,000 installed last year — up by more than 50 per cent in five years.

It's something that Alexandra Marr from Crieff, near Perth, has noticed.

'We have two open fireplaces, and having spent the summer filling our woodshed, and every weekend since refilling it, we soon realised that it goes through so much more wood compared to a wood-burner.

'So now we have had two wood-burning stoves put into the fireplaces, to save energy and, hopefully, money.'

For those with modest means and a modern home, wood-burners are increasingly the fire of choice.



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Warm glow: Heating just the room that you are in is more cost-effective than centrally heating an entire house

'In the past ten years we've seen a move towards stoves that are more contemporary,' says Tony Ingram, technical service manager of Morso (morso.co.uk). 'People are viewing stoves as a focal point for their home as much as an efficient way to heat it.

'That's why cylindrical, curved shapes are becoming more popular, and stoves with the option to be either wall-mounted or raised on a simple pedestal — they're a real shift away from the more boxy, bulky style of stove.'

British brand Chamwood (chamwood.com) has created new vitreous enamel fire surrounds for wood-burners for spring 2015, aimed at giving a slick finish.

The vibrant glazed panels that surround their wall-mounted Bay stoves start from £150 and include the nautical, Whitty design — it's a new take on Victorian glazed tiles.

For something radical, look north for inspiration to Scandinavia, where ceramic tiled stoves, kakkelovn, have become popular again.

More than 90 per cent of homes in Finland have one of these hugely efficient, chimney-like stoves, which not only look beautiful but also burn very cleanly (two hours of burning is all that's needed to release heat slowly over a 24-hour period). While an open fireplace has 10 per cent efficiency, a ceramic stove has 90 per cent efficiency, says UK specialist the Ceramic Stove Company (ceramicstove.com).

But it's not just the financial incentive that is fuelling the fashion for fireplaces — increasingly they are in vogue, and not just in period country properties.

The most luxurious London apartments have designer fireplaces at the heart of their cutting-edge interiors. Fire 'walls' that create a screen between two areas, as well as a focal point, are both practical and desirable.

Karen Howes, chief executive of interior design company Taylor Howes, created the opulent scheme at Distillery Wharf in Fulham Reach, where the fireplace is an integral part of the design.

'Fireplaces can be used to make a statement with striking designs and the use of top materials. Long and sleek fireplaces have become increasingly popular, being more artistic and sophisticated than traditional designs. This new kind of fireplace can be more imaginatively placed within the room to achieve a dramatic effect.'

Karen Howes finds that wealthy, urban clients tend to prefer easy-to-use gas fireplaces, where minimal smoke emissions allow for the use of bronze finishes and glass facades, making for an elegant, modern yet homely look.

Another trend in the luxury sector is outdoor fireplaces, a step up from the fire pit, resulting in a glamorous outdoor 'room'.

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Contemporary feel: Wealthy, urban families tend to prefer easy-to-use gas fireplaces

Howes installed one on the roof-top garden at Distillery Wharf.

Period properties are also seeing a resurgence in traditional hearths, with owners reinstating the original fireplaces that, until recently, were being ripped out and thrown on skips.

The number of people opening up their fireplaces has risen by 20 per cent over the past three years, according to the National Association of Chimney Sweeps.

'The aesthetic value of choosing an antique or reproduction fireplace is immeasurable,' says Owen Pacey, of Renaissance London (renaissancelondon.com), who has sourced and installed period fireplaces for the likes of Kate Winslet, Robbie Williams and Georgia Jagger, and even mega-rich modern developments, such as One Hyde Park.

'They have the ability to make a house more alluring to live in, function better as a home and make a property more attractive to future buyers.'

He has seen a trend emerging for two fireplaces in one room, as more owners of Victorian homes knock through to create a large open-plan space.

'Often the fireplaces don't match, so we are seeing increasing numbers of clients requesting bespoke reproduction fireplaces in order to get two, identical fireplaces that still look appropriate for the property.'

There's no reason to be snobbish about reproduction fireplaces; they typically cost around a third of the price, and, as Pacey notes, a good period reproduction looks a hundred times better than plonking a brand new fireplace into an old property.

'Black is also back. There's a definite boom in black fireplaces right now', says Owen Pacey, who installed one for fashion designer Karen Millen.

'It makes a statement and works well in most rooms, adapting well to both contemporary and period design projects.'

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