

Home



katrina_burroughs

We are playing central heating checks this year, putting off the great switch-off, and many households have sworn to make the month of October (31 days). This means the search is taking on a new importance – or reclaiming its old significance – as the focus of the living room. Banned but never quite left us, but to the minimalist maximalists and those who neglect the kitchen was to opt for old mantelpieces in favour of less noisy, less busy heating solutions. Now, to the thrives of a smaller revival (and an energy crisis), our desire for a mantelpiece, could not be more welcome. All but the return of the decorative mantelpiece.

"It's nothing new that period features are popular," says Emma Mansell, the managing director of Inigo, the online estate agency for historic houses. "But there's a different segment of buyers that are starting to focus on them. A slightly younger demographic. A lot are people in their early thirties who have been living in student houses, rented accommodation, or starter homes that don't have a story behind them. They're drawn to those spaces which history and a patina."

The type of properties an Inigo's looks can range from a grade I listed Georgian style house such as Bamburgh Court in Newnham at £1.7 million to a 16th-century cottage, starting from £200,000 each as they sit on the south Devon coast. The red thread running through the collection is delicately pretty period features, Mansell says. "The vast majority of houses an Inigo love beautiful fireplaces. Often the appeal is general period features. The fireplace can be the clincher, because in a lot of ways it's the most striking one."

What, though, if your home lacks a chimney? You can find reclaimed mantelpieces in a local salvage yard, or at specialist historic examples such as Jamb, Renaissance or Chesneys, which also makes new mantelpieces.

"The big change in chimney pieces is that Renaissance and Italianism have had their day," says Neil Chesney, who has used a friend for highly ornamental marble and granite among his clients in the past six months, what he calls "the resurgence" has given way to an enthusiasm for the "typical marble collector" of

RELIGHT MY FIRE

Our desire for a fireplace has been rekindled by the hot trend in mantelcrafting



Decoratively figured and coloured marbles are in demand. The Chelsea from Chesneys' Contemporary Collection in Breco Medicea marble, £270, chesneys.co.uk. Shown with Chesneys' Albany Ethanol fire, shown in freestanding the basket, £1790



Blue and white porcelain is a traditional mantelpiece staple. Chesneys' concha holder, £24, truffletablescapes.co.uk



The curved stone fireplace is called Cobba, a copy of a mid-16th century stone chimneypiece by Jamb, specialist in reproductions and antique fireplaces, £10,000 plus VAT, jamb.co.uk



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Oversize blue and white ceramic tiles are the key elements of this mantelpiece. The bold backdrop by Cornish Ceramics Burnley, a wallpaper by Cornish de Vries, £165 per roll, ornobase.co.uk

beautiful marbles, chosen for their colour, veining and rarity, including Calacatta White and Gold Travertine. Owen Pacey, the founder of Renaissance, which has supplied chimneypieces for Soho House and Babington House, says "bolection" fireplaces, which feature unfluted curved shapes, are the current favourite. "They have been around since the 16th century and made a resurgence in the 1930s. The beauty of this style is in its simplicity."

The fire of choice to light is ethanol. Made from sugar cane and grain crops, ethanol, also known as bioethanol, emits no smoke or fumes. The downside has always been that it gives out less warmth than a log-burner (which often generates 4kW or 5kW), but Chesney has just launched a bioethanol stove that puts out about 3.5kW of heat. "The big advantage is

caravan. The decorative mantelpiece dealer and interior-maker Peter Cox has built a fantastic choice of mantelpieces, from a multitude of resurfaced items. "I like to include candlesticks, tea lights, small lamps, small photographs, and trinkets that usually end up there."

In contrast, Lisa Carr, the founder of the handmade ceramics brand Boudoir, has a more curatorial, gallery style. She displays various elements and delivers impact with lighting. Carr says, "I've been having an oversized pig foot to a mini vase to create depth and play with the scale."

Perhaps you are more of a traditionalist who would prefer to display a mantel clock between two candlesticks. Andrew Trust says, "All would say it takes real skill to get away with symmetry, and your mantel may appear terrifically old but you don't need a chimney. As long as you have an ethanol fire, you can have an ethanol fire without the need for a chimney and extra ventilation. It's plug and play, basically," he says.

Many of the chimneypieces installed this year will never see a fire. Their role is purely decorative, to supply a surface for a collection of china, candles and trinkets. Mantel galleries will showcase the personal style of their

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Sitting room interior design by Eya Interiors, wall in Jorjuel, a pretty yellow pink by Edward Bulmer National Parks, £25 for 2.5 litres of emulsion, edwardbulmerpaint.co.uk



A mantelpiece by Molly Mahon in her Sussex cottage features a hand-painted chimneypiece and a selection of ceramic old wine, mollymahon.com



Reposited 'dog' collection: fireplace in Arabescato Oro Marble, £6,500, repositioncollection.com — a specialist in historic mantelpieces



At Inigo an original fireplace is an object of desire. In this first floor flat above a Victorian pub in Cobble Lane, London E1, now sold, the original chimneypiece was painted the same colour as the walls for a contemporary look, and filled with decorative Tengen paperbacks



Small, elegant fireplaces work well in bedrooms and bathrooms. Wall in Cusac de Nyrpette Ethanol, a black pink by Edward Bulmer, £25 for 2.5 litres of emulsion, edwardbulmerpaint.co.uk

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