

WHERE THE HEARTH IS

THE HEART OF THE HOME, A FIREPLACE DEFINES A SPACE

By Ivy Gracie

The fireplace — it's one of the most sensory features in a home. Its glow draws us near; its warmth keeps us there. We breathe deeply its waft of hickory or piñon; we doze off to its lullaby of crackling embers. It's the backdrop to the best parts of life — family gatherings, quiet moments, romantic trysts. And it's an architectural statement that structures a space and drives its décor.

"A fireplace distinguishes the feel of a home," says Jeff Murphy, architectural designer and owner of Murphy & Company Design in Buffalo. "It's the epicenter of the house — the place where families gather and enjoy their time together. So it sets the tone of the room and the home."

Whether modest or magnificent, antiquated or avant-garde, the fireplace has the power to mend a mood or stir the soul. And we are the eternal moths to its irresistible flame.

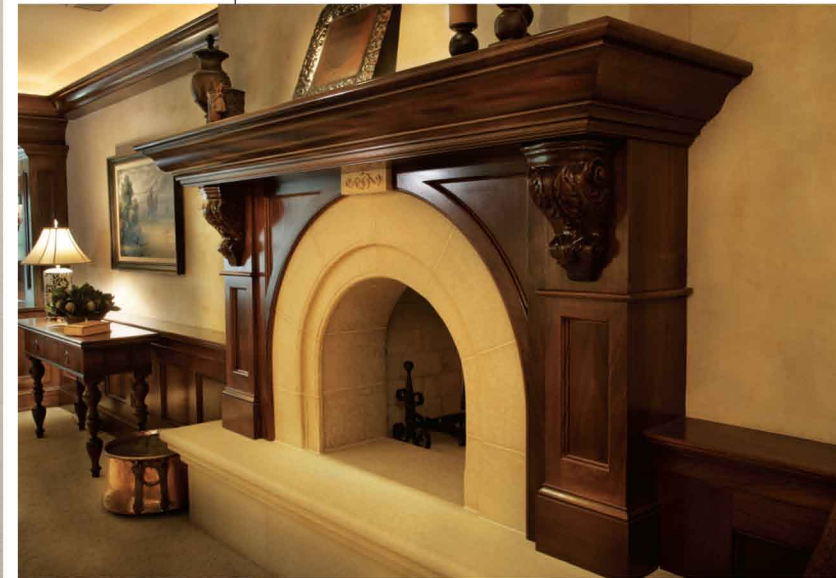
Contemporary

Clean lines and unfussy design are the hallmarks of the contemporary fireplace — where glass adds polish and metal can bring an artistic or industrial feel, depending on its application. And because contemporary is "of-the-moment" design, style statements are limited only by the imagination. "It all comes down to the personal preference of the owner," Murphy says. "It's about how they want the room to look and feel." But above all else, the contemporary fireplace is all about staying cool.



Traditional

A traditional fireplace will adhere to a particular traditional architectural style, like Tudor, Victorian or Georgian. Richly-stained woods, polished marble and detailed mantels, surrounds and corbels call out French palaces; heavy limestone surrounds evoke Tudor castles. Victorian fireplaces are uncluttered and prim while the Georgian varieties are elegantly masculine. No matter the genre, a traditional fireplace has enduring appeal. Notes Murphy, "If you look at a traditional fireplace and you can't figure out when it was built — that's timeless."



Rustic

A rustic fireplace can run the gamut from a humble hearth to a natural work of art, but casual is always the underlying vibe. Large timbers, sticks, stones and weathered metals give a rustic fireplace its organic, outdoorsy feel. Rougher materials arranged in a seemingly random way can create a primitive essence; dressing up materials — like sanding and staining beams — can add sophistication. "Using symmetry can bring a sense of elegance," Murphy explains. "You can use rustic materials and organize them in a way that gives the fireplace cleaner lines. I like to call it 'refined rustic.'"

