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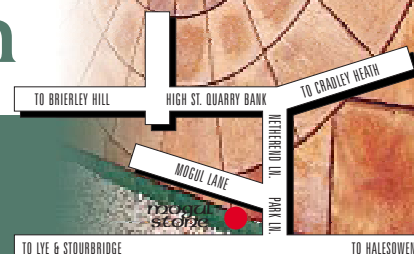
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Your hearth's desire

by
GABRIELLE FAGAN

Cosy's not a word much used by interior designers - they prefer to concentrate on cool concepts such as style, design and trends. But at winter time, when chill winds are swirling around outside, cosy is exactly what we crave.

Satisfy that need with the most enduring focal point - a fire - for instant toast -your-toes comfort and a warm glow that would melt the most fashionably minimalist heart.

Luckily there's no need to sacrifice good looks for practicality. Interior designers such as Kelly Hoppen, Jasper Conran and Jane Churchill have turned their talents to fires and hearths with glowing results.

They and others have transformed them into 'eye candy' and there's a selection to suit every flaming desire with traditional inglenooks right through to sleek, wall fires for streamlined uber-urban lofts.

Purists will love a 'real fire' - and don't mind the mess of coal and kindling. Rising fuel prices also mean that wood-burning stoves are booming.

While real fires have a wonderfully seasonal Scandinavian feel about them, most of us prefer easy-to-clean gas or electric-powered fires.

No chimney - no problem (it's never beaten Father Christmas!) and there's a growing range for those who want flickering firelight without the soot.



Fire expert Darren McMahon, head of Baxi Heating UK, says: "The conventional fire with classic mouldings is still very popular but it's the state-of-the-art, wall-mounted fires which are capturing the attention of style leaders. "Electric fires are also really forging ahead partly because gone are the days of glowing orange bars and uninspiring design.

"Now they're eye-catching in look, are ideal for rooms without a chimney or flue and are easy to install." Considering the environment and our carbon footprint is key these days so don't forget check out the energy ratings of fires and appliances as well as focusing on their appearance. There's no call to be downcast if you're

limited to radiators - just make them a focal point by choosing ones that radiate style as well as heat.

Turn up the heat and follow our guide to the most hearth-warming fires around.

Eye candy

■ The fashion conscious will love ranges offered by companies ranging from B&Q to Baxi.

"Landscape wall-mounted fires are a top choice, with black gloss, stainless steel and stone overtaking last year's brass, gold, silver and chrome finishes," McMahon says.

■ B&Q's Saturn flueless gas fire, £999, is an oval shape with a strip of flame. It's a modern look suitable for homes with no chimney or flue.

■ Black dominates in fashion and in homes this season and the glossy, sleek Valor Distinction from Baxi Fires, £649, is a hang-on-the-wall flat-screen style electric fire.

Hot and modern

Next's trendy range includes the Malmo Fireplace, £375, which has an ivory coloured surround, and an oak or maple shelf with the popular pyramid of pebbles. It's suitable for homes without a chimney.

Hearth warming

■ Traditionalists won't need to get their fingers burnt price-wise if they source from B&Q.

Its desirable polished metal fire surrounds are inspired by original Victorian fireplaces discovered in reclamation yards.

A Cotham solid fuel surround costs £299 and a Rochdale, £249.

■ A classic gas fire like the Valor Homeflame Dream, £599 from Baxi, is energy efficient and would suit a hearth

and traditional surround. It has a regal style fret and curved fascia in brass, chrome or black.

Designer fires

■ Texture, outstanding design and detail are a feature of the fire surrounds designed by Jane Churchill for leading suppliers of period and classic fireplaces, Chesney's.

Prices start from £934, rising to £1,169 for the ornate Coral in limestone with coral frond decoration.

■ Invest in fire art from Diligence, whose designers combine cutting-edge technology with breathtaking style. Melt that plastic and get a Chromifocus fire with sliding doors so it can disguise itself as a work of modern art.



It's a blistering £9,960, but there are other fires for around £2,000.

■ Get your hearth's desire by commissioning a fire surround from experts, Templestone Mason. They also have 13 designs in a standard range as well as making bespoke pieces. Prices start from £850.

Super Stoves

■ These have a homely Nordic feel and can be powered by gas or oil - but the eco-friendly choice is wood.

As the latter is readily available and well-priced you don't need to be a lumberjack to take this option.

■ Euroheat's selection sourced from Denmark and Bavaria features traditional and modern styles.

They start from around £925.

Set a Yuletide scene with a Harmony 23 multi-fuel stove, £1,102, which even has a temperature remote control.

■ Danish company Morso has multi-fuel and gas stoves in cast iron that balance good looks and practicality.

They start from £613 for a Squirrel, up to £2,526 for the Morso 8147, a contemporary stove on a rotatable plinth.

Red hot rads

■ A radiator that pretends to be a wall mirror and can double as a towel rail is just one of the clever designs from Myson.

The Mirage starts from £980.

The range starts from around £195 for an electric panel radiator and goes up to around £3,000.

■ Wickes has radiators that make a statement including the chrome Wave from £219 and the striking black anthracite Tall Focal radiator, £299.

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Turn your teens into 'designers'

Your teenager's room needn't be a style nightmare – liberally decorated only with tacky posters and accessorised in clutter and coffee cups. Get a guide to what's hot and what's not for trendy teenagers.

Teenagers' rooms can so easily turn into war zones as parents battle over the state of them (usually horrible) and their young owners 'express their personality' in them.

If this means everything from obscene posters through to health hazard piles of crockery, coffee cups and socks, it could be time to call a truce and suggest they have their room done up.

Prepare for a communication

minefield, though. Ask any teenager how they want their room to look and you'll get the blank stare, shrug and 'I dunno'.

On the other hand, unwisely try to tell them how you'd like it to look and you'll probably get 'no way!'

But don't despair. Resort to bribery instead – promise a new bed or contribute some DIY hours to create shelves or a storage unit

for them, and agree a decorating budget between you.

Also take on board your teenager's views on decoration, no matter how zany.

Most teenage boys like an edgy, urban look. Consider removing plaster and leaving brickwork exposed on one wall. Team it with colours like purple or scarlet. Panel a wall with tongue-and-groove boards and then paint them or cover one wall with cork tiles for a huge pinboard.

Customise paintwork with graffiti style motifs. Ideally contain it within a specific area, such as a door or the sides of shelves.

Or let them mix up their own paint colour that's unique to their room and use it on one wall. Get their arty friends to help them decorate it.

Teenage girls generally love decorating their rooms. Encourage her to get ideas from magazines before she starts and stick to a modest budget.

If wackily decorated walls can be repainted, ad hoc upholstery ideas rapidly restitched and cheap furniture swapped around, your daughter will feel more relaxed about experimenting. Use second-hand pieces of furniture, which can be repainted or customised with art work.

And don't hide away unusual vintage or party clothes. Use them as decoration by hanging them up on a wall or door.



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Dine in style

By
GABRIELLE FAGAN

Dining rooms used to be the proverbial white elephants in homes - large, space-wasting and unloved. They seemed to be totally out of tune with our desire for more informal living. But now the tables are turning for this once unfashionable space. Around half of today's househunters - compared with one in 10 two years ago - are now demanding a traditional dining room where they can entertain guests or make family meals into an occasion. It's partly due to the influence of celebrity cooks like Gordon Ramsay and Nigella Lawson, who've encouraged the kind of dinner party menus that call for a fully laid-out table in less casual and more elegant surroundings. According to home finders BDI Property Search, it means dining rooms are fast becoming more of a must-have than conservatories or garages. BDI's Tracy Kellett says: "The days of Jamie Oliver-style informal kitchen dining are numbered. "People want a big table separate from the kitchen and away from the TV. "After spending hours creating

beautiful food, people don't want to bring their guests into a steamy kitchen where they're surrounded by dirty pots and pans." The trend is most prevalent among families and young couples, with singles still opting for an open-plan kitchen/dining space. Kellett says: "For too long dining rooms were under-used and unloved, but it shows that people increasingly enjoy entertaining at home. "They want to show off their culinary skills and like their rooms to match their high standards." Don't let your dining room let you down - follow the advice of our experts to create the ultimate gourmet space to suit you and your home.

Dining room design

SHE magazine home editor Harriet Paterson says: "Space is a key factor in the dining room. "If you have the luxury of a dedicated room, go for the largest dining table you can so you and your guests have as much room as possible to enjoy yourselves. There's nothing worse than a cramped table with no room for serving dishes." If you're short of space, she advises, opt for a folding table. "The style of the room should suit you and your home. "For a formal look choose a matching set of dining chairs in an upholstered style, with a high back for maximum comfort. "But the most sociable way to sit and eat is on a bench.

"The close proximity makes it a great way of getting conversation going among your guests and will make for a more relaxing meal." A sideboard can give a real 'dining' atmosphere to an eating space, and be good storage for china and glasses. Ensure though, if the room is dual-purpose, that the storage furniture suits both functions, that it co-ordinates and isn't too workmanlike or too dressy.

Easy tips

Leading interior designer Joanna Wood reveals her tips for creating a room where guests will want to linger.

- Don't be afraid to use a dark colour scheme for dining rooms as this space is mainly used at night, and darker wall shades can give a beautiful glowing 'jewel' effect.
- Remember that chairs with

- arms will take up more room around a table.
- Make sure your lighting has dimmers so it can be adjusted up and down to suit the mood.
- Theme table settings to suit your food, and dress the table properly.
- Fill vases with spring flowers or anything else you fancy, like fairy lights.
- Place a row of tea lights in glass votives down the centre of the table, sprinkle glitter in between place mats or add bowls of sweets.
- All these touches will make a table sparkle.
- Supplement background lighting with candles to completely alter the atmosphere, especially if the room is used for a different purpose during the day.
- Mirrors in antique finishes on walls add hugely to the depth and look of the dining room.



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And so to bed...

Bedrooms are so much more than somewhere to sleep – they should be a sanctuary and that means gorgeous bedding is essential. We show you how to create the best-dressed bed and pinpoint some sales bargains.

Tempted to pull the covers over your head because of the stress and hurly burly of modern life? At least make sure your bedding is up to scratch.

Tired cotton covers, flabby duvets and faded throws will simply make you feel worse, but a bedroom with a well-dressed bed – think cuddly textures like wool, velvet and cashmere – will be a comforting retreat where you can relax and recharge.

SHE magazine editor Sian Rees points out: "The bedroom isn't just a place to sleep, it should be your sanctuary – somewhere to relax and reflect."

"I think it's worth investing in some luxurious Bed linen. Zara Home and Monsoon have some gorgeous fashion designs, but also check out Kelly Hoppen at Bhs and the stylish, hotel chic range at Debenhams."

Style for bedrooms seems to fall into two categories. One replicates the look of a hotel room, usually using neutral colours with character in the texture or detail.

Alternatively, there's the much more romantic boudoir look with rich, coloured throws and cushions added to fine Bed linen, which indulges our yearning for more colour and decoration.

Don't be limited by trends, though. At the end of the day your bedroom is your personal space, so treat it as such. Feel free to mix and match colours and styles – your own private room is a great place to experiment.

Don't forget to display personal trea-

sures such as photographs and pictures, and indulge your senses with scented candles, flowers and a mini sound system for your favourite music.

Aim for top brands, which often heavily discount last season's ranges as well as lines that use the ultimate luxury – 100% cotton. Remember that you get what you pay for. Egyptian cotton can be expensive but is extremely comfortable and will last for years if it's laundered properly. High thread counts are a good pointer to quality – say around 300 threads per inch.

White's a classic choice as it doesn't date, but if that's too plain, look out for embroidered, printed and applied details that make it more interesting.

Remember cool, neutral colour schemes in a bedroom can make it feel chilly, so coloured bed linen – or throws – give an illusion of warmth.

Old-fashioned eiderdowns or quilts, reminiscent of the 50s, are enjoying a revival. Look out for satin or velvet

ones.

Smarten up a bed on the cheap with bedroom fashions from Woolworths, which has bedding from TV interiors expert Linda Barker – a king size beige Soleil duvet set, £35 – or its own-brand bedding, king size Shadow floral duvet set, £20.

Turn a bedroom into a slinky sanctuary for just a few pounds with TJ Hughes bedding. Its Pure Opulence bedding in fashionable Zen Chocolate starts at £15, or choose a classic Satin stripe from £15.

Make room in the trolley for sensual throws from Sainsbury's. Its trend-conscious homewares collection includes a red satin and velvet throw, £34.99, antique gold and mulberry boudoir cushions, £6.99.

B&Q's soft furnishings are attracting well-deserved attention for quality and design. There's a collection to suit any room from floral prints to beaded sequin designs. Bed linen from £14.98.



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Bradley Quinn, author of Chinese Style, a comprehensive guide to the look, says: "I've always been intrigued by Chinese style's staying power – how it's managed to remain so hip throughout the last three centuries and still cast an influence today, perhaps more strongly than ever."

He says real enthusiasts often let their passion for Chinese decor take over their living space, colour themes, art collection and choice of furniture.

"And why not? Chinese art pieces and craftworks bring with them a rich heritage of design and timeless materials that can add colour and exoticism to any interior, without necessarily transforming it into a shrine to Chinese culture."

Nowadays the style's easily accessible with the Eastern influence making its mark in stores from Habitat to Marks & Spencer. There's a host of specialist shops offering Chinese furniture and accessories too.

Leading designer Kelly Hoppen, whose latest collection of furniture and accessories is at Bhs, is among the many interiors specialists inspired by the East.

"For me a room is never complete without an Eastern sense of balance," she says.

"There is something about the Eastern love of simplicity and order that, when mixed with the best of contemporary Western design, is decidedly modern – it is what completes my interiors."

"As our lives grow more complex, this sense of simplicity and balance becomes ever more important. When we enter our homes they should not only look good, they should feel good too."

The Oriental look is simplicity itself. Start off with a neutral backdrop and add a few designer tricks to instantly create an exotic atmosphere.

Jemma Page, co-founder of Orchid, a source for Chinese antiques, contemporary Eastern furniture and accessories, says: "The look should always have clean lines, and no fuss and frills. Symmetry is terribly important and the pairing of chairs, arrangement of furniture and balanced display of accessories all gives a feeling of visual calm."

Try covering your sofa in a rich red or tangerine orange throw, and scatter it with sumptuous embroidered cushions. Dark wood or natural floor covering is in perfect keeping and will be an excellent foil for decorative furniture and furnishings.

Jemma says: "Chinese cabinets, chairs and stools are popular. There's a choice of styles from heavily ornate antiques inlaid with mother of pearl or gold to the plain, rustic look of more affordable pieces which are just as attractive but whose only adornment may be a brass, copper or silver lock and plate."

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Rug revolution

You may not have noticed but a revolution has been happening under your feet.

Rugs, once disregarded in the rush for fitted carpets, are now centre stage as they make the perfect partners for the ultra-fashionable hard floors in wood or stone. A beautiful woven or tufted rug can act as a focal point or the perfect finishing touch for a scheme.

Some rugs are so stunning whether in colour, pattern or design that they can accurately be described as 'works of art for the floor,' and may be hung like paintings on walls.

There's now a huge choice available on the high street in stores such as Habitat, Ikea, The Pier and Argos, a growing band of rug designers, and beautiful antique Persian rugs, kilims and dhurries.

Husband and wife team Christopher and Suzanne Sharp, founders of The Rug Company, have been key in transforming people's perceptions of rugs.

They have a celebrity stable of designers including Paul Smith, Vivienne Westwood, Marni and Ron Arad who create rugs for their collection, which start at around £1,000.

Christopher Sharp says: "People now have completely woken up to the magic that rugs can weave in a room and the innovation and experimentation of designers has transformed rugs."

"Yet when we started out in 1997 the rug market was all about looking back. The only things you could buy then were expensive antiques or the faux oriental carpets that your parents bought in the 1970s. Nobody was looking forward and people were bored."

Leading interior designer Cecilia Neal says recognition of the rug revival among her fellow professionals is widespread.

"The power of rugs cannot be underestimated nowadays," she says.

"There's definitely been a rug revolution over the last few years as people appreciate that rugs transform a room by giving character with vital elements such as



texture, colour, pattern as well providing comfort and luxury.

"Rugs are so practical because they can easily be taken up and cleaned or repaired, unlike fitted carpets. Although they may be a considerable investment they can be taken with you if you move."

Designer Helen Yardley, whose rugs start at £300, agrees that the possibilities are endless.

"Rugs can be tailored to a person's personal palette of colours - maybe shades that relax them or stimulate them. They are a very personal expression of a person's taste."

RUG RULES

Christopher Sharp's tips for buying a rug.

■ Make sure you buy a rug that you really love and not one just to suit your interior.

A rug is not like curtains or a sofa - it should last forever so you must be happy enough to have it in any room or even a different house.

■ Before you decide to buy a rug, it is important to determine its purpose. A hand-tufted rug is relatively inexpensive and has a limited life span. You can find many good rugs like these from shops such

as Ikea, Habitat and the Conran Shop. Hand-knotted rugs are more expensive but should last a lifetime and will always be more beautiful.

■ A rug's pattern will obviously affect the feel of the room. Determine whether you are looking for something that will blend seamlessly into the space giving an overall tranquil appearance or whether you are looking to make a bolder statement. Don't be afraid of strong patterns and lots of colour - choosing a rug is similar to picking out a piece of art.

■ Rugs are a brilliant way of defining areas in rooms. However, if you are attempting to break up a room, a number of rugs can do this effectively.

Choosing a rug without a border will also give the feel of a flowing space that furniture can sit half on rather than pulling all the furniture into one area.

■ If buying an antique rug remember colour is key.

Ask whether modern synthetic or original vegetable dyes have been used.

The latter were used in antique rugs and give a more subtle effect. Avoid heavily restored rugs (check for this by looking on the back of the rug) as they rarely hold value.

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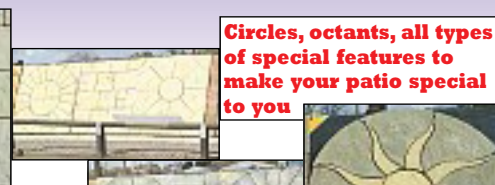
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