

## Hearth & Soul

Fireplaces that comfort the heart add  
a special feel to family spaces.

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The desire for fire is not confined to inhabitants of chilly northern states. Residents of the Space Coast equally crave the irresistible allure of the fireplace, whether it's indoors or out, wood-burning or electric.

Most homeowners have a similar aspiration – "... to use the room with the fireplace as a gathering area," says Christine Whiteley, interior designer and owner of Concepts and Dimensions. From there, the possibilities abound.

On a recent project, Whiteley worked with a couple looking for a warm, contemporary design with a south Florida flair to complement their Merritt Island home. Because the couple entertain a large extended family on a regular basis, they wanted this area of the home to feel especially comfortable.

"They wanted to be able to see the fireplace and the television at the same time," Whiteley said. This was achieved with a streamlined design. In keeping with the themes throughout the home, the gas fireplace was framed with smooth black granite. The fireplace, a product of Hearth and Home in Melbourne, works to balance the television above it, with clean lines and zero accessories.

"I created a monolithic, dramatic element that's unexpected, yet fits the style of the home. This fireplace is more about the material used than the accessories around it," she said.

The natural cherry wood wall behind the fireplace further dramatizes the room's draw and completes the cozy space.

With a push of a button on the remote control, the fire begins to crackle and, the ambiance is set.

The fireplace design is starkly different in the 100+-year-old Melbourne home owned by Tom and Betty Cobb. The home's great room – which the owners consider the hub of interaction – was overwhelmed by the colossal brick, wood-burning fireplace. The fireplace runs floor to ceiling.

For this project, Whiteley said, the owners wanted to maintain the home's traditional atmosphere but correct the proportional issues.

"Our room was dominated by this fireplace that had copious amounts of brick. Christine came up with this design that stays true to the turn of the century time period and masters the scale and proportion of the space. Now the fireplace blends with the room instead of overpowering it," said Betty Cobb.

"For this one, Jim Correa, of RoomScapes of Brevard and I came up with a massive, but appropriate, mantel and corbels," said Whiteley. "Prior to that, the mantel had no grounding. It was just floating in a sea of brick."

Incorporating the "Ralph Lauren, Tennessee traditional feel" her clients wanted, Whiteley applied 48 inch hammered tin square panels on top

of the brick above the fireplace. The four symmetrical panes brought depth and dimension to an otherwise monotonous space.

In the Melbourne home of Dr. Stephen and Audrey Joiner, the unique inside-and-out fireplace provides the family with great pleasure. Unique construction and a shared gas feed line allows the Joiners to enjoy the convenience of a fireplace in the family room inside and the warmth of a wood-burning hearth outside.

High ceilings and an attractive entertainment center accentuate the family room, but the fireplace is the centerpiece. According to Audrey, the ease of the remote-controlled fireplace allows the family to simply turn on the entertainment, with little fuss or bother. Audrey said this allows the couple to use their fireplace frequently.

The indoor fireplace is framed by smooth granite, giving it a rich, luxurious appearance. The firebrick inside the hearth is painted with black fireproof paint to blend with the granite. The cherry wood mantel completes the fireplace design with a warm, welcoming feel.

The accessories atop the mantel of the indoor fireplace relate the interests of the Joiners. "He is a veterinarian and animal-lover. All throughout their home, animals are present," said Vickie Sperry, owner of Vickie Sperry Interiors, who assisted with the interior design.

The screened porch outside their home features a second fireplace. This wood-burning hearth exudes the home's country feel. It is completely brick, from floor to the 15-foot-high ceiling.

"Nothing replaces the sound of popping embers, or the glow of the wood, or the crackle of the logs in the fireplace," said Audrey.

"Because of the gas feed...the fire is quick and easy to start, but the romance of the real logs and the smell of the oak cannot be duplicated," agrees Sperry, adding that nothing about this fireplace is arbitrary.

"The placement of the furniture outside, around the fireplace, including rocking chairs and an antique game of Chinese checkers, all say, "Stop, look, and enjoy," she noted.

The mantel of the outdoor fireplace also reveals the Joiners' love of nature. Floral arrangements and a painting of an outdoors theme by local artist Robert Abbot decorate the space. The antique andirons within the hearth are forged to resemble hunting dogs, and atop the wooden mantel is a pair of antique fire extinguishers that have been refurbished and are functional.

Another local home featuring a unique fireplace is that of Dr. Jeremiah and Shelly Donovan. "When they first saw the fireplace, they felt that it overwhelmed the room," recalled designer Sperry. "However, with the right furniture and accessories, it all came together. They now enjoy the feel of the room."

The cast stone gas fireplace is pulled out from the wall, creating dramatic angles and an elegant façade. The unusual design is something the builder, Charles Carpenter, borrowed from a design he saw in Colorado.

"Shelly enjoys a lot of accessories and greenery," Sperry said, so, on the mantel they placed accents that were unique, but that would also incorporate other elements of their home. "The wrought iron on the mantel picks up the wrought iron in the staircase and around the windows. And we used a variety of colors, textures, and shapes."

Accessorizing helps make a fireplace like the Donovans' feel more a part of the room instead of the dominating force," Sperry explains.

Native Floridians, Dennis and Carol Crawford knew they wanted a fireplace in their home. Finding the right location took a little time. Dennis relocated the gas unit from the family room to the sitting room in the front of their home. Designer Vickie Sperry worked with Carol to complete the space.

The fireplace is framed with small tiles to accomplish a softer look. The traditional mantel holds a few well-chosen accessories. The room itself is reminiscent of an old-fashioned parlor, with the draw of the fireplace as the focal point. "I just love to come in here to sit and read a book or talk with my husband. It's a comforting place," Carol notes.

In their Key West style home on Merritt Island, Roy and Carolyn Malac had a simple fireplace in a plain white wall. They turned to the team at Porter Baxter Interior Design, to create a more distinctive design.

"Fireplaces are architectural elements. The last thing people typically consider is architectural detail. We came in and that was the first thing we thought of," said lead designer Leanna Farrell.

The design team started by using a faux coral stone to front the fireplace. This product is less expensive and less labor-intensive than genuine coral, said Porter Baxter, owner of Porter Baxter interior design. Above the mantel a pineapple motif incorporates the island theme of the home. And, with nearly 27-foot ceilings, the expansive area is now anchored by the floor-to-ceiling design.

"It's a central gathering room for our family – a big open space," said Roy Malac. "The fireplace helps to enhance the appeal of the room. It came out really nice."

Riitta Ylonen, interior designer and owner of Finn Design Inc., believes that a room with a fireplace represents the soul of a home. She worked with a client recently to create a living area that reflects the Old World Tuscan feel of the Italian countryside.

"The homeowners used to live in Italy," she said. "The floors are natural tumbled stone and we wanted the fireplace to coordinate with the tone of the floor."

The stone work on the wood-burning fireplace was fabricated locally from a heavy faux stone mixture that was poured into custom molds. Coupled with colorful artwork above the mantel, soft candlelight, and grapevine décor, the overall impact reflects comfort and romance.

Whether for family gatherings year round or for warmth during short Florida winters the fireplace creates an inviting, peaceful ambiance. Few architectural elements invite families and friends to slow down and enjoy the moment like the crackling warmth of a hearth.



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