

DRESSING THE MANTLE

Regardless of its size or shape,
we have expert tips on how to
transform your fireplace from drab
to fab, in any style you fancy.



When it's cold, wet, and gray outside, what could be nicer than cuddling up in front of a roaring fire? And when you have guests over on a winter day, isn't your fireplace the first thing they see – and head for – as soon as they enter the room? So how do you make the most of yours? Two local designers gave us a few tips that, regardless of its style, size, or shape, on how to transform your fireplace – from drab to definitely fab – in any style you fancy.

Written by Christine Toner

There are hundreds of possibilities when it comes to decorating, but they can generally be categorized into four groups: contemporary, eclectic, traditional and country charm. Ryan Williams, of R L Williams Design Center, explains that since the fireplace is commonly the main focus in any room, the rest of the furnishings are usually centered around it. "That means, whether it's holiday decor or just decorating the mantle, it's a good idea to take the rest of the room in that same concept."

CONTEMPORARY

If you like modern styles, try a contemporary design for your fireplace. Contemporary designs offer a light and airy atmosphere to your room and the key to achieving it is to keep it simple. "Less is more," says Williams. "Keep it simple with color, shape or texture. Try mosaic glass or stone covering the fireplace wall, or hang a tall modern colorful painting or even a sunburst mirror above."

Lighting is also important. For a contemporary style, directional light is key. "Use directional lights from above, shining down to show the shimmer of the mosaics," he adds.

Mary Larsen, of Mary Larsen Designs, believes color schemes are the secret to transforming an old fashioned fireplace to a contemporary masterpiece. "Make your fireplace and mantle contemporary by using black, white, silver and red. Plus look for items that are sleek and sophisticated."

"Metal and glass will also speak to your contemporary taste, as will an asymmetric arrangement. If your fireplace is made of brick, consider painting the brick black to bring it from traditional to contemporary. Or, if you are

in a position to do a major overhaul, get rid of the mantle altogether and install a sleek fireplace face in slate or metal."

ECLECTIC

For the more adventurous out there, an eclectic design may be more your style. Eclectic literally means diverse, so the possibilities are endless. You are free to let your creativity go wild but, as our designers warn, make sure you bear in mind the style and size of the rest of your room.

"The beauty of having an eclectic taste is that virtually anything goes," says Larsen. "But basic design principles still apply, so don't forget to keep balance and scale in mind when dressing your mantle." The key to eclectic designs is color and size and you can be as bold as you like.

"The whole thought of eclectic design is the unexpected," says Williams. "It's about the marriage of two or more different styles that coordinate well. According to Williams, the eclectic design is currently the most popular concept. "Be over-exaggerated in color, size, or texture. Take a traditional mantle – which is found in most new homes - with a distressed painted finish and hang a tall modern abstract on top of textured walls. Then place tall funky textured vases atop the mantle, all with exaggerated sizes."

TRADITIONAL

While eclectic designs may currently be the most popular, traditional fireplaces will always have a place. In years gone by, before televisions and electric lighting, fireplaces were always the biggest focal point of every room. You only have to visit historical houses or watch period dramas to see

the importance of the fireplace; they have them in every room! The traditional design is about bringing that old-fashioned appeal. But achieving it is not always easy.

"Of the four different designs, the traditional could be the most difficult," says Williams. "That is because there are so many styles of traditional. The best way to sum it up is to have some varying height, and to make it interesting."

According to Larsen, the clue is in the title. "If your tastes run to the traditional, think exactly that when decorating your mantle. Use a symmetrical arrangement, and consider using matching candlesticks with candles and matching vases. The center of the mantle could be a floral arrangement, traditional artwork, or the ever-classic mirror. Colors run the whole spectrum, based on the rest of your room furnishings."

COUNTRY CHARM

One of the most adorable styles for any house is the country charm design. You can turn any house into a country cottage with the right colors and a few finishing touches.

"Put a little country in your home by decorating your mantle and fireplace with traditional accessories with country colors - blue, white, brown, cream, yellow, rose, and sage," says Larsen. "Florals and mirrors will also contribute to your country feel."

Williams says covering the fireplace wall with a brick or stone veneer and using a rough sawn piece of wood as a mantle will give your home a rustic, country look.

Accessories are key and the right ones can determine the design of your fireplace. An unusual and attractive accessory is a sign that is made to look like hand stenciling. For example, Danielson Designs WALLigraphy, carried by Garden Supply Company, specializes in tailor-made signs, so you can literally make your fireplace say whatever you want it to—on a wall, mirror, glass, or picture frames. One that's definitely country charm is a beautiful "Home is where your story begins" sign.

Make the most of your fireplace this winter and give your living room's focal point the attention it deserves.

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